Routledge Studies in Latin American and Iberian Literature

QUEER REBELS

Rewriting Literary Traditions in Contemporary Spanish Novels

Łukasz Smuga

Translated by Patrycja Poniatowska

ROUTLEDGE

‘An enthralling enquiry into queer canonicity through the lens of the writer-as-scribe. *Queer Rebels* is compulsory reading for anyone interested in Spanish gay writing.’

– Alfredo Martínez Expósito, University of Melbourne

‘*Queer Rebels* by Łukasz Smuga is an exciting and accurate portrayal of gay literature in Spain between Franco’s death and the same-sex partnership laws. With a retrospective on Lorca, the author combines new theses and insights on authors such as Juan Goytisolo, Juan Gil-Albert, Eduardo Mendicutti, Álvaro Pombo or Luisgé Martín.’

– Dieter Ingenschay, Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin

‘A strong, detailed contribution to queer discourses in post-Franco Spanish cultural landscape. Dr Smuga’s work is an investigation on key tropes in Spanish homosexual writing in the work of canonical authors.’

– Alberto Mira, Oxford Brookes University

‘While acknowledging the work of his predecessors, Smuga engages in subtle polemics and speaks in his own voice in every chapter. That beautifully modulated voice, coupled with erudition and sense of composition, makes reading *Queer Rebels* particularly rewarding.’

– Dominika Ferens, Uniwersytet Wrocławski

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Queer Rebels

Queer Rebels is a study of gay narrative writings published in Spain at the turn of the 20th century. The book scrutinises the ways in which the literary production of contemporary Spanish gay authors – José Luis de Juan, Luis G. Martín, Juan Gil-Albert, Juan Goytisolo, Eduardo Mendicutti, Luis Antonio de Villena and Álvaro Pombo – engages with homophobic and homophile discourses, as well as with the vernacular and international literary legacy.

The first part revolves around the metaphor of a rebellious scribe who queers literary tradition by clandestinely weaving changes into copies of the books he makes. This subversive writing act, named 'Mazuf's gesture' after the protagonist of José Luis de Juan's *This Breathing World* (1999), is examined in four highly intertextual works by other writers.

The second part of the book explores Luis Antonio de Villena and Álvaro Pombo, who in their different ways seek to coin their own definitions of homosexual experience in opposition both to the homophobic discourses of the past and to the homonormative regimes of the commercialised and trivialised gay culture of today. In their novels, 'Mazuf's gesture' involves playing a sophisticated queer game with readers and their expectations.

Łukasz Smuga (PhD) is Assistant Professor at the Institute of Romance Studies, University of Wrocław, Poland.

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Contents

Acknowledgements

Making its way into the hands of an international readership, *Queer Rebels* is a latecomer. The book dates back to my PhD dissertation, completed at the University of Wrocław in 2014 and published by Universitas in 2016. I would like to take this opportunity and thank Universitas for permission to have the Polish book translated into English and made available to the foreign reading public.

The project actually commenced more than ten years ago when, as a PhD candidate, I was collecting materials and marshalling ideas for my book. Thankfully, I could always rely on assistance and advice from many kind and generous people in my quest.

First of all, my heartfelt thank you goes to Professor Beata Baczyńska and Professor Justyna Ziarkowska of the University of Wrocław for the support they offered to my then-budding venture in the autumn of 2009. I owe special gratitude to Professor Ziarkowska for all the encouragement I received from her as the supervisor of my dissertation and for her continued friendship ever since. I am also grateful to Professor Rafael M. Mérida Jiménez of the University of Lleida, who despite his busy schedule always made time to share his knowledge and precious insights with me at this early stage of my career; this has not changed yet, and I hope it never will. A big thank you is due to Josep Turiel, the director of the Biblioteca de Lletres at the University of Barcelona, for his guidance in identifying and retrieving valuable resources. The knowledgeable and helpful library staff at the Faculty of Letters at the Complutense University of Madrid offered me the same assistance when I was doing research for the key parts of my study.

Queer Rebels, a corrected and revised version of that book, would not have appeared in English had it not been for support from the University of Wrocław. I would like to thank the Faculty of Letters for funding the translation and Professor Beata Baczyńska, Head of the Institute of Romance Studies, for giving my project a chance again. I gratefully acknowledge that this book has been published under an Open Access licence owing to a grant awarded by the University of Wrocław from the

'Initiative of Excellence – Research University' programme. I am thrilled to know that the book is freely available to anybody willing to read it.

While institutional backing is not to be underestimated, *Queer Rebels* would not have come into being in English without the crucial human factor. Professor Mérida Jiménez invariably encouraged this publication, and inestimable Professor Dominika Ferens of the University of Wrocław left no stone unturned to convince me that my book should reach out to a broader readership. Her unfailing enthusiasm for my work kept me going throughout the project.

I am immensely grateful to Patrycja Poniatowska, who translated this book, putting her heart and soul into it. Our collaboration was a true intellectual adventure which time and again exceeded my expectations. Patrycja's ingeniousness and erudition are there in every page of this book, and if the reader comes across one or another veiled allusion to Shakespeare, it will be one of her tricks.

I also consulted a range of terminology issues and instances of word-play with my friends from the English and American Studies community: Dominika Ferens, Aneta Dybska, Wojciech Drąg and Tomasz Basiuk. I actually owe the coinage 'literature of self-reveal' – one of my pivotal notions, no less – to Tomasz.

Last, but not least, I would like to wholeheartedly thank my family and friends for their unconditional support and Tomasz Mańkiewicz, my partner of seventeen years, for his patience in sharing a life with a queer rebel. This book is dedicated to him with love and gratitude.

Introduction

Queer Rebels: Rewriting Literary Traditions in Contemporary Spanish Novels discusses queerness in selected Spanish homoerotic prose at the turn of the 20th century. Its major aim is to capture the attitudes of seven contemporary Spanish authors to literary traditions and to various conceptualisations of homosexuality currently in circulation in culture. The leitmotiv of the study is provided by the metaphor of a rebellious scribe who queers literary traditions by clandestinely weaving changes into copies of the books he makes. Before explaining the origin and meanings of this metaphor, I need to make clear that this book has also been 'rewritten' and modified. It was originally published in Polish in 2016, and its Polish title could be translated into English as *Against Nature and Culture: Queerness in Spanish Homoerotic Prose at the Turn of the Twentieth Century*.[1] This palimpsest-like title calls for some explanation as well because its echoes reverberate both in my argument throughout this book and in two chapter titles.

The first part of the title conveys the situation of writers addressing issues of homosexual identity, until recently regarded in Spain as being *contra natura*. Such perceptions were profoundly influenced by the discourse of Francoism, itself underpinned by the teachings of the Catholic church. The belief that homosexuality was 'against nature' was not the only predicament with which the writers of Spanish homoerotic fiction who debuted in the times of General Franco's dictatorship had to grapple. Their work also tended to be dismissed by mainstream critics as 'contrary to culture' and as such undeserving of being called 'art.' Treated as taboo for several decades, homosexuality-related themes were banned from 'high' literature, and any attempts to tackle them stirred disgust in elites unaccustomed to their presence in the cultural space. The original title *Against Nature and Culture* referred to such efforts to write homoerotic literature in opposition to mainstream culture.

1 Łukasz Smuga, *Wbrew naturze i kulturze. O odmienności w hiszpańskiej prozie homoerotycznej na przełomie XX i XXI wieku* (Kraków: Universitas, 2016).

Opposition in this case did not necessarily mean subversiveness. The eminent queer Spanish studies scholar Alfredo Martínez Expósito emphasises in his *Los escribas furiosos. Configuraciones homoeróticas en la narrativa española* [*Frenzied Scribes: Homoerotic Configurations in Spanish Fiction*, 1998][2] that up until the mid-1990s authors writing in the wake of the collapse of the dictatorship first and foremost sought to revive and sustain the tradition of homoerotic literature, whose dynamic development had been interrupted by the Spanish Civil War. Known as the *transición española*, the period of socio-political transformations in Spain (1975–1993), was marked by a veritable eruption of sexual minority writing. Martínez adds that, amidst this boom, quantity did not always translate into quality. Multiple writers who wished their works to reconnect with the past and restore severed ties had no adequate language of their own to articulate homoerotic experience. Consequently, they availed themselves of idioms, motifs and metaphors they found entrenched in the literary tradition, whereby they not infrequently, albeit inadvertently, reproduced stereotypes imposed by the homophobic imaginary. The counter-cultural quality of the fiction studied by Martínez resided in its breaking taboos rather than in its interrogating or engaging in dialogue with the entrenched tradition of homoerotic literature as such. This inspired Martínez to coin the vivid metaphor of a scribe to depict writers of the *transición española* period, whose pursuits were less redolent of the work of conscious artists and more resembled the efforts of artisan copyists pressed to produce as many copies as possible to sustain the continuity of discourse.

Martínez Expósito's insights provide a starting point for my explorations in this book, which are driven by such fundamental questions as: is the scribe metaphor still fruitfully applicable to Spanish homoerotic fiction writers at the turn of the 20th century? Does an element of dialogicity penetrate into their work in the new cultural conjuncture, in which the 'copyists' have already secured the continuity of the discourse? In what ways do the authors I study take a position on the existing, including homoerotic, literary tradition? Is it still their only aspiration to rewrite it, or do they seek to engage in a critical conversation with it?

Before stating the major points of my argument, I want to explain in more detail what I mean by 'the new cultural conjuncture' which is the context of my analysis.

In his study *De Sodoma a Chueca. Una historia cultural de la homosexualidad en España en el siglo XX*[3] [*From Sodom to Chueca: A Cultural History of Homosexuality in Spain in the 20th Century*], Alberto

2 Alfredo Martínez Expósito, *Los escribas furiosos. Configuraciones homoeróticas en la narrativa española* (New Orleans: University Press of the South, 1998).

3 Alberto Mira, *De Sodoma a Chueca. Una historia cultural de la homosexualidad en España en el siglo XX* (Barcelona and Madrid: Egales, 2004).

Mira identifies three pronounced tendencies within the homoerotic tradition that developed in Spain in the previous century: the homophile, camp and 'accursed homosexuality' trends. He argues that they emerged in response to three central conceptualisations of homosexual identity. The homophile model arose as a reaction to medical discourse, which treated homosexuality as a disease. Writers embracing this discourse found inspiration in Greek antiquity and used its legacy to insist that homosexuality was not deviant but represented one of many equal and age-old human sexual behaviours, wrongly treated in modern times as a symptom of disease or mental disorder. The camp model, Mira continues, appeared as a homosexual response to the notion that homosexuality was a sexual inversion within the male-female binary. Camp writings involved attempts to destabilise this dichotomy through irony, humour and hyperbole. The 'accursed homosexuality' model, Mira concludes, was spurred by juristic discourse, which pathologised homosexual identity as a vice, sin and threat to public order. Writers espousing this tradition did not question such a conceptualisation, but, instead, adopted it as a badge of identity in a gesture of rebellion against the values cherished by the bourgeoisie. Mira emphasises that the two latter frameworks were the most clearly pronounced in Spanish homoerotic writings in the 20th century, as a result of the protracted influence of Francoism on the public sphere and of the traditional separation between the 'world of men' and the 'world of women,' a division which was stricter in Spain than in most other European countries. The very modest presence of the homophile tradition in Spain, Mira explains, stemmed from the relatively scant contribution of medical discourse to public debate on homosexuality in that country.

Mira cites plentiful examples and includes texts written in the first half of the 1990s in his corpus. He states that, with democracy already well-grounded, homosexuality having lost some of its status of radical alterity and institutional homophobia mutating into liberal homophobia, these three tendencies within the homosexual tradition were no longer as vivid as in the preceding decades, and the boundaries between them were beginning to blur. These findings are also pivotal to my explorations, which seek to further weave the research threads initiated by both Martínez Expósito and Alberto Mira.

The situation of homoerotic fiction writers in the late 20th century was definitively different from that of the writers who debuted under Franco's regime. Authors writing during the *transición española* were primarily committed to sustaining the continuity of homoerotic discourse by 'copying' solutions they found in the existing literary tradition. As a rule, they reproduced typically modernist codes, which relied on combining Eros and Thanatos to render homoerotic experience. Martínez Expósito underscores the frequent recourse to the metaphor of disease as most fully expressing the homosexual condition. The copyists tended to apply it intuitively, often influenced by Thomas Mann's

Death in Venice and its likes or driven by their own experiences, rife with alienation and anxiety. This state is perfectly encapsulated in the Spanish noun *malestar*, which means 'discomfort,' 'malaise,' 'distress' or 'unrest.'

In contrast, the literature written at the turn of the 20th century is no longer preoccupied with quantity, and authors are guided less by intuition and more by deliberate writing strategies. While the number of texts may be smaller, the awareness of multiple and varied cultural conceptualisations of homosexual identity and corresponding homoerotic traditions has increased considerably. A writer of sexual minority literature makes a series of decisions in the process of crafting his work, like any other writer. What sets him apart from other writers is that, besides deciding about the narrator, the structure of the narrative, the plot, etc., he must also consciously determine what homosexual self will emerge from his text and whether this self will reflect any of the existing conceptualisations of homosexual identity. Will the work he is designing dovetail with one of the homoerotic traditions that took shape in the 20th century? Or will it perhaps engage in a discursive game with them? These and similar dilemmas time and again surface in the novels I examine in this book.

The fiction produced at the turn of the 20th century typically displays considerable intertextuality, abounding in explicit references to existing discourses on homosexuality and replete with individual interpretations of the homosexual self. This does not mean that writers have entirely relinquished the traditions already in place. While their writing remains akin to the gesture of a scribe who rewrites deep-rooted motifs, this scribe is often a rebel who turns the literary tradition inside out or intentionally combines various homoerotic models within one text in order to reveal their discursive constructedness. Moreover, they frequently make direct references to homosexual culture in its globalised and trivial version. If their works take a stand against mainstream culture, they are also often critical of urban gay communities and the emancipatory politics of sexual minorities as such.

To illustrate these processes and developments, I discuss the works of seven writers whose investment in homoerotic literature has been amply recognised: José Luis de Juan, Luis G. Martín, Juan Gil-Albert, Juan Goytisolo, Eduardo Mendicutti, Luis Antonio de Villena and Álvaro Pombo. I scrutinise selected texts published between 1995 and 2010, with the exception of Juan Gil-Albert's novella *Valentín. Homenaje a William Shakespeare* [*Valentín: A Tribute to William Shakespeare*], which first appeared in 1974 and was re-edited and re-released in 2010. Though it falls outside my turn-of-the-millennium timeframe, *Valentín* has more in common with recent gay-themed Spanish writings than with the corresponding fiction of the *transición española* and thus calls for a thorough re-reading informed by queer critical theory.

My argument proceeds in five thematically focused chapters. Chapter 1 discusses my research and the interpretive tools developed in

Anglo-American queer studies and by Spanish gay and queer critics. It also outlines the genesis and development of these two critical approaches in Spanish studies, starting from the literary-critical controversies around homosexuality in the work of Federico García Lorca. In surveying the available scholarship, the chapter also spells out the differences between the Spanish and Anglo-American contexts. As such, it lays the methodological groundwork for my argument and offers an introduction to the distinctiveness of Spanish cultural realities, which are evoked in the following chapters.

Literary texts by the above Spanish authors are analysed in two complementary parts. The first part, comprising Chapters 2 and 3, focuses on meta-literary and intertextual aspects. The opening chapter of this section relies on the copyist metaphor to explore the 'rewriting' of foreign literary traditions, while the following chapter examines the 'rewriting' of the vernacular tradition. These chapters portray the attempts at subversive writing undertaken by José Luis de Juan, Luis G. Martín, Juan Gil-Albert, Juan Goytisolo and Eduardo Mendicutti. My argument opens with José Luis de Juan's meta-literary *Este latente mundo* (*This Breathing World*), which paradigmatically ties in with my methodological toolkit. Specifically, Mazuf, one of the novel's protagonists, is an ancient scribe who rebels against the literary tradition in place and clandestinely modifies the copies he makes in ways that turn its discourse inside out. Drawing on Martínez's metaphor of a scribe, I propose the phrase 'Mazuf's gesture' to depict the practices of homoerotic literature writers which are geared to undermining existing conceptualisations of queer identity and establishing a critical dialogue with the entrenched homosexual tradition.

The second part, which includes the chapters 'Against Culture' and 'Against Nature,' continues my examination of the ways in which writers deliberately employ various discourses and narratives of sexual identity. Devoted to Luis Antonio de Villena and Álvaro Pombo, respectively, these chapters focus on these two writers' striving to project their own interpretations of the homosexual self in opposition to what has come to be called 'homonormativity,' understood here as the imitation of heterosexual patterns by gay and lesbian emancipatory movements. Both authors are critical of developments that resulted from the achievements of these movements and from the globalisation, commercialisation and increasing trivialisation of contemporary homosexual culture. Villena's and Pombo's positions on homosexuality in the postmodern era cannot be comprehensively portrayed without discussing each of them in a separate chapter, even though the work of both is viewed through the lens of the scribe metaphor and in terms of writing strategies typical of the most recent homoerotic fiction in Spain.

The term 'homoerotic fiction' calls for some explanation as well. It can refer to literature which addresses either male homosexuality or lesbian themes. Given the precedence assigned to the notion of 'difference'

in queer studies and the attention paid to cultural factors that affect the ways in which queer identities are defined (e.g. ethnic background, gender, class, etc), treating lesbian and gay fiction writing as a coherent whole would be a serious methodological mistake. Because lesbian identity is influenced by the experience of exclusion within heterosexual patriarchal society on the basis of both sexual otherness and gender, the fiction of women who write from the perspective of this dual exclusion should be explored in a study of its own. However, the body of books I examine includes a novel which looks into female identity in the context of queerness. Eduardo Mendicutti's *Yo no tengo la culpa de haber nacido tan sexy* [*I'm Not to Blame for Having Been Born So Sexy*] features a transsexual heroine and weighs in on the operations of the so-called heterosexual matrix. However, since the book is written as a gay camp novel that problematises gay identity in the context of postmodernity and, crucially, is closely aligned with the strategy I have dubbed 'Mazuf's gesture,' I decided to include it in my analysis.

While this book has now found its way into the hands of an English-speaking readership, it was originally designed and edited for a public less familiar with the Spanish language and thus more likely to be unacquainted with the texts it discusses. For this reason, brief summaries of these works have been provided and the cultural context in which they were written has been elucidated in footnotes. I hope that this book will benefit not only Spanish studies scholars and researchers of homoerotic literature but also all those interested in Spanish culture. It was my intent to make it useful to both specialists and non-professional aficionados. Although it is a scholarly study, I have done my best to avoid – wherever possible – hermetic jargon in order to offer all readers an interesting read. The book opens with a story about Federico García Lorca and his work, even though Lorca is not a turn-of-the-century homoerotic fiction writer. Realising that this may strain readers' patience, I hasten to explain that this lengthy, seemingly 'irrelevant' passage is, in fact, a second – proper – introduction without which this book would start *in medias res*.

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1 Queers and Literature: The Spanish Context

1.1. Lorca Experts: Early Gay and Queer Criticism in Spain

> Ah yes, that Lorca expert put 'truth serum' in your drink, sir, the stuff used by Americans in their interrogations; it's against the law.
>
> – Michał Witkowski, *Lovetown*[1]

To the *mundo hispánico* Lorca is what Wilde is to the Anglo-American world. His life and work are where any discussion of contemporary homoerotic prose in Spain should begin. Federico García Lorca not only made his mark on 20th-century European literature, but he has also become an icon of the Spanish gay emancipation movement, albeit against his will. All narratives need a hero. A gay narrative needs a 'gay'[2] hero. The Spanish Oscar Wilde never aspired to play this role. Nonetheless, he had it thrust upon him. As a result of the vicissitudes of the Civil War, one of the most distinguished poets and playwrights of the Generation of '27 was murdered in 1936 by agents of the forces that were soon to seize power – and consequently control of knowledge[3] – in Spain for decades to come. It

1 Michał Witkowski, *Lovetown*, trans. William Martin (London: Portobello Books, 2010), e-book.

2 The English loan word 'gay' has already become entrenched in Spanish as a term for a homosexual male. While the word itself boasts a long history, its current meaning is closely associated with the American emancipatory movement of the latter half of the 20th century and connotes the affirmation of homosexuality combined with an aspiration of the complete assimilation of homosexuals in society. For this reason, using 'gay' as a noun or an adjective to refer to prior periods is quite controversial. In such contexts, 'gay' should be applied with caution and awareness, signalled by inverted commas. On the etymology of the word and its usage in Spanish, see Félix Rodríguez González, *Diccionario gay-lésbico. Vocabulario general y argot de la homosexualidad* (Madrid: Gredos, 2008), 161–6, and Alberto Mira, *Para entendernos. Diccionario de cultura homosexual, gay y lésbica* (Barcelona: Ediciones de la Tempestad, 2002), 325–6.

3 Michel Foucault insists that knowledge and power are inextricable from each other. To convey this coupling, Foucault came up with the notion of 'power-knowledge,' which,

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is not my intent to discuss in detail homoerotic elements in Lorca's work or to address his personal dilemmas occasioned by his sexual otherness; these issues have been comprehensively examined by a host of researchers, though, in fact, Lorca scholarship still abounds in lacunae. However, Lorca's tragic fate and the history of the reception of his texts are noteworthy and relevant to the development of Spanish studies research on the construction of non-normative identities in literature. What demands particular attention is the attitude of Spanish critics and foreign Spanish literature scholars. Despite Spain having been a fully democratic state for decades, as well as Pedro Almodóvar's international success and the legislation introduced by the José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero cabinet both promoting the image of Spain as a progressive country friendly to sexual minorities, queer studies faced an uphill struggle trying to enter Spanish academia and for quite a while was unable to settle comfortably in the literature departments of Spanish universities. Of course, this does not mean that queer perspectives were entirely absent in Spanish scholarship. However, while the body of home-produced publications on the writings of sexual minorities is steadily increasing in Spain, a significant proportion of early queer-critical studies of Spanish literature symptomatically came from abroad, mainly from the UK and the US.

To outline the state of the art, let us go back to the murdered poet and the dispute among 'Lorca experts,' factors which are far too relevant to the understanding of the Spanish context not to be given due attention before we steep ourselves in turn-of-the-millennium Spanish homoerotic fiction, which is the central object of my argument. Lorca biographers – above all Irish scholar Ian Gibson – have braved serious challenges to identify and illuminate the events that directly preceded the poet's tragic death. As the political conflict escalated and acts of terror began to proliferate in Spain before the outbreak of the Civil War in 1936, Lorca left Madrid in the hope that he would be safer in Granada, with his family and friends, than in the capital, the centre of political upheaval. As he would soon discover, it was an ill-advised – literally fatal – decision, and Granada was the most dangerous place for him. Granada was taken over by the rebels in a matter of days after an armed insurrection against the Republic was proclaimed, while Madrid remained in the Republican hands until the very last moments of the Civil War. Seizing control over Granada on 23rd July 1936 alone did

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first, 'assumes that power is not from the top down, from a dominant class upon a dominated class: power is immanent, diffused throughout society, on all levels. Second, knowledge (*savoir*) is not ideal and abstract, but material and concrete; it cannot be divorced from the workings of power throughout society, again at all levels. Third, as a consequence of the second, science cannot be arbitrarily divorced from ideology because science, as a form of knowledge (*connaissance*), is embedded in power relations (*pouvoir-savoir*).' Charles C. Lemert and Garth Gillan, *Michel Foucault: Social Theory and Transgression* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 136, https://doi.org/10.7312/leme91998 (accessed 15 August 2021).

not guarantee that the nationalists would maintain the status quo. Hence, they immediately commenced eliminating potential hubs of resistance. The city was combed in search of left-wing activists and people suspected of socialist sympathies. Those arrested were as a rule directly executed at the wall of the graveyard neighbouring the Alhambra, and a number of individuals fell victim to more or less secret assassinations by the so-called Black Squad.[4] Lorca was perfectly aware of the gravity of the danger he was facing. His writings, with their explicit criticism of conservative mores[5] and outspoken sensitivity to social injustice, and his involvement with the La Barraca theatre clearly spoke to his allegiance to the opposing party in the conflict. The Falangists, who founded their sense of self-worth on the myth of Spain as a military power and treated their warfare as a new Reconquista, a holy mission of wrenching the country out of the hands of the 'Reds,' that is, the new 'infidels,' certainly could not be expected to condone the poet's opinion of his compatriot's blind nationalism and his critical view of the consequences of reclaiming Granada from the Moors in 1492. The 'liberators' of the city in which Lorca sought shelter must have been particularly irked by what Lorca told *El Sol* on 10th July 1936:

> It was a disastrous moment [in our history], even though we are taught just the opposite at school. We lost admirable civilisation, poetry, astronomy, architecture and sophistication of a unique quality in the world. Now, we have an impoverished and cowardly town instead […], whose peace is wrecked today by the members of Spain's worst bourgeoisie. […] I am integrally a Spaniard and I wouldn't be able to live outside of my geographical boundaries, but I hate Spaniards who are nothing else but Spaniards. I am brother to all people and am loath of those who commit themselves to the abstract idea of nationalism only because their love of the country is blind. A good Chinaman is much dearer to me than a vile Spaniard. I extol Spain and feel that it saturates all my being, but I am first and foremost a man of the world and a brother of all people.[6]

4 Ian Gibson, *Vida, pasión y muerte de Federico García Lorca*, vol. 2 (Barcelona: Folio, 2003), 567.

5 This criticism is at its most straightforward in Lorca's dramas about women, which I analysed in my unpublished MA thesis, *Violencia cultural en dramas escogidos de Federico García Lorca* [*Cultural Violence in Selected Dramas by Federico García Lorca*], supervised by Professor Marcin Kurek (University of Wrocław, 2005).

6 'Fue un momento malísimo, aunque digan lo contrario en las escuelas. Se perdieron una civilización admirable, una poesía, una astronomía, una arquitectura y una delicadeza únicas en el mundo, para dar paso a una ciudad pobre, acobardada […], donde se agita actualmente la peor burguesía de España. […] Yo soy español integral, y me sería imposible vivir fuera de mis límites geográficos; pero odio al que es español por ser español nada más. Yo soy hermano de todos y execro al hombre que se sacrifica por una idea nacionalista abstracta por el solo hecho de que ama a su patria con una venda en los ojos. El chino bueno está más cerca de mí que el español malo. Canto a España

Printed in the daily one week before the outbreak of the war, these cosmopolitan words could not but aggravate the poet's situation. Aware of the risk, he asked the befriended Rosales family for help as they had political links to the Falange (Spanish: Falange Española, literally Spanish Phalanx).[7] He stayed in hiding at the Rosales' house until 16th August, when the nationalists launched another hunt for him, following the failed attempt to detain him at his family home and, this time, having been tipped about his exact whereabouts. Mrs Rosales, who was then alone at home with Lorca, phoned one of her sons to tell him what was going on. Despite the desperate attempts, the commanding officer could not be dissuaded and arrested Lorca. The Rosales brothers immediately sought to get Lorca out of jail, using their connections in extreme right-wing circles. To no avail, however. José Rosales was told that there were too many serious charges against the poet for the commander José Valdés Guzmán to cave in to persuasion and let Lorca walk free, without risking accusations of treason and parleying with the 'Reds.'[8] As it turned out later, this was only an excuse. José Rosales made one more attempt and obtained a written order to release Lorca from Colonel Antonio González Espinosa the next morning. But when he presented the order, José Valdés Guzmán lied that the poet had already been transported from jail,[9] which could only mean one thing to Rosales: Lorca was dead. In fact, Lorca

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y la siento hasta la medula; pero antes que esto soy hombre del mundo y hermano de todos.' Federico García Lorca, *Obras completas III. Prosa*, ed. Miguel García-Posada (Barcelona: Galaxia Gutenberg, 1997), 637. Unless indicated otherwise, all translations in this volume are by its author and translator. All bracketed insertions and ellipses in quotations are by the author.

7 When in Madrid, Lorca regularly kept in touch with Luis Rosales, who returned to Granada at approximately the same time as Lorca. Luis's two brothers – Antonio and José – were locally prominent members of the Falange, even though their father, Miguel, did not endorse their involvement. At Luis's request, Miguel Rosales took the immense risk of giving Lorca refuge at his home despite the rumours that hiding 'the Reds' could be punishable even with death. There was hope that the rebels would not dare search the house of such high-profile Falange activists as Antonio and José. Gibson, *Vida*, 572–3.

8 Gibson cites José Valdés Guzmán's refusal to José Rosales's requests: 'If it weren't for this denunciation, Pepe, I'd let you take him, but it's impossible because just look at what it says' ('Si no fuera por esta denuncia, Pepe, yo te dejaría que te lo llevaras, pero no puede ser porque mira lo que dice'). Gibson adds that the denunciatory note painted Lorca as a dissident writer who had a radio for contacting Russians, mentioned the poet's homosexuality as an incriminating circumstance and accused the Rosales family of helping a 'Red.' The denouncing letter was sent by Ramón Ruiz Alonso, who arrested Lorca at the Rosales' house. *Ibid*., 583.

9 Gibson claims that Valdés Guzmán was determined to intimidate the local community. The death of a famous poet was a clear signal that the nationalists would not shun any measures. For this reason, he chose not to obey the colonel's order but to consult the Lorca case with a higher-ranked officer, General Queipo de Llano, who ordered to shoot the prisoner. *Ibid*., 587.

was shot on 18th August at dawn.[10] Where his body was buried has still not been established, which continues to spark speculations and spurs the imaginations of many researchers. Günter W. Lorenz, one of Lorca's biographers, has written that only dry grass and a bunch of hyacinths are growing where the poet was brutally murdered.[11] A more poignant vision of the burial place of the gay artist, one of the first victims of Francoism, would indeed be difficult to picture.

Without a doubt, the death of Federico García Lorca was politically driven. He was a far too well-known public personality and too directly associated with leftist views for the nationalists to fail to recognise him as one of their chief enemies. The account of the events provided by Gibson, where Valdés Guzmán was ordered to kill Lorca by General Queipo de Llano himself, sounds very probable. Otherwise, the Franco regime would have been less dedicated to hushing up the story and – when banning talk of it was no longer tenable – to misrepresenting the events, suppressing evidence and obstructing the investigation. The poet's death became taboo very quickly. During the Civil War, it was dangerous to talk about him and even to have his books in Granada. As a result of his family's consistent efforts, the authorities eventually issued Lorca's death certificate, which described the circumstances of his passing in an oblique way: 'died in 1936, in the month of May, of injuries sustained in warfare.'[12] Notably, the document was issued on 20th June 1973.[13] The gap between the tragic events of the first days of the Civil War and the issuing of the official statement amply indicates how troublesome an issue the famous poet's death was to the Franco regime.

The attempts at finding out what exactly happened to Lorca were not only hampered by the reluctance of the state administration. Overly inquisitive researchers were also not welcome by all those who wanted to keep the poet's homosexuality secret for fear of what is referred to as *el* '*qué dirán*' in Spanish.[14] Lorca's family, some of his friends and a troop of literary scholars wished to defend Lorca's 'good name.' They were afraid that making details of his private life public knowledge would deprecate his literary accomplishments, stain the family's honour

10 Ian Gibson, '*Caballo azul de mi locura.' Lorca y el mundo gay* (Barcelona: Planeta, 2009), 371.

11 Günter W. Lorenz, *Federico García Lorca*, trans. Krzysztof Radziwiłł and Janina Zeltzer (Warszawa: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1963), 117. It is obviously an allusion to the myth of Apollo and Hyacinthus. Driven by his jealousy for Hyacinthus, Zephyrus deflected the discus thrown by Apollo so that it lethally wounded the youth. Apollo turned his lover's blood into a beautiful flower which has memorialised Hyacinthus's name ever since.

12 'falleció en el mes de Agosto de 1.936 a consecuencia de heridas producidas por hecho de guerra.' The document was reproduced in Gibson, *Caballo*, 361.

13 *Ibid*., 367.

14 Used as a noun, the phrase is a rough equivalent of 'neighbours talking.'

and – equally importantly – possibly occasion satisfaction to the regime, which was openly homophobic and persecuted its non-heterosexual citizens.[15] If there were some grounds for such overcautious attitudes under Francoism, though even this is doubtful to some extent,[16] they can only be regarded as ill will and a glaring disservice to Lorca in democratic Spain. In his book on Lorca, *'Caballo azul de mi locura': Lorca y el mundo gay* [*'Blue Horse of My Madness': Lorca and the Gay World*],[17] Gibson devotes considerably more room than in his earlier studies to the poet's amorous relationships and the development of his homosexual sensibility. Re-examining Lorca's work in the light of new facts, Gibson argues that some resources were not accessible to scholars even at the beginning of the 21st century as a result of misconceived concerns about the good fame of the heroes of those days. As a corroboration of this view, he cites the publication of Carlos Morla Lynch's famous diary *En España con Federico García Lorca* [*In Spain with Federico García Lorca*] in 1957. The heirs of Morla Lynch, a Chilean diplomat who worked in Madrid under the 2nd Republic and during the Spanish Civil War, did not choose to release an unabridged version of the text when its re-edition was published in 2008. The prologue to the diary declares that even if the diplomat's family decides to publish a more complete version someday, it will anyway be censored so as 'not to harm the third parties.'[18] While, in this case, the object is not to reveal that Morla Lynch himself was

15 Fernando Olmeda, *El látigo y la pluma. Homosexuales en la España de Franco* (Madrid: Oberon, 2004).

16 That Lorca's family and literary scholars did not address his homosexuality can also be considered counterproductive. Hindering access to private archives, self-censorship and resentment against inquisitive biographers perfectly dovetailed with the regime's policy of the 'conspiracy of silence.' Of course, one must be very cautious today when judging the decisions of Lorca's relatives and friends, whose situation was often extremely difficult. In fact, both talking about Lorca's homosexuality and being silent about his private life suited the regime. Still, not disclosing some private records that could shed new light on the poet's last days solely in order to avoid revealing inconvenient facts illustrates the mechanism of Foucault's 'power-knowledge,' which does not work vertically ('from a dominating class upon a dominated class') but, capillary and dispersed as it is, permeates all levels and manifests itself in specific situations, including the interactions of people unrelated directly to power, yet acting, albeit sometimes involuntarily and unwittingly, in ways that further its interests. Given the specific historical conjuncture, the Foucauldian 'power-knowledge' is the only context in which attitudes fuelled by the fear of *el* '*qué dirán*' can be fathomed without passing unfair opinions on those who sought to protect the memory of Lorca under Francoism. While their position was far more complicated than it may seem at first sight, continuing half-truths or conscious misrepresentations of the truth after the fall of the dictatorship seems entirely unwarranted.

17 The title alludes to *Federico y su mundo* [*Federico and His World*], a book authored by Lorca's brother Francisco García Lorca (who died in 1976) and published in 1980, which entirely passes over entails of the poet's personal life that his family found inconvenient.

18 'para no perjudicar a terceras personas.' Gibson, *Caballo*, 377–8.

homosexual, the same mechanism is at work as that which impedes scholars' efforts to find and reveal the truth about Lorca and his circle. Gibson certainly knows what he is talking about because he has been grappling with this mechanism since 1965, when he came to Spain to complete his dissertation on the origins of Lorca's poetic universe, then to do research for his book *El asesinato de Federico García Lorca* (*The Assassination of Federico García Lorca*) published in the 1970s, and later to write his celebrated comprehensive, two-volume biography of Lorca (1985 and 1987). In this biography, Gibson illuminates not only the political background of his death but also the role of local animosities, family feuds, the envy of some of Lorca's countrymen and the common homophobia of Spanish society. Gibson's findings imply that to claim that Lorca fell victim to the twists and turns of Spanish politics in the 1930s does not convey the complete picture of the events; nor does the notion that the crime was fuelled exclusively by right-wing hatred of homosexuals. As is often the case with explaining tragedies, calamities are triggered by a bundle of circumstances and factors, rather than by one cause.

Symptomatically, Gibson's investigations coincided with the rise of the gay and lesbian emancipatory movement in the US, which prompted the development of gay and lesbian studies at British and American universities. In its pursuit of signs of homosexual identity in literary texts, gay criticism often reached for authors' biographies as an essential point of reference. Such biographism tended to be denounced, especially by structuralist-minded literary scholars, as a too vulgar approach to literary works, but it proved invaluable in the case of texts which relied on allusions, were thoroughly metaphorical or extensively used double coding to express homoeroticism. While biographism has lost a lot of its relevance in the study of more recent homoerotic literature produced in the post-emancipation times, it is still a method eagerly used by researchers of homosexuality in strictly canonical literature (such as Lorca and other poets of the Spanish Generation of '27) to highlight the aspects of the text which other frameworks would either struggle to comprehend or even fail to notice.[19] Known in Spain as a meticulous biographer rather than a literary scholar, Gibson also applies the gay critical methodology in his 2009 book on Lorca. He discovers new facts in Lorca's life and re-reads his texts, ranging from the juvenilia to his last writings, to re-interpret them in a new context and from a new perspective.[20] This approach to the study of literature inspires

19 Of course, to say that gay criticism comes down to biographism is entirely unfounded. References to biography are only an auxiliary element or sometimes a starting point for gay criticism, which predominantly focuses on the study of discursive manifestations of homoeroticism in literature and more often than not constructs its argument without recourse to writers' private lives.

20 For example, Gibson cites an unpublished letter which Lorca sent from the US to his friend and literary critic Rafael Martínez Nadal, in which he outlines a flippant image

little enthusiasm in Spanish literary scholars, particularly those who believe that Gibson's efforts are more geared towards finding sensational details in Lorca's biography rather than to telling the truth about his life and work and making him a human rather than a monument. Emphatically, Gibson, who is a Spanish studies scholar from outside Spanish-speaking culture, time and again demonstrates that reading Lorca without taking into account what has been dubbed the 'homosexual sensibility' is bound to be fragmentary and reductive. Many of the refined Lorca interpreters and eminent experts were not always ready for such insights.[21]

As already argued, any examination of the construction of non-normative sexual identities in Spanish literature should commence from Lorca and the controversy around the relevance of homosexuality to the interpretation of his work. Of course, Federico García Lorca was not the first Spanish author to meaningfully engage with homoeroticism in his writings. However, the circumstances of his death, the aura of mystery enveloping him and the fact that he is the most recognisable member of the Generation of '27, as well as an unquestionable fixture in the canon of Spanish letters and in the history of world literature, have all caused any new discovery about his life and/or work to almost immediately provoke wide-ranging responses. This is what happened when his *Sonetos del amor oscuro* (*Sonnets of Dark Love*) were published in the Saturday supplement to the daily *ABC* on 17th March 1984. The event was among the factors that contributed to the emergence of gay criticism in Spanish literary studies. As leading figures in Spain's literary criticism responded to the publication all too cautiously and made sure not to mention 'homosexuality' in their comments on the poems, researchers from outside the Iberian Peninsula were prompted to examine Lorca's work from another angle.

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of New York's Harlem bars frequented by homosexuals and sexual orgies he had witnessed. Gibson argues that the visit to the US and contacts with New York's homosexual community impacted Lorca's self-acceptance process and his resolution to write bolder and with more forthright homoerotic flair than Oscar Wilde (*Ibid*., 204, 332). Such findings necessitate revising ideas about Lorca's writings from the New York period. An excellent case in point is his drama *El público* (*The Public*), a critical edition of which edited by the reputed scholar María Clementa Millán in 1987 (and re-edited multiple times without modifications, including post-2000), as part of the prestigious student-favourite *Letras Hispánicas* series, entirely ignored its evident 'gay' dimension. María Clementa Millán, 'Introducción,' in Federico García Lorca, *El público* (Madrid: Cátedra, 2001), 9–115.

21 I mainly have in mind Miguel García-Posada here. Alberto Mira cites numerous instances of his deprecatory treatment of gay criticism, as if it posed a threat to traditionally conceived literary research. See A. Mira, *De Sodoma a Chueca. Una historia cultural de la homosexualidad en España en el siglo XX* (Barcelona and Madrid: Egales, 2004), 258–62.

By the mid-1980s, the forbidden topic had practically not been raised when talking about Lorca, but the breaking of this taboo was looming on the horizon: when the sonnets were published, Gibson was already completing the first volume of his Lorca biography. Essentially, the poet's family had not planned to reveal these texts to the public as they were permeated with 'dark' eroticism and their addressee was referred to in masculine pronouns. What was it then that inclined Lorca's heirs to eventually allow the publication of the poems, which had only been seen by the poet's closest friends when he had still been alive? At the end of 1983, a few months before this unexpected literary event, 250 unauthorised copies of the sonnets were printed and mailed to selected recipients. The anonymous sender had retained the original title and arranged the text, as was later established by Miguel García-Posada, on the basis of the photocopies of the sonnets in possession of Spanish studies scholar André Belamich.[22] Unlike the 'pirated' edition of 1983, the poems printed in *ABC* bore the curtailed title of *Sonetos de amor* [*Sonnets of Love*]. The whole of the Saturday supplement was devoted to them, including write-ups by Lorca's nephew Manuel Fernández-Montesinos and papers by distinguished critics Fernando Lázaro Carreter and Miguel García-Posada, whose collaboration had been solicited by Lorca's family and who were aware how delicate the situation was. As neither of them dared call the love on which the sonnets dwelled by its proper name, they used veiled allusions and applied the strategy of universalisation. Quite often employed in critical commentaries on homoerotically inflected and thus inconvenient literary texts,[23] the strategy consists in underlining that even if some 'specific' love is at stake, this basically does not matter, because the texts are about 'love as such' and if they are read in any other way, they are approached reductively and with blatant incompetence. Does great literature not take human experience 'as such' as its object? Is it not universal? Within this logic, critics who highlight the specific in literature negate its greatness as if homoerotic literature could not be both homoerotic and great at the same time, as if these two properties were mutually exclusive.[24] According to García-Posada, 'dark love' meant difficult, desperate, unhappy love and little else.[25] If so, why did the adjective 'dark' disappear from the title in *ABC*? Was it by any chance the case that Lorca himself did not know exactly what love he was writing about? Did he not realise that his poems were about love 'as such,' love that does not tolerate any epithets? What else, if not an epithet (in the colloquial sense

22 Gibson, *Caballo*, 18–19.

23 See Błażej Warkocki, *Homo niewiadomo. Polska proza wobec odmienności* (Warszawa: Sic!, 2007), 53–5.

24 As Warkocki aptly notices, the universalisation and marginalisation of homoeroticism in literature are coupled with each other and interdependent. *Ibid.*, 54.

25 Gibson, *Caballo*, 22.

of the term), must 'dark love' have been in the censors' view that they decided to tailor the title the way they did?[26]

The Spanish term *oscuro* does not connote homosexuality. The sonnets themselves do not engage with the theme too explicitly either, except a few details, such as the masculine addressee in one of them, as already mentioned. An inattentive reader may easily miss this, engrossed in other aspects of the text. However, the leading literary critics are not likely to have been inattentive readers. Some metaphors, key words and symbols only become fully comprehensible if considered in the context of an author's entire body of writings, especially in the case of a distinguished writer who consciously aspired to chisel his unique idiom. Recurrent motifs in Lorca's works, such as ruins, infertility, a seaman, the colour blue,[27] the night with its darkness, and knives piercing and killing the male body, all acquire a different shade of meaning if viewed in relation to the features distinctive to homoerotic literature of the day. The modernist expression of homoeroticism through the combination of Eros and Thanatos can be found in other national literatures.[28] Besides incorporating such shared devices, the homosexual writers of the Generation of '27 crafted their private codes including a range of other characteristic motifs. As Lorca experts refused to take this context into account, two pioneering studies that articulated what had long been left unsaid appeared in the second half of the 1980s.

First came Paul Binding's *Lorca: The Gay Imagination* (1985), published in Spain as *García Lorca o la imaginación gay* (*García Lorca, or*

26 Because several manuscripts of the *Sonnets of Dark Love* were in circulation, Lorca's family could be thought to possess a version with the shortened title and believe that it was the original. This, however, was not the case. In 1996, Miguel García-Posada admitted that the title was manipulated at an express request from Lorca's heirs and that the sonnets had been written with Rafael Rodríguez Rapún in mind. García-Posada did not mention then that Rodríguez Rapún was Lorca's lover (Gibson, *Caballo*, 30). Interestingly, the notion that in writing the sonnets Lorca was inspired by Rodríguez Rapún has recently been questioned, and the idea that Lorca composed them having Juan Ramírez de Lucas on his mind has gained some currency among Spanish studies scholars. See Justyna Ziarkowska, 'Wstęp,' in Federico García Lorca, *Wiersze i wykłady*, sel. Marcin Kurek, ed. Justyna Ziarkowska, (Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, 2019), XCVIII–XCIX.

27 The colour makes one think of the wok of British poets, such as Oscar Wilde and John Addington Symonds. Alison Victoria Matthews explains that, '[b]lue would also seem a natural color for a Uranian poet, since the appellation is derived from the Greek *Ouranos*, or the sky.' Alison Victoria Matthews, 'Aestheticism's True Colors: The Politics of Pigment in Victorian Art, Criticism, and Fashion,' in *Women and British Aestheticism*, ed. Talia Schaffer and Kathy Alexis Psomiades (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1999), 185.

28 See German Ritz, *Nić w labiryncie pożądania. Gender i płeć w literaturze polskiej od romantyzmu do postmodernizmu*, trans. Bronisław Drąg, Andrzej Kopacki and Małgorzata Łukasiewicz (Warszawa: Wiedza Powszechna, 177–95); German Ritz, *Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz. Pogranicza nowoczesności*, trans. Andrzej Kopacki (Kraków: Universitas, 1999), 97–121.

the Gay Imagination) two years later.[29] Binding's references to Lorca's biography are kept at the indispensable minimum, and his focus is on exploring homosexual sensibility in Lorca's poetic imaginary. He elucidates the characteristic coupling of Eros and Thanatos, particularly in Lorca's later writings, including the sonnets, as well as *casidas* and *gacelas* in *Diván de Tamarit* (*The Tamarit Poems*). He also identifies *Romancero gitano* (*Gypsy Ballads*) as Lorca's first collection to image the male body through a gay lens[30] and comments on the elements of his dramas (both the well-known and the earlier ones) which attest to Lorca's specific sense of alienation caused by his sexual otherness in a society that did not accept homosexuality. Binding's argument, though rambling a bit at places and rather scarce on reliable evidence, demonstrates how Lorca gradually realised that, as a homosexual writer, he could explore the human condition from the perspective of his own queerness. Binding locates the breakthrough moment in the period when Lorca was working on *Poeta en Nueva York* (*A Poet in New York*), a volume which not so much sublimates homoerotic desire (as Lorca's early writings do) as rather consciously builds on the homoerotic tradition and attempts to work through sexual otherness, especially in confrontation with the unfriendly modern world symbolised by the dehumanised New York.[31] In the concluding chapter, Binding closely scrutinises *casidas*, *gacelas* and the newly published *Sonnets of Dark Love*. He explains the meanings of *oscuro* in the context of the dance of eroticism and death, which as he claims are of special significance to homosexual authors,[32] and in relation

29 Paul Binding, *Lorca: The Gay Imagination* (London: GMP, 1985) (*García Lorca o la imaginación gay*, trans. Rafael Peñas Cruz [Barcelona: Laertes, 1987]).

30 *Ibid*., 196–7.

31 An attempt at framing homosexuality in positive terms is illustrated by, for example, a reference to Apollo in 'Tu infancia en Mentón' ('Your Childhood in Menton'). Binding argues that the poem articulates a desire of physical communion with a male love object and its absence is framed as unnatural. According to Binding the verse expresses I-speaker's need for a complete affirmation as engaged in a homoerotic relationship (*Ibid*., 21–2). He also analyses 'Oda a Walt Whitman' ('Ode to Walt Whitman'), where Lorca writes directly about homosexual identity, turning Whitman into an incarnation of Apollonian love, masculinity, courage and unique brotherhood. Such a vision of a homosexual relationship is clashed with an image of lavatorial, mercenary and cynical homosexuality as dehumanised as the city itself (see Justyna Ziarkowska, *Ucieczka do głębi. O surrealizmie w literaturze hiszpańskiej przed 1936* [Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego, 2010], 203, 211). Interestingly, the passages in 'Ode to Walt Whitman' which brand cheating, false homosexuals have sometimes been used to argue that Lorca hated homosexuals as such, so he could not possibly have been one himself. Such scholarly malpractice is abundantly illustrated by the studies of Ramón Sainer Sánchez, which juxtapose decontextualised passages with other poems in which the I-speaker addresses a woman. Ramón Sainero Sánchez, *Lorca y Synge. ¿Un mundo maldito?* (Madrid: Editorial de la Universidad Complutense, 1983), 123.

32 Binding explains that while homosexual males, whose love acts do not lead to procreation, experience passion more intensely (since erotic intercourse is always an aim in and of itself), this contemplation of the beauty of eroticism is accompanied by an awareness

to anal intercourse as a deeply taboo element of male same-sex eroticism. He also argues that Lorca's sonnets characteristically cast their I-speaker as passive vis-à-vis the addressee – the '*tú*' of the poems that embodies dominant masculinity and does not refrain from mocking or spurning the courtship. The lover addressed by the I-speaker appears predominantly interested in sexual contacts and at the same time failing to comprehend the depth of the affection he is offered and unable to fully requite such love.[33] Such a reversal with the passive, suffering I-speaker and the active, pain-inflicting addressee is not typical of love poetry written from the perspective of a heterosexual male. Rather, as Binding seems to imply, it is a product of the gay imagination.

The other study is a revised version of Ángel Sahuquillo's doctoral dissertation, *Federico García Lorca y la cultura de la homosexualidad masculina* (*Federico García Lorca and the Culture of Male Homosexuality*), whose subtitle suggests a broader context than that in Binding's book: *Lorca, Dalí, Cernuda, Gil-Albert, Prados y la voz silenciada del amor homosexual* [*Lorca, Dalí, Cernuda, Gil-Albert, Prados and the Silenced Voice of Homosexual Love*]. Completed in 1986 at the University of Stockholm, the dissertation was published in Spain by the Juan Gil-Albert Cultural Institute in Alicante in a limited print-run in 1991. The study comprehensively discusses expressions of homoeroticism in Lorca and compares them with the writings of other authors from the Generation of '27 to identify interactions between poetry and visual art practised by the group that clustered around the Residencia de Estudiantes, a famous student hall of residence and a cradle of the most brilliant talent of 20th-century Spanish art.[34] Sahuquillo argues that some of the members of the Generation of '27 coded homoeroticism by means of a range of motifs, symbols, allusions and intertextual references associated with the culture of homosexuality. To be able to decode them, readers must possess a certain cultural competency and a profound knowledge of the entire body of work of respective authors, and consider the uniqueness of their poetic idioms. If some allusions to homosexuality are easily decipherable by an educated readership (e.g. references to ancient Greece and its mythology, to the Biblical narrative of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, to the poetry of Walt Whitman, Paul Verlaine and the English Uranian poets, to Plato's *Symposium* and Socrates, to the work of Jean Cocteau, etc.), some other motifs connoting homosexuality may be more obscure, especially if they are bound up with a private code

of the power and majesty of death, which they face entirely 'naked.' In this sense, homosexual writers and artists obtain a better insight into existential issues of life and death than heterosexual ones and more fully express them in art, which is intended for both homo- and heterosexual audiences. Binding, *Lorca*, 208.

33 *Ibid*., 208 *pass*.

34 For more information on the history of this academic hub and its relevance to the development of culture, see Ziarkowska, *Ucieczka*, 65–77.

used by a group of friends or in one author's texts alone. Sahuquillo examines numerous references to ancient Greek myths (e.g. pointing out the echoes of the Ganymede myth in Juan Gil-Albert, explaining the meanings of the sea and sea foam in Lorca as the semen in the context of the Ouranos myth and exploring Apollonian motifs already analysed by Binding) and explicates the hidden meanings of the adjective *amargo* (bitter), which often appears both in Lorca as well as in Cernuda and Gil-Albert.[35] Another equivocal adjective frequently found in Lorca is *verde* (green), which in Spanish denotes not only a colour but also lewdness or lechery[36]; Sahuquillo quotes the famous passage in 'Ode to Walt Whitman' about 'men with that green look in their eyes who love men' and the phrase 'the green blood of Sodom'[37] in 'Carne' ('Flesh'). Sahuquillo completes the list of Lorca's characteristic motifs, some of which also surface in other authors of the Generation of '27, with *venas* (veins), *sangre* (blood), *rosas* (roses), *puñales* (daggers), *palomos* (male doves), *macho cabrío* (male goat) and *torres* (towers). This catalogue may come across as somewhat surprising and stir suspicions of overinterpretation. Given this, Sahuquillo meticulously investigates the context[38] and often

35 '*Ser de la cáscara amarga*' (literally 'to have a bitter skin/peel') is a fixed phrase in Spanish which means 'to be homosexual.' It involves a metaphor of a bad-tasting fruit among a bushel of tasty ones. Just like trees sometimes produce bad fruit, parents sometimes happen to bring offspring with the 'flaw' of homosexuality into the world. See Ángel Sahuquillo, *Federico García Lorca y la cultura de la homosexualidad masculina. Lorca, Dalí, Cernuda, Gil-Albert, Prados y la voz silenciada del amor homosexual* (Alicante: Instituto de Cultura 'Juan Gil-Albert,' 1991), 132–5. *Federico García Lorca and the Culture of Male Homosexuality*, trans. Erica Frouman-Smith, with a Foreword by Alberto Mira (Jefferson, NC, and London: McFarland & Company, Inc, 2007), 84–7.

36 In colloquial Spanish *viejo verde* means 'an old lech/a dirty old man' and *chistes verdes*, 'dirty jokes.'

37 'hombres de mirada verde que aman al hombre,' 'verde sangre de Sodoma.' Sahuquillo, *Culture*, 25, 124.

38 Sahuquillo discusses the fascination of the Generation of '27 with Freud, who interpreted objects capable of piercing the body (daggers, knives etc.) as phallic symbols (*Culture*, 85–7) (hence also the popularity of the St Sebastian iconography in gay culture). He explains that as *vena* (vein; *Ibid*., 81) was used in this language to refer to the penis, *sangre* (blood) is interpretable as the semen (*Ibid*., 82). *Rosas* (roses), which are usually recognised as a symbol of heterosexual love, were also recast as the male genitals, as suggested by examples in Cernuda (where a seaman, another motif commonly associated with homoeroticism, transmutes into *rosa dejada* ['an abandoned rose'] after *breve espasmo* ['a brief spasm']) and in Lorca, where kissing a rose is an embarrassing act and *Doña Rosita, the Spinster* (*Doña Rosita la soltera o el lenguaje de las flores*; literally *Doña Rosita the Spinster, or the Talk of Flowers*) tends to be interpreted as a drama about infertility (with a rose standing for transient beauty which fails to replenish life). A dove cote is supposed to metaphorically convey the situation of homosexuals, who are prevented from spreading their wings (the dove metaphor is also employed in Eduardo Mendicutti's novel *El palomo cojo* [*The Lame Pigeon*]). *Macho cabrío* (billy goat) appears in Lorca as a reference to the Bacchanalia and the demonisation of homosexuality in Christian culture. Sahuquillo observes

emphasises that coding is all about the constant game of veiling and unveiling, in which the writer does not conclusively state anything and leaves readers alone with their assumptions, while communicating with those versed in the code. Sahuquillo is aware of the challenges faced by a researcher who seeks to decode the meanings hidden in the texts, especially those bound up with the theme that stirs considerable animosity ('has enough enemies'[39]) and justifies the length of his heavily overquoted and repetitive study by the imperative to carefully document his theses. He also refutes the objection of the non-inclusion of Vicente Aleixandre in the study by pointing out that the Nobel Prize winner was still alive when the book was published. Admittedly, so were Juan Gil-Albert and Salvador Dalí, but, unlike Aleixandre, who kept his sexual orientation secret, they did not object to having their work discussed in the context of 'the culture of homosexuality.'[40]

This detail deserves some attention, given that when gay criticism appeared in Spanish studies, homosexuality was still a strong taboo in literary research. The two pioneering studies – by Binding and Sahuquillo – received scant attention,[41] have never been re-edited, and their copies are poorly accessible in Spain. While Sahuquillo's book was

that in Lorca's texts *macho cabrío* never desires what is within his hand's reach, and 'becomes a eunuch' but of a 'contextual' kind, only being one when surrounded by she-goats (*Ibid*., 142). *Torres* (towers) are discussed by Sahuquillo in conjunction with the drawings of Salvador Dalí, who gave them clearly phallic shapes as a private joke for friends who often talked about onanism in the days of the Residencia de Estudiantes; hence Lorca's *torre de sangre* ('tower of blood'). Sahuquillo also mentions Dalí's insistence on exploring the subconscious in search of suppressed homoerotic desires, which provoked André Breton's disapproval. *Ibid*., 201–22, *Cultura*, 126–8, 135–9, 163, 213–28, 288–91.

39 'tiene bastantes enemigos.' Sahuquillo, *Cultura*, 10.

40 *Ibid*., 9.

41 Alberto Mira observes that the few critics who have anyway addressed the issue of homosexuality among the major members of the Generation of '27 have adopted three strategies: universalisation, heterosexualisation and psychologism. As already mentioned, universalisation involves arguing that 'this' has no interpretive consequences because literature talks of feelings 'as such.' Heterosexualisation is connected to Proust's 'Albertine strategy,' where critics believe that since a same-sex male relationship is impossible in the context of desire, one of the partners must identify with femininity (while retaining the male body). The critics insist that femininity is the key to understanding a homosexual author, viewing it not as a tool for expressing homosexuality ('Albertine's strategy') but as the essence of homosexual identity. Psychologism also acknowledges homosexual traces in the text but explains metaphors expressive of the subject's suffering as ensuing not from surrounding homophobia but from homosexual identity itself, as if a 'happy homosexual' were always an oxymoron. Mira adds that such attitudes often do not in the least speak to the critics' homophobia, instead stemming from their ineptness and unconscious reproduction of clichés inherent in heterosexist representations of homosexuality. He also mentions a fourth strategy adopted by literary critics, in which the inconvenient topic is simply not mentioned altogether (*invisibilización*), as exemplified by María Clementa Millán's critical edition of *The*

published again in 2007, it only appeared in an English translation in the US.[42] The 'truth serum' has failed to entice enthusiasm in Spanish criticism. Yet it has proven abidingly attractive to researchers from outside the Iberian Peninsula.

1.2. Critically Queer? Spanish Studies in Anglo-American Academia

The reluctance of Spanish mainstream criticism to acknowledge authors' homosexual sensibility as relevant to the interpretation of their works results not only from the decades of taboo on non-normative sexualities in public space (though this has certainly been a factor in the dispute about Lorca). This reluctance can equally be attributed to the tradition of literary studies in Spain, which comes across as a hermetic discipline, distrustful of reading literature against the grain, standing in stark contrast to the methodological plurality of Anglo-American literary research. As observed by Alberto Mira, Harold Bloom's *The Western Canon: The Books and School of the Ages* of 1995 attracted considerable interest from Spanish critics. Widely commented in English-speaking countries, Bloom's publication – a 'manifesto against postmodernist approaches to literature'[43] – served Spanish scholars to defend the status quo, that is, the traditionally conceived literary studies, even though gender, postcolonial and queer criticisms neither were practised widely nor enjoyed a strong position in Spain. Consequently, it may come as somewhat of a surprise that Spanish researchers voiced such determined views and appeared so committed to joining an academic dispute unfolding in the foreign context of the US and the UK. Mira claims that the slightly exaggerated attack launched by such critics as García-Posada against the more recent tendencies in literary research resulted from the ignorance of their methodological underpinnings and from a wrong belief that the study of texts in terms of cultural notions, such as gender, sexual identity and ethnicity, reduced the meaning of the works and threatened canonical readings, as if only one way of interpreting literature were correct or, indeed, possible.[44] While much of such a distrust has already been overcome by literary gender criticism, which is gaining more and more currency in Spain, with more and more Spanish scholars relying on queer criticism in their research, most of the first queer-inspired Spanish-studies publications were produced at American, British and Australian universities, that is, in

Public. For more details on the responses of Spanish critics, see Mira, *De Sodoma*, 247–62.

42 Sahuquillo, *Federico García Lorca and the Culture of Male Homosexuality*.

43 'un manifiesto contra las visiones posmodernas de la literatura.' Mira, *De Sodoma*, 258.

44 *Ibid*.

the environment where queer criticism was born. This had some unwelcome ramifications, such as an obliviousness to specific local conditions and an unexamined over-acceptance of American theorisations of sexual non-normativity.

Nevertheless, the authors of the most important studies (especially those hailing from the Iberian Peninsula) seek to withstand the temptation of generalisations and all too easy analogies and call for modifications to the research toolkit developed in queer theory in order to adjust it to Spanish realities. They point out that some Spanish studies researchers who build on American publications fail to notice that some findings of Anglo-American research are incompatible with the Iberian context.[45] Alfredo Martínez Expósito ponders whether it is even possible to apply the queer paradigm (as conceived of in Anglo-American academia) to a country which has had no prior strong feminist tradition and has not generated a recognisable, homogeneous movement of gay and lesbian emancipation.[46] To grasp Martínez Expósito's objections, let us go back to the beginnings of queer studies in the US and compare them with what happened in Spain.

The founding of queer studies in the US and the UK at the turn of the 1980s was entangled in the dispute on essentialism and constructionism. Characteristic of gay and lesbian studies and the second wave of feminism, the former presupposed a trans-historical (sexual, gender) identity which was immutable and shared by the entire group oppressed by the majority (respectively, gays and lesbians discriminated against by heterosexuals and women marginalised by patriarchal society). The essentialist (minority) model of identity was the lynchpin of emancipatory movements at the turn

45 Martínez Expósito describes two clear tendencies: on the one hand, the reluctance of Spanish intellectuals to address homosexual issues and, on the other, 'the servility some of the latest studies display in following Anglo-American theories' ('servilismo con que algunos de los textos más recientes parecen seguir las teorías anglosajonas'). Alfredo Martínez Expósito, *Escrituras torcidas. Ensayos de crítica 'queer'* (Barcelona: Laertes, 2004), 51. The latter of the attitudes branded by Martínez blatantly contradicts the very core of queer thinking, which is founded on a (self-)critical approach to sexuality discourses. Queer theorists encourage creative re-employment of one's own works, constant re-signification of concepts and augmentation of perspectives. Consequently, imitative applications of queer theory, the pursuit of closures and the stabilisation of the theory itself herald its end. As stated by Judith Butler in relation to political action and academic reflection: 'If the term "queer" is to be a site of collective contestation, the point of departure for a set of historical reflections and futural imaginings, it will have to remain that which it is, in the present, never fully owned, but always and only redeployed, twisted, queered from a prior usage in the direction of urgent and expanding political purposes. This also means that it will doubtless have to be yielded in favor of terms that do that political work more effectively. Such a yielding may well become necessary in order to accommodate – without domesticating – democratizing contestations that have and will redraw the contours of the movement in ways that can never be fully anticipated in advance.' Judith Butler, 'Critically Queer,' in *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of 'Sex'* (New York and London: Routledge, 1993), 228.

46 Martínez Expósito, *Escrituras*, 52–3.

of the 1960s, which fought for equal rights of women and sexual minorities. However, the equal-rights identity politics soon proved to embrace binaries, such as homosexuality/heterosexuality and masculinity/femininity and to reinforce such distinctions rather than interrogating them. The exclusion of lesbians, who were a minority both in the gay-dominated emancipatory movement and in the feminist movement (where they were 'incomplete' as non-heterosexual women) prompted women intellectuals engaged in these movements to propose different theorisations of identity. What received some spotlight was the obvious fact that, for example, the social position of low-income women who were members of sexual and ethnic minorities drastically differed from the position of WASPs (White Anglo-Saxon Protestants), who were dominant both in the gay-and-lesbian and feminist movements in the US. Michel Foucault's ideas and post-structuralist theories helped re-think identity as an outcome of discursive strategies, rather than as a stable and historically permanent essence shared by particular groups. Known as constructionism, this standpoint stresses the input of multiple (social, economic, political and historical) contingencies into how notions such as gender, sexual and ethnic identity, function and are perceived. Constructionists also explore power relations inscribed in the hetero-homo and male-female binaries and the role of hegemonic discourses in the production of these identity notions in social and cultural spaces. Unlike gay and lesbian studies, queer studies does not focus on capturing homosexual identity as shared by a given group discriminated against by the heterosexual majority within the homo-hetero dichotomy. Rather, it scrutinises the very mechanisms of stigmatisation of otherness and the entire system based on an array of exclusion-triggering binaries.[47] As such, queer studies offers a broader perspective which brings trans-sexuality, trans-gender and other non-normative identities (e.g. bi- and intersexuality) into the orbit of scholarly reflection. At the same time, it helps explore sexualities from various points of view, for example, in combination with postcolonial approaches, which is particularly relevant in US society with its considerable diversity. The interrogation of essentialism precipitated by the monolithic character of the emancipatory movements of the 1960s and 70s contributed to the foundation of queer studies as part of the humanities, therein literary research.

Martínez Expósito observes that the Anglo-American debate on essentialism and constructionism stirred hardly any interest among Spanish activists, who tended to regard the problem of excessive essentialism as 'artificial' and irrelevant to their realities. Since their onset in the 1970s, gay and lesbian movements in Spain have largely been disengaged from identity-thinking and preoccupied with the socio-economic circumstances of homosexual lives, without erecting homosexual identity into

47 See Joanna Mizielińska, *Płeć, ciało, seksualność. Od feminizmu do teorii queer* (Kraków: Universitas, 2006), 111–21.

an indisputable core of the community. Besides, these movements were scattered across Spain's various regions and did not make up a unified and centralised formation which could be accused of monopolising the discourse. While the American emancipatory movement mainly acted on behalf of the middle class, the Spanish movements were originally inspired by Marxist ideas[48] as a result of attempts to overcome the decades-long supremacy of right-wing ideology. The emergence of a strong identity politics was also thwarted by the overall atmosphere of the late 1970s and early 80s, which is not mentioned by Martínez Expósito but deserves attention. The period was marked by the development of the *movida madrileña*, a counter-cultural artistic movement which was a vehement response to the long years of Franco's pompous Spain with its emphatically conservative mores. The fertile breeding ground of talent epitomised, for instance, by Pedro Almodóvar, the *movida madrileña* was characterised by an eruption of sexuality and frivolity – an urban fiesta of postmodern dandies fascinated with pop-art, punk and camp. The celebration of sexuality (including homosexuality as one of the many viable options) was not accompanied by any desire to do serious politics, not even to struggle for gay and lesbian rights.[49] The opposite was the case: the young wanted a break from politics; they wanted free love and flippant art.[50]

Of course, there are many more differences to be taken into account. They also result from a different conceptualisation of homosexuality in Spanish culture, from the Spanish language with its different metaphors and from the specific perception of masculinity and femininity in societies which are still ridden with *machismo*, such as Spain and other Spanish-speaking countries.[51] Martínez claims that this represents 'an extremely interesting case of epistemological untranslatability, which stems from an utter asymmetry of homosexuality concepts espoused by

48 Martínez Expósito, *Escrituras*, 15.

49 Weronika Bryl-Roman, *Madrycka* movida *jako ruch kulturowy* (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Poznańskie, 2008), 93–110.

50 Pedro Almodóvar embodies queer art *avant la lettre*. Elements characteristic of the New Queer Cinema of the 1990s already appeared in Almodóvar's first feature film *Pepi, Luci, Bom y otras chicas del montón* (*Pepi, Luci, Bom and Other Girls on the Heap*) of 1980. Yet Almodóvar's style and the trajectory of his art are closely linked to the *movida* aesthetics, which tends to be overlooked in queer film studies analyses.

51 It is commonly acknowledged that while, in North America and most Europe, the axis of the sexuality system stretches along the heterosexuality-homosexuality dichotomy, in South America the poles of this axis are different because the division is between activity (identified with masculinity) and passivity (identified with femininity). This determines who is and who is not considered homosexual, effecting a peculiar displacement in which the active party in a same-sex male intercourse is not necessarily branded as homosexual whereas the passive party is strongly stigmatised as such. Dieter Ingenschay, 'Introducción. La literatura/cultura gay y lesbiana actual en Latinoamérica: postmodernidad y postcolonialidad,' in *Desde aceras opuestas. Literatura/cultura gay y lesbiana en Latinoamérica*, ed. Dieter Ingenschay (Madrid: Iberoamericana, 2006), 9.

Anglophone and Spanish critics.'[52] As a result, Paul Julian Smith, the first scholar to apply the queer perspective to the study of Spanish letters and film (1991), rues the fact that no study comparable to Jeffrey Weeks's *Sexuality* has been produced in Spain and the existing literature subscribes to obsolete viewpoints, unlike British and American publications. Smith is also surprised that despite a wealth of Spanish writings and art probing homosexuality, the theme has hardly been touched upon in Spanish research.[53] This gap was to be partly bridged by the efforts of philosophers (Paco Vidarte and Paul B. Preciado), social scientists (Ricardo Llamas and Javier Sáez) and translators of Judith Butler, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, Guy Hocquenghem and Leo Bersani. Their work, as well as the dedication of the distinguished queer studies scholar Rafael M. Mérida Jiménez, the editor of the ground-breaking reader *Sexualidades transgresoras*,[54] ushered queer theory into Spain and helped other disciplines face up to its 'epistemological untranslatability' and accommodate it to Spanish realities.

In literary studies, a handful of noteworthy publications appeared in the 1990s, but most of them – with the notable exception of Martínez Expósito – did not emphasise the urgency to re-examine the partial incompatibility between Anglo-American queer studies and the Spanish context. Smith's pioneering collection of essays, *Laws of Desire: Questions of Homosexuality in Spanish Writing and Film, 1960–1990* (*Las leyes del deseo. La homosexualidad en la literatura y el cine español 1960–1990*), looks into the work of writers, such as Terenci Moix, Juan Goytisolo (the so-called trilogy of treason) and Esther Tusquets (the sea trilogy), as well as filmmakers: Pedro Almodóvar and less known Eloy de la Iglesia. Smith also examines feminist and gay autobiographical writing (Rosa Chacel, Juan Goytisolo and Terenci Moix). In contrast to the earlier studies by Binding and Sahuquillo, Smith addresses 'the risk of essence'[55] and draws on the concepts of Judith Butler, Diana Fuss and Lee Edelman. (The latter's concept of homographesis will later be employed by queer Spanish studies scholars, which I discuss below.)

Smith also co-edited *¿Entiendes? Queer Readings, Hispanic Writings*, a volume of contributions chiefly on Latin American literature, such as

52 'un caso realmente curioso de intraducibilidad epistemológica, que consiste en una asimetría radical en la concepción de la homosexualidad entre críticos de habla inglesa y críticos españoles.' Alfredo Martínez Expósito, *Los escribas furiosos. Configuraciones homoeróticas en la narrativa española* (New Orleans: University Press of the South, 1998), 6.

53 Paul Julian Smith, *Laws of Desire: Questions of Homosexuality in Spanish Writing and Film, 1960–1990* (Clarendon Press, 1992), 2–3. Spanish edition: Paul Julian Smith, *Las leyes del deseo. La homosexualidad en la literatura y el cine español 1960–1990* (Barcelona: Ediciones de la Tempestad, 1998).

54 Rafael M. Mérida Jiménez, *Sexualidades transgresoras. Una antología de estudios queer* (Barcelona: Icaria, 2002).

55 Smith, *Laws*, 15 *pass*.

a discussion of 'homosexual panic' in Jorge Luis Borges and the homosexual 'closet' in Virgilio Piñera, side by side with an analysis of Lorca's 'Ode to Walt Whitman' and a paper on Cervantes's monumental work with the telling title 'Aldonza as Butch: Narrative and the Play of Gender in *Don Quijote*.'[56]

Four years later, Duke University Press released a collection of essays on queerness in mediaeval and Renaissance writings in the Iberian Peninsula – a borderland of three cultures and a site of communing with otherness. Its preface explains that the volume continues upon the preceding one and springs from an interest in the uniqueness of the Spanish Middle Ages, which stood out from the rest of Christian Europe due to the strong presence of Moors and Jews.[57] The medievalist research into sexual non-normativity was inspired by the already classic works of the Spanish historian Américo Castro, who coined the term *convivencia* (literally: coexistence or living-together)[58] to capture the relations among then-diverse inhabitants of the Peninsula and its lost multiculturality, which Lorca believed to have been inestimable and which Juan Goytisolo adulates in his writings. The editors of the collection emphasise that Castro, as it were, queers history by 'exposing the Semitic roots of modern Spanish identity,'[59] which is predominantly founded on the myth of Catholic Spain as 'pure' as a result of ousting the Other. Queering in this case consists in reclaiming the different and the disturbing, that which has been driven away from the collective consciousness. As a consequence, the discourse in place is turned inside out. This was also the aim pursued by the authors of *Queer Iberia*, who set out to identify the role of non-normative sexualities and the attitudes to queers in Iberian culture from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance. For example, Mark D. Jordan's contribution analyses the cult of St Pelagius, a Christian ephebe taken captive by Moors. When the Córdoban caliph Abd ar-Rahmān III fell in love with him, Pelagius not only refused to disown his faith but also categorically rejected the caliph's courtship, which cost the boy his life. Jordan explores various versions of the saint legend to conclude that the Christian authors who wrote about Pelagius gradually erased erotic allures contained in his image to prevent their male audience from yielding to irresistible desire (as the hateful caliph did) stirred by too evocative depictions of the beautiful ephebe. Pelagius's attractiveness proved

56 Emilie L. Bergmann and Paul Julian Smith (eds.), *¿Entiendes? Queer Readings, Hispanic Writings* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1995).

57 Josiah Blackmore and Gregory S. Hutcheson, 'Introduction,' in *Queer Iberia: Sexualities, Cultures, and Crossings from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance*, ed. Josiah Blackmore and Gregory S. Hutcheson (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1999), 1–5.

58 Castro's coinage was supposed to convey the image of productive 'living together' – a culture-enriching co-existence.

59 Blackmore and Hutcheson, 'Introduction,' 3.

as much of a problem to Spanish culture as the sinful presence of infidels. From version to version, Pelagius was transforming from an alluring ephebe into a mature Christian militant, whose manly valour could be 'safely' admired, which Jordan interprets as a sublimation of forbidden desire.[60] In the same volume, Daniel Eisenberg posits that Juan Ruiz's *Libro de Buen Amor* (*The Book of Good Love*) was written in response to the commonness of homosexual behaviour among non-Christians and the 'queerness' of Muslim al-Andalus, against which his brethren in faith had to be protected by having the pleasures of heterosexual intercourse advertised to them.[61] The anthology as a whole implies that the processes observed by Américo Castro involved progressing heteronormativisation. Spanish identity was constructed by expelling not only the infidel but also the sexual queer as the former's double,[62] which in the long run bred the homophobia of the Francoist ideology.

Among English-language studies published in the 1990s, there are also a guide to Spanish gay- and lesbian-themed literature,[63] modelled on *The Gay and Lesbian Literary Heritage*,[64] a short introduction to the work of Luis Antonio de Villena,[65] Brad Epps's extensive study on Juan Goytisolo's fiction from 1970–1990 (containing a noteworthy chapter on homosexuality in the context of the AIDS epidemic in *Las virtudes del pájaro solitario* [*The Virtues of the Solitary Bird*])[66] and a book by Robert Richmond Ellis, which picks up the issues outlined in the first chapter of Smith's *The Laws of Desire*, specifically gay autobiographic writings in contemporary literature.[67] Drawing on Leo Bersani,[68] Ellis develops

60 Mark D. Jordan, 'Saint Pelagius, Ephebe and Martyr,' in *Queer Iberia*, ed. Blackmore and Hutcheson, 23–47.

61 Daniel Eisenberg, 'Juan Ruiz's Heterosexual "Good Love,"' in *Queer Iberia*, ed. Blackmore and Hutcheson, 250–74.

62 Interestingly, Spanish studies on non-normative sexual identities often talk about 'sexual heterodoxy' (*heterodoxia sexual*), and this Spanish propensity for yoking together religious and sexual themes has been skilfully used in some camp writings I discuss in Chapter 3.

63 David William Foster (ed.), *Spanish Writers on Gay and Lesbian Themes: A Bio-Critical Sourcebook* (Westport and London: Greenwood Press, 1999).

64 Claude J. Summers (ed.), *The Gay and Lesbian Literary Heritage: A Reader's Companion to the Writers and Their Works, from Antiquity to the Present* (London: Bloomsbury, 1997).

65 Chris Perriam, *Desire and Dissent: An Introduction to Luis Antonio de Villena* (Oxford and Washington: Berg, 1995).

66 Brad Epps, *Significant Violence: Oppression and Resistance in the Narratives of Juan Goytisolo, 1970–1990* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996).

67 Robert Richmond Ellis, *The Hispanic Homograph: Gay Self-Representation in Contemporary Spanish Autobiography* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1997).

68 In *Homos*, Leo Bersani addresses the 'dilution' of gay and lesbian identity caused by the emergence of queer theory, which rejected the minority (essentialist) model and precipitated the loss of gay and lesbian specificity ('de-gaying gayness') for the sake of a non-identity labelled as 'queer' – one which is always fluid and defies any definition.

the concepts of homo- and heterorelationality to come up with a typology of homosexual autobiographies.

Heterorelationality is understood as defining identity through its opposite ('I'm a woman, so not a man,' 'I'm heterosexual, so not homosexual'). Such a definition is enclosed within the hetero/homo dichotomy whereas in homorelationality, it involves the suspension of this binary, indifference to the difference inscribed in it and self-definition despite the dichotomy. Taking Leo Bersani's observations in *Homos* as his starting point, Ellis discusses homosexuality not in terms of some gay essence, understood as a Derridean supplement, a *sine qua non* of heterosexuality, but in terms of 'gay praxis,' based on the desire for sameness. This is about repudiating heteronormativity inscribed in the hetero-homo and male-female dichotomies as the point of reference for the positions of gays and lesbians ('homo-acts'), and at the same time about dismantling the idea of a shared core identity that determines these positions/acts.[69] This reasoning leads Ellis to identify three types of autobiographical texts: gay autobiography, queer autobiography and homobiography. Gay autobiography pictures homosexual identity in an essentialist way, and its major objective is to come out and affirm and freely express the previously repressed identity. This approach is not successful in Spanish writings of this type. As essentialism firmly inscribes identity in the structure of heterorelationality, identity comes to be determined by meanings accumulated around heterosexualism and perceived through the lens of the hetero/homo dichotomy. Queer autobiography 'neither affirms nor denies gay and lesbian identities but endeavors to destabilize all sexual and gender identities by allowing them to free-float across the hetero/homo and masculine/feminine binary divides.'[70] Similarly to queer theory, this results in 'eras[ing] gay and lesbian specificity.'[71] The third type of text, homobiography – only represented by Juan Goytisolo's *Las virtudes del pájaro solitario* (*The Virtues of the Solitary Bird*[72]) – manages to steer clear of the reefs into which gay and queer autobiography bumps. Homobiography is best understood by recourse to the deconstructive notion of *homographesis*, which was proposed by Lee Edelman[73] and has become popular with Spanish studies scholars.

Bersani claims that deconstructive pursuits of queer theorists aimed at undermining the division into heterosexuals and homosexuals have contributed to the erasure of gays and lesbians from social and cultural space, which is actually the main goal of homophobic discourse. Bersani insists that homoerotic desire – that is, the desire for sameness, which works even if homosexual identity is 'erased' – is a potential site of resistance which at the same time helps retain what he calls gay specificity. Leo Bersani, *Homos* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), 4–6.

69 Ellis, *Homograph*, 6.

70 *Ibid*., 14. Ellis adds that, in the Spanish context, queer autobiographies rely on camp to achieve this effect.

71 *Ibid*.

72 *Pájaro*, literally 'a bird,' is a jargon term for a homosexual.

73 Lee Edelman, *Homographesis: Essays in Gay Literary and Cultural Theory* (New York and London: Routledge, 1994).

Homographesis is basically a double operation. On the one hand, it involves the incorporation into a text of homosexual 'identity marks' consistent with the essentialist representations of homosexual identity in circulation since the mid-19th century (inscription), and, on the other, it consists in undermining – in the same text – these labels imposed by a 'foreign,' external discourse (de-scription). In other words, homographesis is a discursive game in which a homosexual writer surrenders to the necessity of articulating difference in conformity with the heterosexual imaginary, without which his otherness would remain unrecognised and transparent, but he simultaneously questions the relevance of difference in defining identities.[74] Juan Goytisolo's homobiography succeeds in performing this feat because, as Ellis insists, it focuses on sameness rather than on difference, is 'indifferent' to the latter and brackets it off, at the same time shifting emphasis onto gay praxis.[75]

While precious and in many senses innovative, the works of Anglo-American Spanish studies scholars referenced above use the toolkit of queer theory, which arose in a context divergent from the Spanish one. Ellis's argument pivots around the Anglo-American debate on essentialism and constructionism, a division which breeds certain reservations about its applicability to the Spanish setting. Similar echoes of Anglo-American perspectives reverberate in the other studies, though it must be admitted that several insights offered by Anglo-American queer studies scholars are pertinent to Spanish culture, especially that culture as such is increasingly globalised, which affects the ways sexual minorities function and are perceived. The critics of Anglo-Saxon approaches are rather concerned with details and call for an adjustment, and not a total rejection, of the queer criticism methodology. The language in which studies are produced is one such detail. The publications of the 1990s were written in English and determined by this language. This begs the question of in how far today's lingua franca is capable of conveying nuances of the Spanish tongue. How important is it to write in Castilian? The monopoly of the English language was dented at the end of the 1990s, when the first studies by Spanish literary scholars affiliated with queer criticism appeared.

1.3. *¿Entiendes?* Towards an Epistemology of 'the Opposite Pavement'

An alternative title of this subchapter could read *Metaphors 'We' Live By*, only differing from George Lakoff and Mark Johnson's formulation by

74 '[H]omographesis would name a double operation: one serving the ideological purposes of a conservative social order intent on codifying identities in its labor of disciplinary inscription, and the other resistant to that categorization, intent on *de*-scribing the identities that order has so oppressively inscribed.' *Ibid.*, 10. See Martínez Expósito, *Escrituras*, 85–6.

75 Ellis, *Homograph*, 14.

the inverted commas used to highlight the specificity of sexual minorities. Admittedly, Martínez Expósito does not refer to the famous cognitivists (rather building on the texts of Susan Sontag and Gayle Rubin exploring the impact of the AIDS epidemic on the perception of homosexuality[76]), but he underscores the immense role of metaphorical renderings of homosexuality in language. He himself proposes the metaphor of a scribe to depict writers of homoerotic literature. Somewhat against chronology, before discussing Martínez Expósito's concepts in *Los escribas furiosos. Configuraciones homoeróticas en la narrativa española* [*Frenzied Scribes: Homoerotic Configurations in Spanish Fiction*] (1998), the first literary-historical queer study published in Castilian, I will present his slightly later observations on the adaptation of queer studies to Spanish cultural realities.

The year 2004 was marked by the publication of two ground-breaking studies: *Escrituras torcidas. Ensayos de crítica 'queer'* [*Twisted Writings: Essays in Queer Criticism*[77]] by Martínez Expósito and *De Sodoma a Chueca. Una historia cultural de la homosexualidad en España en el siglo XX* by Mira, a monumental monograph which in many senses heeded Martínez Expósito's earlier appeals by offering the so-far most complete discussion of male homosexuality in Spanish literature and film. In this way, it remedied the deficit which Martínez Expósito described four years before:

> We already have a more or less established canon of homosexual writers or writers with homosexual sensibility; we possess some good historical studies of the legal status of homosexuality in Spain; and there is also a tolerably entrenched critical awareness that such research should be developed. But we still lack several basic analyses: we have not identified several texts and authors that could contribute to this homophile canon, and we practically know nothing about how the various homoerotic traditions that coexist in Spanish literature are interlocked.[78]

76 Susan Sontag, *Illness as Metaphor and AIDS and Its Metaphors* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1990); Gayle S. Rubin, 'Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality,' in *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader*, ed. Henry Abelove, Michele A. Barale and David M. Halperin (New York and London: Routledge, 1993), https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203820575 (accessed 15 August 2021).

77 Translating the term 'queer theory' into Spanish has proven problematic and challenging. Spanish sociologist Ricardo Llamas came up with *teoría torcida* in 1998 (Ricardo Llamas, *Teoría torcida. Prejuicios y discursos en torno a «la homosexualidad»* [Madrid: Siglo XXI de España, 1998]). The verb *torcer* means 'to twist,' 'to turn,' 'to bend' or 'to warp,' but in some contexts it is related to 'making somebody change their mind.' By choosing this particular world, Llamas sought to convey the subversive potential of 'queer' in Spanish. Martínez Expósito's title captures the dual investment of essays in his volume, which concern both subversive literary writings and the very methodology of queer studies.

78 'Tenemos una lista más o menos canónica de escritores homosexuales o sensibles a la imaginería homosexual; disponemos de algunos buenos estudios históricos sobre las condiciones legales de la homosexualidad en España; y existe ya una conciencia crítica

When this gap had been bridged (with *Los escribas furiosos* having considerably contributed to this), the already mentioned 'epistemological untranslatability' of Anglo-American queer studies became a more pressing issue. Martínez Expósito explored it throughout the first part of *Escrituras torcidas*, which includes chapters entitled 'Literatura queer y teoría torcida' ['Queer Literature and Twisted Theory] and 'Metáforas y desplazamientos semánticos' ['Metaphors and Semantic Shifts']. The chapters relate the development of queer criticism in the UK and the US and investigate language as a factor that conditions knowledge. Martínez Expósito observes that Spanish sexual minorities tend to use the verb *entender*[79] (to understand) when referring to sexual non-normativity, which in a sense corresponds to English 'queer,' as indicated by its inclusion in the title. *¿Entiendes? Queer Readings, Hispanic Writings*. However, as Martínez Expósito laments, the authors of the papers in the collection fail to follow this path or to attempt a deeper reflection on the role of language. He argues that Spanish uses different metaphors than English and consequently categorises reality in entirely different ways. For example, is the widespread metaphor of the closet equally expressive as it is in Anglo-American culture?[80] Does Castilian use another metaphor which entails certain epistemological consequences? In exploring

relativamente asentada sobre la importancia de desarrollar este tipo de estudios. Pero aún nos falta mucha investigación básica: aún no hemos identificado muchos de los textos y autores susceptibles de formar ese canon homofílico, y desconocemos prácticamente todo sobre la imbricación de las diversas tradiciones homoeróticas que se dan cita en las letras españolas.' Martínez Expósito, *Escribas*, 7.

79 Félix Rodríguez's dictionary, which compiles Spanish jargon expressions in one volume, explains that the question *¿entiendes?* (do you understand?) has become a convenient and safe way to establish whether the interlocutor engages in homosexual practices. Importantly, it concerns not so much 'being' homosexual as rather practising homosexuality or even the ability to practise it. This pertains both to gays and to lesbians, so the phrase is somewhat indeterminate, as 'queer' is. At the same time the Spanish expression is positively coloured (analogously to 'gay') and positions homosexual individuals as privileged, who possess knowledge and, as such, control the situation, in contrast to people who do not 'understand' what the question is actually all about. These implications have been noted by Mira, who put together the second dictionary of homosexual culture available in Spain (Mira, *Para entendernos*, 261–2). Rodríguez adds that, according to author Lluís Fernàndez, the source of this usage of *entender* goes back to the 1950s and is to be found in an advertising slogan for a soft drink called Trinaranjus: 'Drink Trinaranjus, show that you're in the know' ('Toma Trinaranjus, se nota que entiendes'). The notion of 'showing to be in the know' (or, literally, 'one seeing right away that you're in the know') quickly caught on, and the verb *entender* soon came to stir a campy, playful game of associations, becoming a widespread usage in the 1960s. To order the popular beverage was also a recognisable signal to those in the secret gathered at the bar. Rodríguez González, *Diccionario*, 138–41.

80 Martínez Expósito already signalled this issue in his 1998 book: 'The immoderate application of this metaphor is one of the most frequent errors committed by Anglo-American critics who try to understand Spanish gay literature' ('La aplicación inmoderada de esta metáfora es uno de los defectos más imperdonables de los críticos anglosajones que tratan de comprender la literatura gay hispana'). Martínez Expósito, *Escribas*, 32.

these queries, Martínez Expósito comments on the homosexual closet metaphor:

> In English, one of the most frequent metaphors associated with homosexuality plays on the closet into which the most shameful secrets are shoved. This *skeleton in the closet*, proof of concealed guilt, shows how important privacy is for English-speaking societies and how fraught the relations between the private and the public or social spheres are. […] The English metaphor of the closet institutes a relationship between two spaces – internal and external – which symbolise the hidden and the revealed, the private and the public. Sedgwick has shown that the 20th century was, among other things, a time when the closet in which European society had locked up sexual diversity for almost a thousand years was gradually being opened.[81]

Martínez Expósito contrasts the closet metaphor with the Spanish expression *ser de la acera de enfrente* (literally: 'to be from the opposite pavement'), which also 'institutes a relationship between two spaces,' but it does so in an altogether different way. This fixed phrase has been used by heterosexuals in Spain for two purposes: firstly, to point at a homosexual individual (as belonging to 'another' world, to the space 'over there') and, secondly, to emphasise their own identity (as belonging to 'this' world, to the 'here' space). Martínez Expósito explains that the expression stems from a widespread habit in Spanish-speaking countries, described by Juan Eslava Galán,[82] specifically from the ritual of strolls, taking which groups of men and women would walk separately on the opposite sides of the street; this made it possible to keep eye contact and watch potential partners while retaining distance between the male and female worlds, a division more powerful on the Iberian Peninsula than in other European countries. The phrase *ser de la acera de enfrente* also appeared in other versions,[83] but what all of them always had in common

81 'Una de las metáforas homosexuales más usadas en el idioma inglés hace referencia a un armario en el que cada cual oculta sus secretos más inconfesables. Ese *esqueleto en el armario*, prueba de la secreta culpa, refleja la importancia que para las sociedades de habla inglesa tiene la esfera privada, y sus nunca fáciles relaciones con la esfera social o pública. […] La metáfora inglesa del armario establece una relación entre dos espacios, dentro y fuera, que simbolizan lo oculto y lo revelado, lo privado y lo social. Sedgwick ha mostrado que el siglo XX ha sido, entre otras cosas, una historia de progresiva apertura de ese armario en que las sociedades europeas habían encerrado la pluralidad sexual durante casi mil años.' Martínez Expósito, *Escrituras*, 68 (italics original).

82 Martínez cites Juan Eslava Galán, *Coitus interruptus: la represión sexual y sus heroicos alivios en la España franquista* (Barcelona: Planeta, 1997).

83 Martínez provides examples of variants comprising a street (*ser de la calle de enfrente* – 'to be from the other side of the street') or even a railway platform. The latter is illustrated in Ramón Gómez de la Serna's words about the homosexuality of the Nobel

was splitting the space into 'over there' and 'here,' differently than in the 'internal'/'external' division envisioned in the closet metaphor. In Martínez's view, this has a range of implications. Firstly, the opposite pavement metaphor contributes to a stronger naturalisation (essentialising) of homosexual identity by heterocentric discourse. Identifying a homosexual individual immediately entails ascribing him/her to another world ('over there'), from where there is no coming back to the heterosexual 'side of the street.' Thus-framed, homosexuality is not a matter of practising certain sexual behaviour from time to time, which would not prevent a person from fitting in at 'both sides of the street'; instead, it is the very core of identity and embeds one permanently in the alien space. Secondly (and consequently), the process of coming out of the closet, as discussed by Kosofsky Sedgwick, is barely identifiable in the Spanish context. Instead of the gradual unveiling of the secret by the individual in question, there is a single act of identity ascription by a third party, which is followed by the establishment of distance from the homosexual. Thirdly, the private-public opposition is relegated to the background as the public moves to the foreground: 'The popularity garnered by the pavement metaphor in Spanish speaks to a conceptualisation which grants the supreme status to the public sphere and which closely links sexuality to the staging of identity and feelings.'[84] In other words, 'sexual identity, too, should be publicly performed, staged and enacted.'[85] 'Too' is crucial in this observation because it refers to the concept of gender performativity developed by Judith Butler, who sought to problematise the connection between sex and gender and to question the sex-gender opposition. Sex comes across as natural as a result of regular, daily repetition of strictly cultural gestures.[86] Martínez Expósito thus insists that, in the Spanish context, the mechanism depicted by Butler concerns not only sex but also sexual identity, which is naturalised by the heterocentric imaginary as effectively as sex. Fourthly, another, equally fundamental consequence caused by the pavement metaphor is a closer coupling of gender and sexual identities, that is, the binding of the masculine/

Prize winner Jacinto Benavente: 'He is a faithful and honest friend, his manners are impeccable, but he peeks at the other platform' ('Es amigo fiel, correcto, de buenas maneras, pero mira hacia otro andén'). Qtd. in Martínez Expósito, *Escrituras*, 65.

84 'La popularidad alcanzada en español por la metáfora de la acera atestigua una concepción que otorga primacía a la dimensión pública, y en la que la sexualidad está íntimamente ligada a la escenificación de identidades y sentimientos.' *Ibid*., 68.

85 'también la identidad sexual debe ser ejecutada, escenificada y representada en público.' *Ibid*.

86 For more on the concept of gender and sex performativity, see Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York and London: Routledge, 2006/1990), 175–93; and Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of 'Sex'* (New York and London: Routledge, 1993), 230–42.

feminine binary to the heterosexuality/homosexuality dichotomy.[87] On learning that somebody is gay, a Spanish speaker immediately draws a false conclusion that if the person prefers men, he *must be* like a woman; and because a lesbian falls in love with women, she *must be* like a man.[88]

Martínez Expósito proposes that his conclusions be taken into account in Spanish queer studies and, paraphrasing Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's classic title,[89] examines the 20th-century history of homosexuality on the Iberian Peninsula in terms of the 'epistemology of the opposite pavement.' He certainly has a point as such a local perspective helps explain why, since its onset, the Spanish emancipatory movement has rejected the identitarian framework. The constant naturalisation (essentialising) of homosexuality by 'third parties' – the state apparatus of the Franco regime (legal and medical discourses) – prompted an urge to oppose such positions even though the dismissal of the identitarian idea was, arguably, more 'intuitive' than theoretically informed. Unlike their English counterparts, Spanish gay and lesbian movements did not have an extended intellectual base at their disposal. I believe that the popularity of gestures which tend to be called campy has also been propelled by the binding of gender and sexual identities fuelled by the pavement metaphor. Intrinsic to the camp style, an ironic attitude to gender and sexual identities is quite ingrained in Spain and acquires an interesting colouring in combination with the tradition of Spanish Catholicism (which is where the central difference between the Spanish and Anglo-American camp varieties lies).[90] These examples indicate that Martínez is right to assert that both *entender* and *acera de enfrente* 'offer extraordinary

87 This coupling is the foundation of the so-called heterosexual matrix, which 'produces' heterosexual identity as the only possibility, based on the sequence of sex → gender → heterosexuality. How the heterosexual matrix works can easily be illustrated by the fact that girls are brought up to be wives in marriage to men, but never to be partners in lesbian relationships. The term is used by Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble* in a chapter discussing the production of heterosexuality from the psychoanalytical perspective. See Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 47–106.

88 Martínez Expósito, *Escrituras*, 55–72. Of course, such a conceptualisation of homosexuality is not a Spanish 'invention,' but, as explicated by Michel Foucault, an 'invention' of 19th-century psychiatric discourse, which produced the category of the homosexual by defining homosexuality as 'inverting the masculine and the feminine in oneself. Homosexuality appeared as one of the forms of sexuality when it was transposed from the practice of sodomy onto a kind of interior androgyny, a hermaphroditism of the soul' (Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Vol. 1: Will to Knowledge*, trans. Robert Hurley [New York: Vintage: 1980], 43). The pavement metaphor discussed by Martínez contributes to the perpetuation of this view among unaware language users.

89 Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemología del armario*, trans. Teresa Bladé Costa (Barcelona: Ediciones de la Tempestad, 1998); *Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1990).

90 I discuss camp in the context of Catholicism when analysing novels by Juan Goytisolo and Eduardo Mendicutti in Chapter 3.

epistemological possibilities and may in many cases prove more fruitful in exploring literary texts than the hackneyed references to the closet.'[91]

Besides the Spanish-specific metaphor of the opposite pavement, Martínez also discusses the metaphors for homosexuality ubiquitous in Western culture, such as an abominable sin (*pecado nefando*), stemming from mediaeval theology,[92] crime and disease: 'a sodomite is a sinner, an inverted man, a sick one; a homosexual is a delinquent.'[93] The three metaphors are products of the hegemonic discourses of, respectively, the church, medicine and law. While this was seminally explored by Foucault in the first volume of *The History of Sexuality*, subtitled *Will to Knowledge*,[94] a matter of interest is how these discourses work in Spanish culture. This is what Mira examines in his *De Sodoma a Chueca*, which covers almost the whole of the 20th century. Mira studies the sources of institutional homophobia, which Franco's dictatorship and the Catholic Church jointly sustained over several decades, the taxonomy of homosexuality and the few attempts at defending homosexuals within medical discourse.[95] Mira's study, however, is more than just an investigation of the three discourses which adapts Foucault's insights to Spain. The subtitle reading *Una historia cultural de la homosexualidad en España en el siglo XX* [*A Cultural History of Homosexuality in Spain in the 20th Century*] announces Mira's interest as lying not so much in the hegemonic discourses themselves (they only provide a starting point for his argument) as rather in the reactions to them which are discernible in culture (mainly in literature and film). Mira scrutinises art for both representations and expressions of homosexuality, that is, for stereotypical renderings of homosexuals and for responses to these stereotypes in the works of writers and artists who identify with the culture of sexual minorities.

Mira argues that the three hegemonic discourses contributed to the emergence of three traditions or paradigms of homoerotic expression in 20th-century Spain: the 'accursed homosexuality' (*malditista*) model, also dubbed decadent (*decadentista*), the homophile model and the camp model. The *malditista* paradigm arose as a reaction to the stereotype of the homosexual as a degenerate criminal, produced by legal discourse. This paradigm 'accepts the externally imposed marginalisation but

91 'ofrecen extraordinarias posibilidades epistemológicas y en muchos casos pueden resultar más fructíferas para el análisis de textos literarios que el manido recurso del armario.' Martínez Expósito, *Los escribas*, 32.

92 See Krzysztof Skwierczyński, *Mury Sodomy: Piotra Damianiego* Księga Gomory *i walka z sodomią wśród kleru* (Kraków: Towarzystwo Wydawnicze 'Historia Iagellonica,' 2011).

93 'el sodomita es un pecador, el invertido es un enfermo, el homosexual es un delincuente.' Martínez Expósito, *Escrituras*, 62.

94 Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Vol. 1*.

95 He cites the eminent, world-renowned endocrinologist Gregorio Marañón, who was one of the first physicians to oppose the stigmatisation of homosexuals.

appreciates it as positive in a gesture of protest: this involves *choosing* what society defines as evil in order to demonstrate the denial of society's founding values.'[96] This model was formatively influenced by 19th-century authors, such as Oscar Wilde and Lautréamont, and was at the peak of popularity in the 1960s and 70s, when the Franco regime ostentatiously trumpeted bourgeois values and intensified repression against homosexuals. Mira underscores that the endorsement of 'accursed homosexuality' was paired with anti-Franco attitudes, which is particularly pronounced in the fiction of Juan Goytisolo, a friend of Jean Genet and admirer of his work, which embraced the same attitude to homosexuality.[97] The homophile model 'seeks to integrate homosexuals in society, calling for the recognition of their "normality."'[98] This paradigm emphatically refuses to accept the peripheral position as a value and underscores that the homophile approach is the only acceptable avenue for coming to terms with society. According to Mira, this position has been espoused by Luis Cernuda, Juan Gil-Albert and later writers of the *transición española* period – Armand de Fluvià and Jordi Petit. This model was practically absent under the dictatorship,[99] but it dates back to the 1920s, when André Gide's homophile treatise *Corydon*, inspired by ancient homoeroticism, garnered considerable popularity. Interestingly, this essentialising, proto-gay paradigm is not very much in vogue in Spain, which may be attributed to the dominance of the Francoist discourse, which precluded any favourable expression of homosexual identity, and to the repudiation of the so-called identity thesis by Spanish activists shortly after the fall of the dictatorship. Third on Mira's list, the camp model is associated with the stereotype of the inverted type, that is, with 'hermaphroditism of the soul,' as Foucault put it, which has been and is perpetuated in language through the metaphor of the opposite pavement. The Spanish camp 'is expressed in what came to be called *pluma* (affectation, mannerism) in the second decade of the century,'[100] and its first signs can be traced back

96 'acepta la marginación impuesta desde fuera, pero se valora positivamente como signo de rebeldía: se *elige* lo que la sociedad define como el mal para mostrar el desacuerdo con los pilares de la sociedad.' Mira, *De Sodoma*, 24 (italics original).

97 In 2009, Galaxia Gutenberg published a collection of essays by Goytisolo, including reminiscences about Genet's stay in Barcelona, ponderings on his writing and the correspondence that the two writers exchanged between 1958–1974. Juan Goytisolo, *Genet en el Raval* (Barcelona: Galaxia Gutenberg, 2009).

98 'tiene como objetivo la integración del homosexual en la sociedad, reclamando su "normalidad."' Mira, *De Sodoma*, 25.

99 The most important work within this model, *Heraclés. Sobre una manera de ser* [*Heracles: About a Way of Being*], inspired by *Corydon*, was written by Juan Gil-Albert in 1955, but it was not published until 1975, when Franco's death was looming. Juan Antonio González-Iglesias, 'Introducción,' in Juan Gil-Albert, *Heraclés. Sobre una manera de ser* (Valencia: Pre-Textos, 2001), 9.

100 'Tiene expresión en lo que desde la segunda década del siglo se denomina "la pluma."' Mira, *Sodoma*, 25–6. *Pluma* is Spanish for 'pen,' 'feather' and 'quill,' but the word is also used in the sense of affectatious, 'mincing,' 'mincy,' mannerisms of homosexual

to the work of Antonio de Hoyos and Álvaro de Retana in the early 20th century. In later periods, the camp tradition has been continued by Terenci Moix, Lluís Fernàndez, Nazario and Eduardo Mendicutti and by Pedro Almodóvar in film. Mira explains that '[c]amp contradicts science, truth, sincerity and reason and is associated with irony, sense of humour, flippancy, exaggeration, language games, theatricalisation and some hedonism. In particular, it questions heterosexism and ideologies behind gender roles.'[101] This insight deserves highlighting since camp in Spain is mainly conceived as synonymous with homosexual affectation (*pluma*), which 'dissolves moral injunctions by using irony and questioning all intents of seriousness.'[102] Consequently, camp literature appears to hold the greatest potential of subversiveness, which surfaces in writings I discuss later in the book.

Mira examines an impressively opulent body of texts, which also includes little known works from outside mainstream Spanish literature. His study heeds two pleas articulated by Martínez Expósito in *Los escribas furiosos*: for discovering forgotten writers and texts which could add to the canon of Spanish gay literature and for investigating various literary traditions that make it up.[103] Martínez Expósito himself embarked on such a venture and published his findings in 1998. *Los escribas furiosos* was the first literary-historical study of homoeroticism in contemporary fiction (from the 1960s to the mid-1990s) to be published in Spanish. Unlike Smith and his colleagues, Martínez Expósito undertook to examine texts by not necessarily canonical, albeit tolerably established, authors alongside books by writers of such repute as Álvaro Pombo and Terenci Moix.

Martínez Expósito concluded that homoerotic fiction produced in the period falling under his study displayed some regularly recurring features: the construction of protagonists was closely linked to the respective authors' ideas about homosexuality; homosexual themes were often combined with national and/or religious topics; the tragic was the most frequently applied plot solution; and the characters were portrayed as suffering from a range of maladies.[104] Besides, they led double lives, stable and happy couples were hard to find, most homosexual relationships ended up in a failure, causing frustration and pain, and relations as such

individuals' effeminate behaviour. *Pluma* connotes feminine fragility and at the same time ties in with the image of a bird (*pájaro*), a popular Spanish metaphor for homosexuality.

101 'Lo camp se opone a la ciencia, a la verdad, a la sinceridad y a la razón, se relaciona con la ironía, el sentido del humor, la frivolidad, el exceso, el juego lingüístico, la teatralización y cierto hedonismo. En particular se cuestiona el heterosexismo y las ideologías que se asocian a los roles de género.' *Ibid.*, 26.

102 'disuelve los imperativos morales a través de la ironía y el cuestionamiento de cualquier intento de seriedad.' *Ibid.*

103 Martínez Expósito, *Los escribas*, 7.

104 *Ibid.*, 9.

were typically asymmetrical, with partners having unequal statuses.[105] Martínez Expósito located the heyday of homoerotic literature in the 1970s but pointed out that quantity eclipsed quality at that time as the increase in the number of texts rarely went hand in hand with artistic value.[106] The turn of the 1980s saw a certain shift in handling homosexual themes as the tragic was gradually abandoned for the 'poetics of humour.'[107] Martínez Expósito also identified exceptions from these rules and listed signature features of respective authors, especially those who boasted unique styles and original idioms. One of his conclusions was that in the early 1970s a shift had begun away from literature about homosexuality to literature written from the perspective of homosexuality (that is from representation to expression, to use Mira's terminology), even though the latter was still dominated by the representations of homosexuality as a condition best rendered through the disease metaphor.

As mentioned at the beginning of this subchapter, Martínez Expósito himself relies on the metaphor of a scribe to capture writers' attempts to write novels from the homosexual perspective. The metaphor results from the observation that the period is pervaded with works which boast little aesthetic quality, though Martínez Expósito immediately adds that this assessment is not fully applicable to Eduardo Mendicutti and Álvaro Pombo.[108] The eponymous *escribas furiosos* ('frenzied scribes') are writers who strive to sustain certain traditions which have developed in literature since antiquity and in pursuit of this goal commit themselves to selfless exertions for the sake of anonymous, immemorial discourse with which they identify and to which they submit. Therefore, they 'rewrite' motifs from prior homoerotic texts, which serve as models to be imitated by their own 'copies' with a view to disseminating their culture and preserve it for the generations to come: 'Whether this tradition survives or perishes depends on their skill.'[109] Instead of accurate 'rewriting,' the skill consists in the perseverant, artisan-like production of countless 'copies,' which should circulate even if they include errors and distortions.[110]

This vivid and compelling metaphor helps Martínez convey the situation of writers during the *transición española*, when censorship was lifted and homoerotic literature could be freely written. The adjective *furioso* refers to the atmosphere of newly regained liberty and the irresistible drive to work off the decades of silence imposed on homosexual writers. However, as Martínez Expósito insists, 'the frenzy did not reside in the

105 *Ibid*., 52–3.
106 *Ibid*., 29.
107 *Ibid*., 137.
108 *Ibid*., 15.
109 'De su habilidad depende que el mensaje de esa tradición se perpetúe o se difumine.' *Ibid*., 14.
110 *Ibid*., 14–15.

scribe, but in the discourse,'[111] which forcefully rushed to reveal itself. A similarly violent momentum was specific to the *movida madrileña*, which disappeared as spontaneously as it had arisen. Was Spanish homoerotic literature an equally ephemeral phenomenon, or were *los escribas furiosos* successful in prolonging the tradition and inspiring new copyists to continue such efforts?

Los escribas furiosos and *De Sodoma a Chueca* cover the periods ending in the mid-1990s. Martínez Expósito's later *Escrituras torcidas* is a collection of separate essays that examine manifestations of homosexuality in Spanish literature and film in various timeframes. Structurally, it has more in common with Smith's *The Laws of Desire* than with *Los escribas furiosos*. So far, no study has picked up the scribe metaphor as a lens through which to analyse the latest gay-themed literature from the queer perspective. While multiple new publications have obviously appeared, none of them examines the work of the 'scribes' in a similar, literary-historical framework and by means of the concepts proposed in the seminal studies of Alfredo Martínez Expósito and Alberto Mira. In this sense, this book can be read as a continuation of the enterprise launched by these two scholars.

The latest homoerotic fiction is no longer written 'in frenzy.' It is informed by an increasing awareness of varied cultural factors that affect such literature and registers the transition from a scribe's naive gesture to deliberate writerly strategies, from submission to discourse to endeavours to play with it. The surrender of *escribas furiosos* to homoerotic discourse stemmed from the 'desire of influence,' a striving to defer to certain traditions. In the following two decades, do scribes feel, for a change, an 'anxiety of influence' which transfigures their imitative scribbling in original writing? Do they enter into a critical dialogue with discourses that have grown around homosexuality? These are some of the questions I seek to answer in this book.

1.4. Against Nature and Culture: Attempts at Subversive Writing

The position of writers who identify with the homoerotic tradition is highly challenging even today, in the post-emancipation era. For centuries, homosexuality has been branded as being 'against nature' and at the same time treated as being 'against culture,' which is vividly illustrated by the dispute around the homosexuality of Lorca, a figure from the exclusive pantheon of Spanish literature. Writers who have aspired to be acknowledged as mainstream authors have either practised self-censorship or availed themselves of sundry strategies of indirect expression, or coding

111 'la furia no residía en el escriba, sino en el discurso.' *Ibid.*, 15.

homoeroticism in their texts.[112] For this reason, as Ellis states, many of them have dubbed themselves ventriloquists in their autobiographies.[113] In North American literature, 1969 marks the symbolic date of the passage from pre-emancipatory to gay literature. This was the year of violent riots at the Stonewall bar. Robert Ferro, one of the writers who refer to themselves as gay, elucidates the importance of this turning point:

> Since the small but symbolically important act of rebellion in a gay bar in 1969, which was a long-needed symbolic shift from victim to activist, an army of scribes [*sic!*] have attempted to replace this central destructive myth with others. It has been a collective effort to change the perception of homosexuality in society, to write ourselves out of one role and into one workable and self-assigned.[114]

The passage establishes a clear link between gay literature and activism. Writers such as Robert Ferro and Edmund White sought to dismantle the image of a homosexual as victimised and to write literature from the point of view of gays. Similarly to the 'team from Poznań,' satirically portrayed by Witkowski in *Lovetown*,[115] they were striving to foster a positive image of homosexuals in society and a new, friendly 'myth.' Given this, the term 'gay literature' should be used to refer to engaged literature with a pronounced emancipatory investment rather than as an umbrella term also subsuming the works of writers who are critical of various 'myth-making' ventures and voice this attitude in their texts. Consequently, to discuss Spanish fiction of the turn of the millennium in this book, I adopt a broader term – homoerotic literature.

Any analogous turning point representing a clear line between pre- and post-emancipatory literature is difficult to pinpoint in Spanish literary

112 Self-censorship is perfectly exemplified by E.M. Foster's *Maurice*, a novel written in 1913–1914, but only published after Foster's death in 1971. The publication history of Juan Gil-Albert's *Heraclés. Sobre una manera de ser* was similar: the text composed in 1955 was released in 1975.

113 Ellis, *Homograph*, 27.

114 Robert Ferro, 'Gay Literature Today,' in *The Violet Quill Reader: The Emergence of Gay Writing after Stonewall*, ed. David Bergman (New York: InsightOut Books, 2001), 395–6.

115 In *Lovetown*, one of the protagonists addresses Michalina la Belletriste, the narrator, as follows: 'Write a novel about us. Us gays … It should be a narrative about two middle-class, educated gay men, doctoral students in management and finance, who wear glasses and woolly jumpers … They've established a stable, long-term relationship, and now they want to adopt a child. But they've run into some trouble. Society, you see, doesn't accept them, even though they're well bred and well behaved, as the reader can tell.' Michalina's comment on this proposal is thoroughly ironic: 'Oh what a wonderful idea for a book! The perfect gift for Valentine's Day! All gay couples can go buy it for each other at the galeria. I'll just pop along and write it. I'll better clear off now. I might even make some money!' Witkowski, *Lovetown*.

history (and some other vernacular traditions, including that of my native Polish[116]). Definitely, a crucial breakthrough came with the death of General Franco and the onset of the *transición española*. The Spanish 'scribes' of that time aimed less at producing a positive image of a homosexual in literature and more at reviving and sustaining the homoerotic tradition, which had been severely repressed in the preceding decades. Consequently, their writings hardly qualify as gay in the sense and with connotations that the term has acquired in Anglo-American culture. Activist engagement was not necessarily paired with literary pursuits. In Spain, the axial concern rather lay in endeavours to overcome the taboo imposed on homosexual themes by the Franco regime, and this brings to mind the homosexual closet metaphor, which Martínez Expósito has argued is not really compatible with the Spanish tradition. Given this, I propose putting aside the pre- and post-emancipatory distinction and, instead, talk of Spanish homoerotic literature in terms of 'ventriloquist literature' and 'literature of self-reveal.'[117] These terms seem more germane and convenient as they may also refer to various stages in the work of individual authors, which do not necessarily coincide or overlap with historical turning points affecting the development of homoerotic literature. For example, most

116 Wojciech Śmieja, *Literatura, której nie ma: Szkice o polskiej 'literaturze homoseksualnej'* (Kraków: Universitas, 2010), 30.

117 The original expression used in the Polish version of the book is 'literatura u*ja*wniona,' which literally means 'revealed literature,' but whose italicised *ja* – the equivalent of 'I' in Polish – envelops this core meaning in a layered mesh of references. Specifically, 'u*ja*wniona' deliberately repeats the italicisation of *ja* in 'u*ja*rzmienie,' which is the by-now entrenched Polish translation of Foucault's 'as*sujet*tissement,' most frequently translated into English as subjection, subjectivation or subjectification. The Polish 'u*ja*rzmienie' literally means subjugation, subduing, taming, etc., but the italicised *ja* superimposes the sense of 'becoming/producing an I' on these primary dictionary denotations. In this way, the emergence of an I in the process of being mastered (in the Polish 'ujarzmienie') corresponds to the emergence of a subject/ivity in a like process (in the French 'as*sujet*tissement' and the English 'subjection/subjectivation/subjectification'). Foucault stressed in this way that identity/subject is a construct, an effect of discourse which subordinates individuals and produces their identities 'from outside': 'The notion of "as*sujet*tissement" is based on a play on words as the term has *sujet* – a subject – hidden in it […]. Power relations work to make individuals internalise the norm so thoroughly that it becomes the founding and constitutive element of their inner selves […]. Individuals acquire the constructed knowledge of themselves, a knowledge that becomes their own "inner truth," their "identities"' (Jacek Kochanowski, *Fantazmat zróżNICowany. Socjologiczne studium przemian tożsamości gejów* [Kraków: Universitas, 2004, 29–34]). Playing on the notion of 'u*ja*rzmienie' (as*sujet*tissement/subjection), the phrase 'literatura u*ja*wniona' was supposed to convey the idea that a similar mechanism is observable in the ways in which the authors of homoerotic literature reproduce external discourses of homosexual identity. Regrettably, the rich allusiveness of 'u*ja*wniona' is not neatly translatable into English. Hence, 'literature of self-reveal,' where 'self-reveal' both echoes 'self-avowal' and references the gesture in which a magician explains the devices behind the trick that the audience has taken for reality and thus lays bare the constructedness of its truth.

texts by Lorca would count as 'ventriloquist' since he resorted to a special code to express homoeroticism. But Lorca also wrote in ways that explicitly addressed issues of homosexual identity and homoerotic desire, for example in *The Public* and *Sonnets of Dark Love*, works which may be described as 'literature of self-reveal.'

The dilemma of disclosure or concealment of homoerotic experience in literature, in which the former has been the more frequent choice in recent decades, is not the only quandary faced by homosexual writers. The decision in favour of a 'literary coming-out,' that is, writing openly about queerness, entails making other choices as well. Writers must consider what homosexual 'self' will emerge from the reading of their works; in other words, what identity will self-reveal in the text and which discourse will effect its subjectivation, to use Foucault's terminology. Will the image of homosexuality refer to the existing stereotypes in one way or another? Will the text align itself with one of the homoerotic traditions in place, or will it perhaps engage in a polemic with it? At the turn of the millennium, the place from which writers write is peculiar since on the one hand homophobic discourses, which evoke negative stereotypes of homosexuality, are still strongly entrenched, but on the other a range of homoerotic (homophile, 'accursed homosexuality' and camp) traditions have already taken definite shape and firmly established themselves in response to the prior frameworks in which queer identities were cast. Authors aware of these cultural factors must find their own path amidst the thick of these multiple discourses around homosexuality.

In the last two decades, Spanish homoerotic literature has not abruptly relinquished the three models of homoerotic expression identified by Mira in *De Sodoma a Chueca*. While they continue to coexist, they are no longer as distinctive as they were previously, and the lines between them are blurring. When homosexuality lost its status of radical alterity in Western societies and institutional homophobia changed into liberal homophobia, literary responses to it also lost some of their sharp edge. Turn-of-the-millennium writers still refer to these paradigms, but rather as components of the homosexual culture of the previous century. In doing so, they do not really *respond* to a given homophobically underpinned discourse but consciously *evoke such responses*, cite the tradition and 'rewrite' it in a new cultural conjuncture. As such, they indeed perform a scribe's gesture, but this scribe is more aware of the diversity behind the notion of 'homosexuality' and his object is to problematise identity by writing, as it were, 'against culture,' precisely speaking against mainstream culture. The Spanish homoerotic fiction I discuss in this book has a counter-cultural slant. Resorting to allusion and intertextual devices, the authors engage with the entrenched literary traditions in order to 'rewrite' them from their own, marginal point of view. Equally importantly, the most recent texts level criticism against urban gay subcultures, which in Spain are associated with Madrid's Chueca and Barcelona's

Eixample neighbourhoods. Authors such as Álvaro Pombo and Luis Antonio de Villena are acutely aware of some developments implicated by globalisation and Americanisation, which affect sexual minorities as incisively as the majority of society. Thereby, they oppose homonormativity and are committed to undermining not only stereotypes but also autostereotypes of homosexuality, championing diversity and pluralism. This represents a certain novelty as compared with the writings that Martínez Expósito discussed in *Los escribas furiosos*, which were committed to overcoming the taboo rather than to developing an in-depth (self-)reflection on so-called gay culture. Elaborating on his metaphor of a copyist, we can observe that the turn-of-the-millennium 'copyists' have developed a greater awareness, which translates into their increased eagerness to undertake a critical dialogue with the existing discourses, both homophobic and homoerotic. Admittedly, Martínez Expósito's insight about 'selfless exertions for the sake of anonymous, immemorial discourse with which they identify and to which they submit' remains applicable to a host of literati, but several reputed and critically acclaimed authors, such as Juan Goytisolo, Álvaro Pombo, Luis Antonio de Villena and Eduardo Mendicutti, do not rest content with simply *thematising* homosexuality in their works. They *problematise* homosexuality-related issues, imbue their works with ironic detachment and portray homosexual identity as ensnared in multiple discourses. In other words, what they bring into literature is not so much the previously muffled voices (which was the case in 'ventriloquist literature') as rather their individual, distinctive contribution to the discussion. Though they rely on a range of staple motifs and plotting devices generated and rehearsed in the homoerotic literary tradition, they make sure their voice is inimitable and recognisably their own. In this sense, they are more mature heirs to the Martínezian scribes. Their attitude is best embodied in Mazuf, the protagonist of José Luis de Juan's *Este latente mundo* (*This Breathing World*), a Syrian scribe in ancient Rome who – in a gesture of subversion – modifies and alters the classic texts which are copied in his workshop. In this way, he morphs into a rebel artist who clandestinely overthrows the cultural order in place, in which he is barred from the world of grand literature as a copyist and a slave. In the semblance of Mazuf, turn-of-the-millennium Spanish homosexual novelists 'rewrite' the existing literary traditions in an attempt to make their individual imprint on the literary history of 'queers.'

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2 Rewriting Foreign Traditions

2.1. 'Under the thin skin of this world': Mazuf's Gesture in *This Breathing World* by José Luis de Juan

> There is no 'why.' Nothing is because of something; everything just is. There is only a dark, black, pulsating substance, hidden under the thin skin of this world, which only on the surface, on the outside, seeks to answer 'why.'
>
> – Szczepan Twardoch, *Morfina*[1]

Este latente mundo (*This Breathing World*), José Luis de Juan's novel from 1999, boasts a special place in Spain's latest homoerotic fiction. De Juan borrowed his title from a monologue which Richard Gloucester famously delivers at the opening of Shakespeare's *Richard III*. In one of the most popular Spanish translations of the drama, Richard's words 'deform'd, unfinish'd, sent before my time into this breathing world' are rendered as 'deforme, sin acabar, enviado antes de tiempo a este latente mundo.'[2] This ostensibly minor alteration breeds rather consequential interpretive implications. Stemming from Latin, the adjective *latente* means 'latent' or 'dormant' and hints at a peculiar feature shared by the two protagonists of the novel, specifically, their ventriloquist capacities. This suggestive allusion is erased from the English title of the novel, which retains Shakespeare's original wording.

Using a device similar to that employed in Luis Goytisolo's *Estatua con palomas* [*Statue with Pigeons*], De Juan sets the action of his novel in both ancient Rome and our times, in the latter part of the 20th century. The two alternating plot lines relate the histories of homosexual rebels who sabotage classic texts which have acquired a canonical status in Western literature. One of them, Mazuf, is a Syrian scribe who initially works as a slave in Cafo's workshop, crafting copies of treatises,

1 Szczepan Twardoch, *Morfina* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2012), 579.
2 William Shakespeare, *La tragedia de Ricardo III. Enrique VIII o Todo es verdad*, trad., prólogo y notas L. Astrana (Madrid: Marín, Espasa-Calpe, 1969), 22.

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poems and historical works for affluent Roman citizens. Yet Mazuf, one of Cafo's most efficient copyists, does not simply write down the texts which are dictated to him. He introduces his own modifications and makes improvements in others' texts by removing logical errors in their reasoning, chiselling their stylistic awkwardnesses and imperceptibly altering their appeal. With time, his interventions in the copies he is ordered to make become increasingly bolder as he obeys an inner, female voice which represents what has been suppressed in the patriarchal culture of ancient Rome. After gaining his liberty, Mazuf himself becomes an artist and stirs a scandal by reciting – a former slave as he is and, more importantly, using his female voice – a work dwelling on crimes from a distant future and the fate of a book titled *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* by Edward Gibbon. In this way, Mazuf's story ties in with a narrative about Laurence and Jonathan, two gay Harvard University students. As the action of the novel progresses, the reader finds out that Mazuf is the protagonist of a tragedy being written by Jonathan, an American student, and his alter ego at the same time. Jonathan himself is a ventriloquist and a passionate aficionado of the history of Rome and its collapse, with an obsession about Gibbon's monumental work, one of the most important studies in Western historiography.

Este latente mundo is narrated by Laurence, who has a part in Jonathan's death. After several years, Laurence records an audiotape with his memories, in which he recounts his vices and crimes. This is how De Juan references a long-standing convention in Spanish literature, which readers know from Camilo José Cela's *La familia de Pascual Duarte* (*The Family of Pascual Duarte*) and which is also employed in two other works I discuss in this chapter: *Valentín* by Juan Gil-Albert and *La muerte de Tadzio* [*Tadzio's Death*] by Luis G. Martín. The text implies[3] that when Laurence learns about the content of Jonathan's play, he remodels it into prose fiction, whereby he adds coherence to his deceased friend's work and intersperses it with encoded clues helping unravel the mystery of his death. By doing so, he appropriates Jonathan's work in order to rewrite it and use it for his own purposes.

De Juan's novel is special for several reasons. The most important of them lies in the way in which the author handles concepts such as sexual identity, masculinity and femininity, and in the reflection the text offers on the very process of writing (both literary and historical works) as a series of appropriations, misrepresentations and mystifications, which

3 Readers follow the Mazuf plot and the Jonathan-and-Laurence plot in parallel. Chapters concerning, respectively, the ancient times and the present alternate so that it is only at the end of the novel that readers can conclude that the history of a Syrian scribe they are reading is not Jonathan's original version, but a mediated one, a story rewritten by the narrator, who impresses his own mark on it, all the while recounting his own memories.

later come to be regarded as the original. The textual world which arises from the novel is a site of operations undertaken by unscrupulous individuals who seek to leave a mark of their – not always innocuous – pursuits. Clearly Borgesian, this world of copied, quoted and borrowed texts, of ancient scrolls and of libraries which harbour their mysteries is a world where things visible to the naked eye are determined by things latent and elusive. What is more, in the novel, this visceral element is bound up with sexual otherness. Such an approach – associating homosexual practices with textuality – encourages scrutinising *Este latente mundo* through the lens of Lee Edelman's deconstructive notion of *homographesis*.

In his *Homographesis: Essays in Gay Literary and Cultural Theory* (1994), Edelman proposed a critical project aimed less to study the traces of homosexual desire in culture, which is what gay critique addressed, and more to expose rhetorical devices and discursive strategies which contributed to perpetuating a particular set of conceptualisations of homosexual identity in culture:

> [A] recognition of the cultural inscription of the gay body as writing or text suggests that a necessary project for gay critics and for the expanding field of gay theory must be the study of historically variable rhetorics, the discursive strategies and tropological formations, in which sexuality is embedded and conceived; it suggests that the differing psychologies of figuration in different places and different times bear crucially on the textual articulations and cultural constructions of sexuality […].[4]

Edelman's explorations take as their starting point Michel Foucault's insights about a shift from viewing homosexuality as incidental, albeit reprehensible, practices to framing it in essentialising terms as a fixed identity, a change Foucault dated back to the second half of the 19th century. At that point, what had previously been deemed merely possible and contingent came to be recognised as the very core – the very essence – of queer identity. Edelman draws on Jacques Lacan to identify a semantic shift within rhetoric in which metonymy is replaced by metaphor as the principal trope in discussing sexuality: 'a transformation from a reading of the subject's relation to sexuality as contingent or metonymic to a reading in which sexuality is reinterpreted as essential or metaphoric.'[5] When this shift is effected, the homosexual body begins to be treated as a text which must be deciphered and properly interpreted, having its meanings produced in an act of hermeneutical reading. Hence

4 Lee Edelman, *Homographesis: Essays in Gay Literary and Cultural Theory* (New York and London: Routledge, 1994), 20.

5 *Ibid*., 8.

the preoccupation with examining the body for special 'identity marks' which can be perceived and described. Edelman cites examples from English literature which illustrate such an approach to homosexuality. For instance, the narrator of *Teleny* fears that his forbidden sexuality will be revealed in signs on his body, like the mark of Cain; and John Addington Symonds mentions a man with 'lusts written on his face.'[6]

Edelman delves into this association of textuality with gay identity and investigates the ways in which Western culture has *attributed* certain features to homosexuals since the mid-19th century in order to subsequently *decipher* them as external *symptoms* betraying a non-normative identity. Traditionally ascribed to sodomites, effeminacy in men was a prominent 'mark' construed as evidence of their sexual alterity.[7] Assigning to homosexuals certain qualities and distinguishing features aligned with representations produced in Western civilisation is a practice which Edelman dubs *homographesis*. It crucially involves an 'in-scription' performed upon the body which is later treated as a text that can and ought to be read. Yet *homographesis* is a dual operation, which Edelman's examples make clear. In a counter-movement, so to speak, it entails a destabilisation of the 'signs' of sexual identity inscribed in the text. Edelman explains that this happens through showing these signs to be a purely textual practice ('de-scription'). Consequently, one *signifiant* is tied to two different *signifiés*, which is also the case in homography or homophony.

To elucidate the mechanisms of *homographesis*, Edelman analyses *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and the fourth volume of *Remembrance of Things Past*. In *Picture*, the protagonist retrospectively reads his own identity, prompted by Lord Henry's insistence that one must discover one's 'nature.' Dorian Gray's perception is unsettled by the rhetorical device his friend uses. Lord Henry's essentialising approach compels Dorian to look back and discern what has eluded him so far. The 'discovery' of his own nature is revealed as a process in which this nature is simultaneously 'produced' for or 'conferred' on the protagonist in a performative speech act. Edelman is also interested in the famous picture itself. Basil tells Dorian that 'there are no such things [as secret vices]. If a wretched man has a vice, it shows itself in the lines of his mouth, the droop of his eyelids, the moulding of his hand even.'[8] Nonetheless, Dorian's body does not bear such an inscription: 'Dorian's clear implication in a world of "unnatural vice" fails to produce the "appropriate"

6 *Ibid.*, 5.

7 Edelman adds that between the 12th and the 19th centuries, effeminacy was perceived less as an external symptom of sexual orientation and more as a kind of behaviour resulting from the adoption of a female role, that is, as a variety of mimicry. *Ibid.*, 11.

8 Oscar Wilde, 'The Picture of Dorian Gray,' in Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray and Other Writings*, ed. Richard Ellmann (New York: Bantam Books, 2005), 142.

inscription of difference upon his body; that inscription, instead, is displaced onto the picture.'[9] This displacement exposes such an inscription itself as casual and contingent, rather than essential, despite the clearly moralising ending of the novel.

Edelman's other example illuminating the dynamics of *homographesis* comes from Marcel Proust's *Cities of the Plain*, where the narrator 'discovers' the nature of the Baron de Charlus and Jupien, who are immediately transfigured in his eyes as if by magic. The characteristic order of Western epistemology is reversed as the narrator begins to see because he has understood, instead of understanding because he has seen, which is the typical, expected sequence. Sense-making thus determines perception, which again brings in *homographesis* as the process of the 'inscription' of meaning upon the homosexual body. 'The narrator expresses that homographesis in terms that place the issue of gay visibility in explicit relation to issues of writing or graphesis,'[10] which is conveyed by the novel's metaphor of scattered letters that suddenly arrange themselves into an intelligible communication and begin to make sense. This illustrates the idea that the aleatory – that which has no meaning by and of itself and is governed by the principle of contiguity (characteristic of metonymy) – is ordered in the process of writing so as to become legible, as is the case with metaphors.[11] *Este latente mundo* conjures similar meaning-making practices and efforts to capture the all too complex character of human sexuality and historical processes. These efforts are exposed as purely discursive manoeuvres, as a 're-ordering of letters' rather than as the deciphering of a textually conveyed, incontestable truth about the world.

De Juan furnished his novel with two opening quotations. Evoked above, the passage from a Spanish translation of *Richard III* directs readers' attention to the visibility/concealment of subversive writing practices and non-normative identities. The other references human endeavours to make contingent phenomena meaningful, the craving to remedy the chaos and ubiquitous death, which govern the world: 'to fix events and times, to set rites and passages against the disorder chaos riddled with holes and stains.'[12] These words are uttered by Mariano, the protagonist of Julio Cortázar's short story 'Summer,' who relies on repeated daily rituals to exorcise death and numb the haunting feeling of existential

9 Edelman, *Homographesis*, 18.

10 *Ibid*., 19.

11 *Ibid*.

12 Qtd. in José Luis de Juan, *This Breathing World*, trans. Martin Schifino and Selina Packard (London: Arcadia Books, 2008). Spanish: 'fijar las cosas y los tiempos, establecer ritos y pasajes contra el desorden lleno de agujeros y de manchas.' Qtd. In J.L. de Juan, *Este latente mundo* (Barcelona: Alba, 1999), 7.

emptiness: 'But they weren't compulsions, thought Mariano, rather a response to death and nothingness.'[13]

The characteristic ritual of Mazuf and Jonathan, who obsessively control their bodies, involves counting steps. However, what they are in fact utterly committed to doing is working over other people's texts. Instead of simply copying the texts, Mazuf revises them at will, imbuing them with new overtones. In this way, he 'improves' Plutarch's famous text about Phidias, where he fashions the protagonist into a criminal rather than a sculptor, directly contravening the 'original' author's intentions. A glimpse at Mazuf's motivations is offered in the following passage: '[W]asn't much of what Plutarch had written about Phidias, and other men with parallel lives, false? Were not all literary genres, especially biography and historical chronicles, based on slander and invention?'[14] This suggests that he does not seek to give meaning to chaotic facts, to re-arrange 'scattered letters' into a meaningful whole. The Syrian scribe realises that he only changes meanings instituted by his predecessor. At the same time, he emphasises that Plutarch's original text is merely a confabulation, a meaning-making construct which has little to do with historical truth. Consequently, Mazuf feels authorised to intercept the text and etch a peculiar stamp on it from the perspective of his marginal position as a homosexual murderer. A similar attitude is exhibited by Jonathan, the inventor of the Mazuf character, who writes down in his diary that:

> The ventriloquist copies and changes whatever kinds of writings come to hand, from Horace to his own bland contemporaries. He's a great sinner, as any interesting man must become. […] The literary tradition is a great sewer in which floats all kinds of filth, and he recruits three scribes to help him with his purifying work.[15]

13 Julio Cortázar, 'Summer,' trans. Clementine Rabassa, in Julio Cortázar, *A Change of Light and Other Stories*, (Knopf, 1980), 6–7. (In this translation, the passage which serves as a motto to *This Breathing World* reads: 'fixing things and times, establishing rituals and passages in opposition to chaos, which was full of holes and smudges,' 7.) Spanish: 'Pero no eran manías, pensó Mariano, más bien una respuesta a la muerte y a la nada.' Julio Cortázar, *Octaedro* (Barcelona: Ediciones B, 1998), 72–3.

14 De Juan, *Breathing*, 55. '¿No era falso mucho de lo que Plutarco había escrito sobre Fidias y tantos otros hombres? ¿No vivían de la invención y la calumnia todos los géneros literarios, sobre todo la biografía y la crónica histórica?' De Juan, *Latente*, 95.

15 *Ibid*., 84. 'El ventrílocuo copia y cambia a voluntad escritos de todo tipo, desde las obras de Horacio hasta las de un insulso contemporáneo. Es un gran vicioso, todo hombre interesante acaba siéndolo. […] Recluta tres escribas para que le ayuden en su labor depuradora, porque la tradición literaria es una cloaca por donde circulan toda clase de inmundicias.' *Ibid*., 146.

Jonathan himself is committed to his mission of 'purifying' literature and, like his literary protagonist, he sabotages a classic work of Western historiography which Borges once labelled 'a crowded novel, whose protagonists are generations of mankind.'[16] Fascinated with Jonathan, Laurence furtively watches his friend at one of Harvard's libraries and discovers that he is tampering with copies of Gibbon's *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*. After Jonathan's death, the activity is carried on by Vera, a young student who, to Laurence's astonishment, professes to be Jonathan's fiancée. Jonathan and Vera were both busy cutting out passages of the text and re-sticking them in completely unexpected places with adhesive tape. In this way, they would alter the tenor of entire chapters in Gibbon's monumental work, and they would apply themselves to this chore with utmost consistency and veritably Benedictine patience. What is the relevance of Jonathan's choice of this, and not some other, historical work as the target of his vandalism? To answer this question, let us first examine how this character is constructed in the novel.

Laurence, the first-person narrator of *Este latente mundo*, remembers his deceased lover, Jonathan, as a handsome and intelligent erudite, incessantly flirting with girls and adored by them. This image largely overlaps with prevalent Western representations of gays, that is, it fits in with what Edelman referred to as *homographesis* in the first meaning of this term:

> And Jonathan was very effeminate. His full lips, his ironic, obscene mouth, his dimpled chin, his fleshy Jewish nose, his beautiful dark gaze, his high-pitched voice that he used to humiliate others, his *commedia dell'arte* gestures, his learned and quick wit, all of that was a dangerous mixture that would have made him a butt of jokes had it not been for his audacity with girls. And girls loved him.[17]

Effeminate and camp gestures (*commedia dell'arte*) could be read as a symptom of homosexuality, an outer sign disclosing Jonathan's true inner 'nature.' Emphatically, he is a law student at a conservative American

16 Jorge Luis Borges, 'Prologue to Edward Gibbon, *Pages of History and Autobiography*,' trans. Esther Allen, in Jorge Luis Borges, *Selected Non-Fictions*, ed. Eliot Weinberger (New York: Penguin, 2000), 443; '[u]na populosa novela, cuyos protagonistas son las generaciones humanas,' in Jorge Luis Borges, *Miscelánea*, (Barcelona: Debolsillo, 2011), 82.

17 De Juan, *Breathing*, 30. 'Jonathan era muy afeminado. Sus labios exagerados, su boca irónica y obscena, su barbilla de hoyuelo, su nariz carnosa y judía, su bella mirada oscura, su voz atiplada que él convertía en arma de humillación, sus gestos de *commedia dell'arte*, su labia culta y ocurrente, todo ello formaba una mezcla explosiva que le hubiera convertido en blanco de todos los escarnios de no ser por su temeridad con las muchachas. Y ellas lo adoraban.' De Juan, *Latente*, 58.

university during the McCarthy era. Very much vulnerable to risk, Jonathan 'managed to divert attention from his effeminate looks by eliciting laughter from lipsticked mouths, and also by doing sports.'[18] Versed in endearing women to him, which is another stereotype of homosexuals employed in the novel, he is believed by his mates to be a red-hot heartthrob and simultaneously proves his masculinity by practising 'male' sports: 'Jonathan sculpted his body in the gym at a time when working out was an unambiguously masculine activity.'[19] In this way, he accomplishes his goal: he indulges in theatrical gestures in public and plays with his image as an effeminate man, at the same time inviting 'homographic' readings of his behaviour, which effectively helps him pass as a heterosexual on the campus. He is very Machiavellian in his ploys. He treats women as objects and only seduces them to show off his cunning and take delight in humiliating his fellow students who are not as readily successful in their amorous conquests.

Portrayed as both effeminate and deliberate, Jonathan sabotages *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* because this volume laid the foundation for homophobic discourse which preaches that the dissemination of homosexual practices and the purportedly related effeminisation of males inexorably leads to the collapse of civilisations. Gibbon, himself a prominent thinker of the European Enlightenment and a British convert to Catholicism, attributed the fall of Rome to, among other factors, the crisis of marriage as an institution and to common moral dissolution, which was halted by increasingly influential Christianity, the cornerstone of a new European civilisation. The perception of homosexuality as a lethal hazard to the whole of civilisation is highly typical of the homophobic imaginary. However, the source of this deep-seated belief is relatively rarely identified, while it without a doubt originates in Gibbon's paramount work.[20] In *One of the Boys: Masculinity, Homophobia, and Modern Manhood*, David Plummer cites a British politician who alluded to *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* in a debate on the depenalisation of homosexual practices in the UK: '[T]his is how Rome came down. And I care deeply about it […] you will have a totally disorganised, indecent and unpleasant society. You must have rules! We've gone too far on sex already.'[21]

18 *Ibid*. '[L]ograba disolver su estampa afeminada gracias al cultivo de la risa en las bocas pintadas, pero también con el deporte.' *Ibid*.

19 *Ibid*. 'Jonathan esculpía su musculatura en el gimnasio en una época en la que nadie hubiera puesto en duda que engordar músculos era una ocupación viril.' *Ibid*., 59.

20 Gregory Woods observes that 'ever since Edward Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (1776–1788), it has been taken by many people as self-evident that homosexuality destroyed "the glory that was Rome."' Gregory Woods, *A History of Gay Literature: The Male Tradition* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1999), 32.

21 David Plummer, *One of the Boys: Masculinity, Homophobia, and Modern Manhood* (New York: Harrington Park Press, 1999), 24.

Gibbon's study, which is being contorted amidst the peace and quiet of the university library and (literally) deconstructed by means of scissors and adhesive tape, deserves further comment for another reason as well. It is a historical treatise which boasts a writing style so vivid and pictorial that it often invites emphatic comparisons to acclaimed novels, as exemplified by Borges's appraisal.[22] As Hayden White observes, historical writing is governed by similar principles as literary fictions. Historical works are narratives which employ a wide array of stylistic devices (tropes, rhetorical figures, etc.), that is, tools which have been developed and perfected in literature to help writers produce fiction.[23] Besides, Gibbon is well known to have gained some notoriety for dealing with his historical sources with a considerable liberty and availing himself of borrowings and paraphrases from other authors so abundantly that his writing verged on the modern notion of plagiarism:

> Attentive readers of the *Decline and Fall* will find many a passage in which Gibbon's paraphrase of ancient authors comes through the text of a modern writer he had consulted rather than from the ancient author directly. […] In the outcry over the notorious fifteenth and sixteenth chapters on the origins of Christianity, one critic, the unfortunate Henry Edwards Davis […] was able to set up in parallel columns a huge series of direct borrowings by Gibbon. And Mr. Davis, of course, categorized these as plagiarisms.[24]

In this light, the text manipulated by Jonathan, which provides a major point of reference in homophobic discourse stigmatising homosexuality and effeminacy, comes across as an artfully woven construct, as nearly a literary novel pieced together from the words of other authors, and a paraphrase of paraphrases, while writing itself turns out to entail looting other people's texts and ripping out excerpts from which to knit one's own work. Crucially, a text recognised as part of the Western cultural

22 Gibbon's stylistic expressiveness, his talent for constructing ambiguous, larger-than-life characters, flamboyant imagination and frequent use of irony have been recognised by the dramatist Joe Orton, who, when asked whether he had read Gibbon's works, responded: 'What an old queen she is! Send up, send up, send up the whole time.' This reply has itself earned a nod as 'a very funny and penetrating piece of literary criticism.' Glen W. Bowersock considered this remark by the camp writer to be as meaningful as Richard Wagner's emphasis on the dramatic quality of Gibbon's work. Glen W. Bowersock, *From Gibbon to Auden: Essays on the Classical Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 6–7.

23 Hayden White, 'Tekst historiograficzny jako artefakt literacki,' trans. Marek Wilczyński, in Hayden White, *Poetyka pisarstwa historycznego*, ed. Ewa Domańska and Marek Wilczyński (Kraków: Universitas, 2010), 78–109. For the original text, see Hayden White, 'The Historical Text as a Literary Artifact,' *Clio* 3, no. 3 (June 1974): 277–303.

24 Bowersock, *Gibbon to Auden*, 10–11.

canon and aspiring to historicity, that is, to authenticity, is rendered as actually being a mosaic of borrowings that is closer to fiction than to the historical truth. Jonathan's subversive activity is thus justified, as is Mazuf's gesture of re-casting Plutarch's text, altering the description of Phidias the way he fancies and denouncing the original itself as a fabrication. The gesture performed by Mazuf and Jonathan is nothing other than a subversive re-enactment of Gibbon's gesture. It is an attempt at regaining the command of discourse, at strewing arbitrarily ordered letters around in order to regroup them into a new cluster. Thereby, the point is less to imbue aleatory events (historical facts) with meaning, and more to shift meanings and take control of them. The text, which partly blames the fall of a civilisation on homosexuality, is treated as a disassemblable and re-assemblable construct.

The effeminacy of the protagonist who sabotages Gibbon's work is of key relevance in this context. The novel pictures Jonathan as an affectatious homosexual, which can be interpreted as a homographic 'inscription' within the framework proposed by Edelman. Yet since *homographesis* is a dual operation, the text can also be expected to harbour the opposite process, that is, 'de-scription.' Similarly to Edelman's literary examples, such a destabilisation of meaning in De Juan's novel is associated with the writing process. The effeminate Jonathan is working on a piece whose protagonist (and Jonathan's alter ego at the same time) not only 'copies' other people's texts but also himself engages in writing practices. Let us examine the process in which Mazuf emerges as an artist and scrutinise the way his character is constructed in the context of effeminacy.

The Syrian scribe inhabits an utterly patriarchal world, in which homosexuality was tolerated as one of legitimate sexual practices as long as it did not involve adopting the passive role, which was assigned to women. A beauty-seeking free Roman citizen could adore both adolescent boys and young women, since, as Woods observes, 'beauty tended to be determined by age, not gender.'[25] However, the desired status and the respect of fellow citizens were certainly predicated on gender. The very fact of being adored by a younger male was a stain on an older male's honour because it positioned him as an object instead of as an agent.

Mazuf, the protagonist of the narrative spun in *Este latente mundo*, performs transgressive acts not only within the bounds of literature. Having become a free citizen (a status he gains after taking over Cafo's workshop) and enjoying the company of his young apprentices, who work for him as copyists, he indulges in homosexual orgies where he takes the forbidden roles. His transgression of the requisite norms unfolds on three levels: the reversal of gender roles, the inversion of master-student

25 Woods, *History of Gay Literature*, 32.

relations (the adolescents adopt masculine roles in orgies) and the breach of the ban on having sex in public places, a new principle introduced in Rome and heralding the future Christian moral order. When dictating Catullus's works to his team of scribes, Mazuf seizes the occasion to obliquely articulate his dissenting theory by putting it into the poet's mouth:

> 'The more social the passion,' he wrote, or rather dictated, while reading a brief moral work of Catullus, 'the more genuine and perfect it is. Lustful displays in public, shared with everybody in the street, during a public banquet or at a social gathering, are more wholesome and advisable than those which take place in the shades of the bedroom. Intimacy is, underneath, a hellish territory […] I refer to the democracy of sex. Why be spectators of only the pain of our fellow men, as in executions? […] Why not educate our gaze in studying the simplicity of public pleasure?'[26]

Mazuf's proclamation of the democracy of sex, which might as well feature in a contemporary queer manifesto in defence of the bulwarks of gay subculture, such as saunas or public baths, serves in the novel as a counterbalance to Gibbon's insistence that moral dissipation and promiscuity were instrumental in the fall of Rome. In Mazuf's opposite vision, public love-making is 'an unquestionable sign of culture, an argument that disproved the alleged decadence of Roman civilisation.'[27] Mazuf not only queers Catullus's words to belie future theories of sexuality but also eagerly revels in subversive sexual practices in Rome's largest libraries:

> All of a sudden and without warning, as if he were at home alone or about to enter the baths, Mazuf would take off all his clothes. The boys' tongues would fall on him like the arrows showering Saint Sebastian's shameless flesh. And then, as they licked his lean, sallow body, he would talk to them in the voice from his belly, the female voice, the voice of verse and inspiration.[28]

26 De Juan, *Breathing*, 54. 'Cuanto más social – escribió, o mejor, dictó, al leer una obrita moral de Catulo –, más genuina y perfecta es la pasión amorosa. Las efusiones libidinosas en público, compartidas con los demás en la calle, en el acto del banquete público o en la reunión social, resultan más sanas y recomendables que las que se producen en la penumbra de la alcoba. La intimidad es, en el fondo, un terreno del infierno. […] Hablo de la democracia del sexo. ¿Por qué sólo ser espectadores del dolor de los semejantes, de las ejecuciones? […] ¿Por qué no educar la mirada contemplando la pública sencillez del placer?' De Juan, *Latente*, 93–4.

27 *Ibid.* '[U]n indudable elemento de cultura, el detalle que anulaba la pretendida decadencia de la civilización romana.' *Ibid.*, 93.

28 *Ibid.*, 60. 'De repente, sin ninguna señal establecida, como si se encontrara solo en su casa o fuera a darse un baño en las termas, Mazuf se despojaba de todas sus ropas. Las

This female voice resounding from within Mazuf is a fully liberated voice that whispers utterly profane words into his young lovers' ears, demanding not so much tenderness as, indeed, objectification and taking delight in staging sexual humiliation and surrendering to pseudo-gang rapes. The subversiveness of this act lies both in Mazuf's deliberate adoption of the role forbidden to men for its total passivity and submission and in doing this in a public place.

Notably, the expression 'the voice of verse and inspiration' is symptomatic, for this is a voice which switches on not only during his homosexual bacchanals but also when Mazuf is dictating texts to his scribes, whereby he alters their meanings. Mazuf also speaks in this muffled, feminine voice when he is reciting his own works in public, which scandalises his audience – males, who hold the exclusive prerogative of authorship:

> Mazuf closes his eyes and seems to concentrate. And then, to everyone's surprise, a voice starts to emerge very close to where he is standing. It is as though there were a trapdoor concealed somewhere. As if, underneath the proscenium, a woman was reciting with perfect oratorical diction. A woman! […] Protests can be heard.
>
> 'Enough of this farce!'
>
> 'Who does he think we are, this foreign freedman!'
>
> 'What's the world coming to, a woman reciting!'[29]

The 'female nature' of homosexual Mazuf only surfaces in two situations: when he engages in sexual intercourse with adolescents and when he produces texts (both while intervening in others' works and while performing poetic improvisations in public). In this way, Jonathan, as the author of a piece about Mazuf, links homosexual effeminacy to eventuality and contingency. Thereby, he effects a 'de-scription' of homosexual identity, which his contemporary heirs to the Enlightenment frame in terms of the feminine essence. Mazuf's effeminacy is not an intrinsic, permanent feature which determines the entirety of his being. On the contrary, Mazuf is brave, resolved, strong and domineering, that is, he is furnished with what are traditionally defined as masculine features. Tellingly, as already mentioned, Mazuf is Jonathan's alter ego, and Jonathan himself adeptly manipulates his own image by alternating utter effeminacy and

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lenguas de los muchachos caían sobre su piel como flechas de san Sebastián. Entonces, mientras ellos lamían centímetro a centímetro ese cuerpo cetrino y fugaz, él les hablaba con la voz del vientre, con la voz de mujer, la voz de los versos y la inspiración.' *Ibid*., 103.

29 *Ibid*., 149. 'Mazuf cierra los ojos y parece concentrarse. Entonces, para sorpresa de todos, empieza a surgir una voz de muy cerca de donde él está. Parece como si hubiera una trampilla disimulada. Como si bajo el proscenio, una mujer declamase con perfecta dicción oratoria. ¡Una mujer! […] Se oyen protestas.

– ¡Que acabe esta burla!

– ¡Por quiénes nos ha tomado ese liberto extranjero!

– ¡Adónde vamos a ir a parar, una mujer recitando!' *Ibid*., 249.

characteristic macho traits as the overriding impression of his public persona.[30] Being the author of a text about the ancient copyist, Jonathan himself performs an 'inscription' which binds femininity with Mazuf's *interiority*, that is, with the core of his identity, and at the same time associates this femininity with the *external* and the aleatory ('de-scription').

De Juan's novel on the one hand challenges Western culture's dominant interpretation of homosexual identity as 'a hermaphroditism of the soul,' revealing it as a product of certain discursive practices, and on the other engages in a game with another discourse related to male homosexuality, specifically with the stereotype of a homosexual as a criminal, a degenerate and a threat to the social order. The text undoubtedly builds on the traditional mode of 'accursed homosexuality' (*homosexualidad maldita*) identified by Alberto Mira.[31] Yet, in the novel, the homosexual-as-criminal stereotype is handled similarly to the image of the effeminate gay. Let us look into this facet of the book now.

The narrative of *Este latente mundo* is based on a number of crime-related plots, all of which are associated with the protagonists' homosexuality. Laurence, the narrator of the novel, admits to having been implicated in Jonathan's death and tape-records his confessions several years after the fateful events. He also admits to killing another two of his male lovers. Mazuf, the protagonist of the 'novel-within-the-novel,'

30 By consciously playing with their gender, characters can challenge the heterosexual order of culture through subversive acts such as the ones recalled by one of Jonathan's lovers who knew the protagonist by a false name: 'One time we went to see this James Cagney movie […]. We sat in the middle, in the second or third row. Back then Scott had long hair. He must have looked like a girl to the rest of the audience, and he acted like one. We kissed on the mouth through the whole film. He used his woman's voice. He laughed in a flirty way that drove every guy behind us crazy: they were paying more attention to him gasping and moaning than to the movie. You should have seen their faces when the lights came on …' De Juan, *Breathing*, 127. 'Una vez fuimos al cine […]. Nos colocamos en el centro, en la segunda o la tercera fila. Entonces Scott llevaba el pelo largo. Para los espectadores que estaban detrás debía de parecer una chica. Y se comportaba como tal. Nos besamos en la boca durante toda la película. Él ponía voz de mujer. Reía con una coquetería femenina que llegó a poner frenéticos a todos los hombres a nuestra espalda, más atentos a sus exclamaciones y gemidos que a la película. Si hubieses visto sus caras de asombro cuando se encendieron las luces …' De Juan, *Latente*, 213.

31 In his study *De Sodoma a Chueca. Una historia cultural de la homosexualidad en España en el siglo XX*, Alberto Mira identified three conspicuous patterns of homoerotic tradition which developed in the Iberian Peninsula in the 20th century: the homophile tendency, the camp trend and the 'accursed homosexuality' model. According to Mira, each of them was a response to one of three different conceptualisations of homosexual identity. The homophile trend developed as a reaction to medical discourse, in which homosexuality featured as a disease. The camp tradition arose provoked by explanations of homosexuality as a sexual inversion within the male-female binary. The 'accursed homosexuality' framework was triggered by juridical discourse, which pathologised homosexual identity as vice, sin and a threat to the public order. Alberto Mira, *De Sodoma a Chueca. Una historia cultural de la homosexualidad en España en el siglo XX* (Barcelona and Madrid: Egales, 2004), 24–7.

also murders his lover in a fit of sexual passion, which inspires his poetic work. This is a significant detail since it situates his homosexual crime within the context of writing and literary conventions.

With a duality inherent to its handling of the effeminate homosexual stereotype, *Este latente mundo*, on the one hand depicts the dark world of queers in alignment with the representations spawned by the homophobic imaginary and on the other enters in critical dialogue with this discourse by highlighting the contrast between appearances and reality, and between interpretations and facts. The questioning of the homosexual-as-criminal stereotype is made possible by the metaliterary investment of the novel. The deaths of homosexual characters are always shown as dictated by the logic of the novelistic truth, which demands that the plot be appropriately capped. Death is an element that serves as such a necessary closure. In terms of Edelman's framework of *homographesis*, the novel evokes associations of homosexuality with criminality, perpetuating a stereotype prevalent in Western culture ('inscription') only to immediately foreground the discursive nature of this stereotype, the application of which is compelled by a certain convention ('de-scription'), which would occur in a typical crime novel as well.[32]

This dual operation patently involves Mazuf. As early as in the initial descriptions, the protagonist is located amidst the murky corners of a Roman neighbourhood frequented by pederasts in search of random sexual contacts with young males. As the alter ego of Jonathan, who himself indulges in sadomasochistic practices, Mazuf murders his lover at the peak of erotic excitement, piercing his body with a spear.[33] This event inspires Mazuf's poetic art. When he turns from a common scribe into an artist, he recites verses titled 'Poemas a una lanza' ('A Poem on the Spear'), thereby confirming rumours which are rife about him. Yet genuine indignation is aroused by his next work, in which he narrates crimes committed at a mysterious place called Harvard in a distant future. The recitation in a female voice in the episode related above spawns a scandal, not only because of the enigma of the unexpectedly emerging voice, but also because of the controversial content and form of the recited

32 While in a typical crime novel, the riddle to be solved lies in the identity and motivations of the killer, what matters in *Este latente mundo* is how the two plots (the contemporary and the ancient ones) are interrelated and what connects them. Against all appearances to the contrary, *Este latente mundo* is not a mystery. It is a novel about the production of narratives and the mechanisms of dicursivisation.

33 As in the iconography of St Sebastian and the work of the Generation of '27 discussed in the previous chapter, the blade which pierces the adolescent's body bears phallic connotations in the novel: 'Like one's sex, a drawn weapon longs to be sunk home.' De Juan, *Breathing*, 15. 'Como el sexo, a las armas desenfundadas hay que utilizarlas, hundirlas donde corresponda.' De Juan, *Latente*, 34.

piece, that is, the breach of hallowed conventions. The new style and theme invite scathing censure from the audience:

> So, to return to Virgil and serious matters, in giving traits of Melibeus to a loveless, pitiless murderer, Mazuf has served our literature poorly. Why, after amply enjoying the gardener's pastoral favours, does he leave him to die in that unbucolic way in a damp room in the unwholesome coastal town of Harvard?[34]

This response begs an explanation. Mazuf's poem recounts crimes committed by Laurence, who intercepts the tragedy which Jonathan was writing, converts it into prose and fills it with events that took place after the original author's death. One of the events perpetuated in the 'novel-within-the-novel' is an encounter with Francis, a gardener and one of Jonathan's former lovers. Laurence meets him and causes him to die during sexual intercourse. Francis dies of asphyxiation, in circumstances resembling those of Jonathan's death. Laurence deliberately re-enacts that episode, and Francis's death serves as an inspiration for his writing a literary text, which corresponds to Mazuf and his 'Poem of the Spear.' As a result, the equating of homosexuality with the criminal world, which prevails in the literature of 'accursed homosexuality,' clashes with the classic convention of bucolic poetry. In a sense, Mazuf queers the tradition represented by Virgil, the author of a canonical text of homoerotic literature (Eclogue 2 which tells of Corydon's unrequited love to beautiful Alexis), by introducing a convention which is completely incomprehensible to his audience since it comes from the future, as does the related story. In this sense, the quotation that opens *Este latente mundo* ('sent before my time into this breathing world') conveys the situation in which Mazuf finds himself as a precursor of a new literary genre, a genre we may add which elicits quite violent responses from the audience:

> Did you know that this man dared appear at the Marcellus theatre to relate his crimes as if he were talking about the festivals calendar? Did you know that he had the effrontery to call it a 'narrative' and believe it a genre as any other?[35]

34 *Ibid*., 162. 'Bien, volviendo a Virgilio, y siendo rigurosos, Mazuf ha hecho un flaco servicio a nuestras letras al insuflar aires de Melibeo a un asesino carente de amor, compasión. ¿Por qué, después de gozar sin medida de los favores pastoriles del jardinero, deja que muera de esa manera tan poco bucólica en una habitación húmeda de la malsana y costera ciudad de Harvard?' *Ibid*., 268.

35 *Ibid*., 195–6. '¿Sabéis que este hombre se atreve a presentarse en el teatro Marcelo a contarnos sus crímenes como quien habla del calendario de festividades? ¿Sabéis que

The Chinese-box structure reinforces the idea that the equation of homosexuality and criminal propensities is a petrified convention, entrenched in a certain literary code, rather than a straightforward reflection of any extra-literary reality,[36] contrary to how the listeners interpret it ('Do not think they are figments of his imagination. Did Tacitus imagine Claudius's death at the hand of Agrippa? Did the writers of chronicles invent the murder of Caesar?'[37]). The audience, who treat literature literally as an unmediated record of events, feel nevertheless confused, since Mazuf's story references facts from a distant future instead of from a remote past. These facts, for their part, are components of another narrative, one constructed by the narrator – Laurence – as he tape-records his tale. This is also where clues suggesting that the entire narrative should be interpreted in terms of ingrained conventions are to be found. The key passage which corresponds to the quotation from Cortázar which serves as a motto to the novel and dwells on conferring meaning on aleatory elements of the chaotic world comes in the narrator's pondering: 'Can one be a murderer in the present, or is it the past […] that makes us murderers even if we remember nothing? Let's say that to become a murderer you have to confess to your crimes.'[38] It is only writing as an act of ordering the chaos of past events that wields the meaning-making power, which parallels the mechanisms and effects of Gibbon's enterprise. Like *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* earlier, Laurence's narrative fits within certain literary conventions which readers know (as mentioned earlier) from such familiar works as Camilo José Cela's *The Family of Pascual Duarte*, whose first-person narrator writes down an account of his crimes as a result of acquiring self-awareness.

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tiene la desfachatez de llamarle a eso «narración» y que pretende que sea un género literario como cualquier otro?' *Ibid*., 321.

36 At this point, it makes sense to evoke controversies around excessive biographism embraced by literary scholars associated with queer criticism. I suggest reading this passage of the novel as an allusion to the failure of mainstream critics to grasp what lies at the core of homoerotic literature research. The patent irony of the passage implies that it does not seek to glean any reflections of the author's actual experiences from the texts, but rather focuses on 'figments of the imagination,' that is, on the study of phantasms. Moreover, Mazuf not only transfigures 'figments of his imagination' into literature, but is also aware of its conventional character ('believes it a literary genre as any other'), as a result of which instead of being a common Martínezian 'frenzied scribe' (see Alfredo Martínez Expósito, *Los escribas furiosos. Configuraciones homoeróticas en la narrativa española* [New Orleans: University Press of the South, 1998]), he is a queer scribe who undermines the literary order in place.

37 De Juan, *Breathing*, 196. 'No creáis que sean un producto de su imaginación. ¿Acaso se imaginó Tácito la muerte de Claudio a manos de Agripa? ¿Acaso los cronistas inventaron el traidor asesinato de César?' De Juan, *Latente*, 321.

38 *Ibid*., 187. 'Puede uno ser asesino en el presente, o sólo es el tiempo pretérito, […] lo que nos convierte en asesinos aunque no nos acordemos de nada? Digamos que para convertirse en asesino hay que confesar los crímenes.' *Ibid*., 307.

Laurence is prompted to tape-record his confession when he discovers that an innocent person has been jailed for the murder of Francis. This realisation triggers the narrative which covers both the ancient times and the present moment. Nevertheless, this fact is only an excuse to spin a tale and provides a conventionalised starting point for the plot.[39] Unlike *The Family of Pascual Duarte*, De Juan's novel does not explore the condition of the criminal as a sinner who fell into the snares of evil as a result of insurmountable circumstances. With its pronounced meta-literary dynamic, *Este latente mundo* relocates the focus to how the motifs of death and eroticism function as elements in literature which addresses homosexual themes. That Laurence's guilty feelings are just an utterly conventional pretext for commencing a narrative can be concluded from the fact that this idea is abandoned without being even developed in the novel and from the narrator's attitude to his other two murders, which do not stir any remorse in him. Laurence's musings on the deaths of Jonathan and Henry Powell head in the opposite direction, which implies a gap between the apparent and (over)interpretable on the one hand and the factual and not requiring interpretation on the other.

Laurence's role in Jonathan's death is far from unambiguous in the novel. The narrator does not straightforwardly confess to having killed his lover, using indirect expressions, such as 'that *fatal accident*' and 'had he not *died in my arms* on his nineteenth birthday.'[40] He intimates that he was merely a witness of Jonathan's death and comments on the progress of the police investigation: 'They didn't have the key to what happened, but they had enough details to know that the murderer, or at least the person who'd *witnessed* his death without doing anything to stop it, was at large on campus.'[41] Jonathan himself is pictured as an individual with suicidal tendencies, who nevertheless lacks nerve to take the final step, as his diary entry attests: 'The sense of the absurd is what stops us from really thinking about death.'[42] Moreover, in his plans to indulge in

39 The literariness of Laurence's confessions is corroborated by yet another detail. Specifically, his entire recording is dictated by the same female voice emerging from the depth of the protagonists' bodies, which is intrinsically associated with literature writing throughout the novel: 'The ventriloquist's voice, that voice on the tape recorder that imitates mine, requires much training and many egg whites. […] But who put it into the belly in the first place?' *Ibid.*, 221 ('La voz del ventrílocuo, esa voz de la grabadora que imita la mía, requiere una buena educación y muchas claras de huevo. […] Pero ¿quién la puso en el vientre?' *Ibid.*, 362).

40 *Ibid.*, 46, 31. '[E]se *accidente fatal* que había acabado con la vida de Jonathan'; 'si no hubiera *muerto en mis brazos* el día que cumplió diecinueve años.' *Ibid.*, 81, 59 (italics mine).

41 *Ibid.*, 43. 'No disponían de la clave de lo ocurrido, pero sí detalles suficientes para saber que el asesino, o al menos quien había *presenciado* la muerte de Jonathan sin hacer nada por evitarla, andaba libre por el campus.' *Ibid.*, 77–8 (italics mine).

42 *Ibid.*, 51. 'El sentido del ridículo es lo que nos impide pensar de veras en la muerte.' *Ibid.*, 89.

sadomasochistic practices with Laurence, he comes across as expecting Laurence to be the right person who will not shun overstepping certain boundaries at the crucial moment: 'Nothing else as I'm saving myself so I can unleash Laurence's violence. I want him to overwhelm me. I know there's a ruthless being behind those impassive celestial eyes.'[43] Laurence, who discerns 'the weariness of survival'[44] in Jonathan's eyes, in a sense becomes a tool in the hands of his death-seeking lover. At the moment of ecstasy, he performs his task by asphyxiating Jonathan at his own express demand until the life-death line is crossed.[45] Clearly surprised and scared at such a turn of events, Laurence flees from Jonathan's room in a panic, and the only person to whom he reveals the real circumstances of his friend's death is Henry Powell, a homosexual librarian who helps him cover things up. Powell, who knew about Jonathan's sexual preferences, becomes Laurence's confidant, because 'no one would understand how it had happened.'[46] No one except Powell.

The actual course of the fateful events is contrasted with how they are interpreted by outsiders – the police and the university authorities, who imagine the student's death to have been an effect of sinister homosexual orgies with possible links to communist circles.[47] Paradoxically, these stereotypical visions and the taboo on homosexuality work in Laurence's favour: 'No one dared mention queers.'[48] Both the university authorities and Powell himself find it exigent and expedient to avoid a scandal which would damage the reputation of the university: 'And if it wasn't enough, when the press discovered Jonathan's reading matter, a link would be made between pederasty and communism.'[49] Therefore, Jonathan's death is classified as an enigmatic suicide.

Similarly to the stereotype of the effeminate homosexual, the equation of homosexuality with crime is shown in the context of writing as entangled in meaning-making practices. As already mentioned, the deaths of the characters are subservient to the logic of plot construction. How is Jonathan's death connected with the process of writing literature? This question can be answered by examining the novel's plentiful intertextual references to Shakespeare.

43 *Ibid*., 85. 'Por lo demás, me reservo para desatar la violencia de Laurence. Quiero que me avasalle. Sé que hay un ser despiadado tras esos célicos ojos impasibles.' *Ibid*., 147.

44 *Ibid*., 86; 'cansancio de la supervivencia.' *Ibid*., 148.

45 These circumstances are strongly reminiscent of the final scene of Pedro Almodóvar's *Matador*, in which the protagonists decide to kill each other while making love, in a voluntary act of transgressing the norms in place and as a gesture of absolute freedom.

46 De Juan, *Breathing*, 43. 'cómo había pasado, nadie lo entendería.' De Juan, *Latente*, 77.

47 *Ibid*., 41/74.

48 *Ibid*., 41. 'Nadie se atrevió a hablar de maricones.' *Ibid*., 73.

49 *Ibid*., 46. 'Por si fuera poco, pederastia y comunismo se confundirían al conocer la prensa las lecturas de Jonathan.' *Ibid*., 81.

In one of his diary entries, Jonathan writes down: 'The connoisseurs[50] at the Loeb theatre studied me shrewdly, as if trying to guess what Shakespeare character I represent in daily life.'[51] This sentence ties in with Laurence's observation in which his dead friend is compared to Mercutio in *Romeo and Juliet*:

> Mercutio reminded me of Jonathan. At that moment, I sensed the spirit that had moved Shakespeare to dispatch his most attractive character at the beginning of the third act with Tybalt's lucky thrust: brittle, luminous Mercutio threatened to take over the whole play, just as Jonathan might have my life.[52]

Jonathan must meet his demise for Laurence to be born as a narrator, to appropriate the Mazuf tale, make it ultimately coherent and cap the entire narrative. The murder of Henry Powell, who falls victim to Laurence many years after the tragic events in the narrator's university days, can be interpreted in a similar vein.

Powell, the only person who knows the actual circumstances of Jonathan's death, is thrown out of a high-rise window. In this case, the police also classify the event as a suicide, and their conclusion is substantiated by the discovery that Powell was HIV positive. Importantly, the final episodes of the novel are set in the 1980s, a decade marked by the outbreak of the AIDS epidemic. With AIDS perceived back then less as an acquired immunodeficiency syndrome and predominantly as a *disease* of homosexuals, a 'gay cancer' as it was dubbed, the period saw a bolstering of homophobic discourse, in which the metaphor of death was ever more vehemently pinned to homosexuality, amidst an upsurge of apocalyptic visions of divine punishment being visited on the world for the sin of sodomy. As emphasised by Alfredo Martínez Expósito, Spanish writers of homoerotic literature were reluctant to address AIDS, and first attempts at giving this new phenomenon a literary rendering in the early 1990s heavily relied on the tragic as the only solution to plots: 'In all these instances, a tragic ending is used as the only guarantee of legibility: whatever his circumstances in life, the AIDS patient eventually dies, and his death marks the climax of the

50 At this point, the English translation misses out on the allusion to the sexual orientation of these 'connoisseurs,' which is conveyed by the original wording 'entendidos.' 'Entendidos' – those who understand, those who are in the know – is a widely used jargon term referring to homosexuals (see footnote 79 in Chapter 1).

51 *Ibid*., 31. 'Los entendidos del teatro Loeb me miran con sagacidad, como si jugaran a adivinar qué personaje de Shakespeare represento en la vida cotidiana.' *Ibid*., 88.

52 *Ibid*., 46, 'Mercucio me recordó a Jonathan. En ese instante intuí la razón que movió a Shakespeare a liquidar su más atractivo personaje al inicio del acto tercero por medio de una inesperada y certera estocada de Teobaldo: ese histriónico y lúcido Mercucio amenazaba con engullir toda la pieza, igual que Jonathan podría haber hecho con mi vida.' *Ibid*., 82.

novel.'[53] This is also the case in *Este latente mundo*, where the seropositive character dies in tragic circumstances. Thus the novel espouses the pattern identified by Martínez. At the same time, however, it undermines the meanings ascribed to AIDS in conjunction with homosexuality, by such devices as having Powell murdered by Laurence and his death being dictated by the dynamics of the plot. The following dialogue in which HIV surfaces in the characters' conversation is illuminating in this respect:

> Something made Henry cough uncontrollably. I asked him kindly when he was planning on dying.
>
> 'It's all a joke to you,' he said bitterly. 'I've visited my doctor in Baltimore, a friend from university, and he told me confidentially that immunologists fear the virus might eventually turn into an epidemic, a deadly serious matter.'
>
> 'Have another glass of wine, Henry. Pay no attention to the doctors, what do they know? We're all going to die of the common cold.'
>
> 'It's odd that you say that, very odd. Yesterday I woke up with a terrible phrase on my lips. "I'm going to die of a goddam cold."'
>
> 'There's nothing strange about that, really. Even those who die a violent death, murdered or in a tribal massacre, die of the cold they caught when they left their mothers' wombs.'[54]

Henry's fears that he will die due to an ultimate destruction of his immunological system are downplayed by the suggestive image of a cold as an inexplicable and *possible* death that can befall absolutely anyone at any moment. As a result of this semantic shift, AIDS as such does not feature in the novel as an essentialising metaphor, a 'disease' *distinct to homosexuals*, being instead framed as contingent and not calling for interpretation, like death itself. HIV and homosexuality alike are pictured in the novel as phenomena which are simply there, without any necessity of having meanings ascribed to them 'from outside' – phenomena which exist as

53 'En todos los casos se recurre al final trágico como único garante de legibilidad: el paciente de sida, independientemente de su peripecia vital, termina muriendo, y su muerte se constituye en clímax narrativo.' Expósito, *Escribas*, 143–4.

54 De Juan, *Breathing*, 218. 'Algo en su interior provocaba a Henry accesos de tos que no podía controlar. Le pregunté con amabilidad cuándo pensaba morirse.
– Tú te lo tomas a guasa – dijo con amargura –. He visitado a mi médico en Baltimore, un amigo de la universidad, y me ha dicho en confianza que a los inmunólogos les ronda la idea de que el virus puede convertirse a la larga en una epidemia, en un asunto de supervivencia.
– Tómate otro vaso de vino, Henry. No hagas caso de los médicos, saben menos que nosotros. Todos vamos a morir de un simple resfriado.
– Es curioso que digas eso, muy curioso. Ayer me desperté con una frase terrible en los labios: voy a morir de un maldito resfriado.
– ¿Qué hay de extraño en realidad? Incluso los que mueren de forma violenta, asesinados o en la masacre de una revuelta tribal, mueren en realidad del resfriado que cogieron al salir del regazo de sus madres.' De Juan, *Latente*, 356–7.

the 'pulsating substance, hidden under the thin skin of this world' about which 'only on the surface, on the outside [we] seek to answer "why."'[55]

2.2. The Pitfalls of Identity: Queering Shakespeare in *Valentín* by Juan Gil-Albert

STUDENT 2: In final analysis, do Romeo and Juliet necessarily have to be a man and a woman for the tomb scene to come off in a heart-rending and lifelike way?

STUDENT 1: It isn't necessary and that was what the stage director brilliantly intended to demonstrate […].

STUDENT 4: Romeo was a man thirty years old and Juliet a boy of fifteen.

Federico García Lorca, *The Public*[56]

Multiple parallels to *Este latente mundo* are to be found in Juan Gil-Albert's novella *Valentín*, in which a homosexual murderer confesses to his crime and reveals its particulars and the motives behind it. Similarly, in a breach of a familiar convention, the narrator is not a sinner who seeks to redeem his vices. This is by far not the only similarity between the protagonist and Laurence, for whom the crime, as we remember, served as an excuse for philosophical ponderings rather than as the source of guilty feelings which could conceivably stir Christian remorse, as readers could justifiably expect. Both Richard in *Valentín* and Laurence in *Este latente mundo* re-forge their grim experiences into tales of homosexual identity, whereby they *problematise* it, rather than commonly *thematising* it. Besides these analogies in the construction of the two narrators, both texts share an obvious and telling detail which encourages juxtaposing them and exploring them side by side. Specifically, both texts are intertextually related to Shakespeare's *Richard III*. The passage from Gloucester's celebrated monologue which José Luis de Juan used as a motto for his *Este latente mundo* is a text with which Gil-Albert's protagonist, whose name – Richard – is by no means a random choice, identifies himself.

Gil-Albert wrote *Valentín* as a short prose piece in 1964, but he only had it published, like his *Heraclés*, several years later. *Valentín* was sent off the press 'into this breathing world' in spring 1974, published by La gaya ciencia. Admittedly, with this chronology, the text falls outside the timeframe discussed in this study, but there are good reasons to include it in the body of texts analysed here. Most importantly, it is a pioneering text which encourages placing it within my framework of the artist scribe metaphor as opposed to the Martínezian artisan scribes, who uncritically submit themselves to the discourse in place. Classified within the

55 Twardoch, *Morfina*, 579.

56 Federico García Lorca, 'The Public,' in Federico García Lorca, *The Public and Play without a Title*, trans. Carlos Bouwer (Cambridge, MA: New Directions Publishing, 1983), 36–8.

homophile movement in homoerotic literature, Gil-Albert was admired by poets, such as Jaime Gil de Biedma and Luis Antonio de Villena, who wrote their own studies included in the two existing editions of *Valentín*. Biedma penned an afterword to the first edition of 1974, and Villena contributed an introduction to the 2010 edition, which was released as part of the *Orfeo* series published by Paréntesis. The series is dedicated to calling the reading public's attention to valuable literary texts which have fallen into oblivion by republishing them with forewords by prominent connoisseurs of the work of respective authors. Villena's discussion included in the 2010 edition represents the Madrid-based poet-cum-author's broader engagement in fostering homosexual culture in Spain, which I will revisit in Chapter 4 of this book.

Importantly, the work of Gil-Albert was practically unknown in Spain for a relatively long time, because after the Spanish Civil War he emigrated to Mexico and Argentina, where he lived from 1939 to 1947,[57] only to embrace so-called internal emigration upon his return to his homeland.[58] In this period, he wrote *Heraclés*, a text inspired by André Gide's *Corydon*, and *Valentín*, which calls for re-reading within the framework of gender and queer critique. As will be shown below, this profoundly intertextual work consciously manipulates a variety of discourses which have clustered around homosexuality and explores homosexual identity. Consequently, it has more affinity with texts published at the turn of the 20th century than with the *transición española* fiction discussed by Martínez Expósito and overlapping with *Valentín* solely in terms of the publication chronology.

Martínez Expósito himself observes in *Escrituras torcidas. Ensayos de crítica 'queer'* (2004) that practically the entire body of work by Gil-Albert can be discussed within the framework of Edelman's *homographesis*.[59] Martínez Expósito mainly attends to Gil-Albert's sonnets, whose

57 Martínez Expósito adds that the delay in the reception of Gil-Albert was also caused by the clearly homoerotic resonance of his poetry. 'That Gil-Albert remained unknown for a long time is closely connected to his homosexuality – a logically expected effect, one could say – as well as to his emigration after the Civil War' ('El desconocimiento de Gil-Albert guarda estrecha relación, como es lógico, con su homosexualidad, pero también con su exilio tras la Guerra Civil'). Alfredo Martínez Expósito, *Escrituras torcidas. Ensayos de crítica 'queer'* (Barcelona: Laertes, 2004), 75.

58 The work of Gil-Albert was reclaimed chiefly by the efforts of the Institute of Culture founded in Alicante (named after the poet in 1984), which published Ángel Sahuquillo's dissertation entitled *Federico García Lorca y la cultura de la homosexualidad masculina. Lorca, Dalí, Cernuda, Gil-Albert, Prados y la voz silenciada del amor homosexual* (Alicante: Instituto de Cultura 'Juan Gil-Albert,' 1991), including a section devoted to Gil-Albert.

59 'Homosexuality in Gil-Albert is of paramount significance to the history of Spanish gay literature not because of either homoeroticism, which as a rule eventually surfaces in heterosexual writers, or his own homosexual identity, but because of what, following Edelman, we could call *homographesis*, that is, a unique inscription of homosexuality in his texts, which remain homosexual even when the most external signs (e.g.

relevance as a subversive literary form in homoerotic literature he encapsulates in the following passage:

> Let us examine how the homographic operations unfold in the opening sonnet of *Misteriosa Presencia*. The very fact that a homosexual writer resolves to compose love sonnets should basically come across as shocking. Wasn't the sonnet by some chance erected into one of the most important forms of love expression by the heterosexual tradition? Wasn't it by some chance reserved for conveying – as artfully as possible – the most sublime love of all – Platonic love, divine love? What business could a homosexual have appropriating a genre as obviously exclusive of the homosexual as the sonnet? […] The modern homosexual sonnet offers a convenient form of appropriation and emulation. Its established conventions, its imperative to combine verbal conciseness with conceptual precision, its formal rigours, all make the love sonnet a genre in which homosexual poetry has an opportunity to perfectly convey the tensions described by Edelman. For example, it can question the heterosexual conjecture that the most sublime expressions of love are exclusively heterosexual, or, for quite a different matter, it can unexpectedly engage in intertextual interplays with the homosexual love tradition.[60]

This extensive passage is worth quoting at length for its key insights illuminating *Valentín* as well. They foreground the idea of appropriating literary tradition in order to unravel and upend it, an operation

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homoeroticism) are removed from their surface' ('La homosexualidad de Gil-Albert es enormemente relevante en la historia de la literatura gay española, no por su homoerotismo, que al fin y al cabo es moneda común incluso entre escritores heterosexuales, ni tampoco por su identidad homosexual, sino por lo que podríamos denominar, con Edelman, *homographesis*, o sea, la peculiar inscripción homosexual de su escritura, que sigue siendo homosexual incluso cuando las marcas más externas [el homoerotismo, por ejemplo] son eliminadas de su superficie'). Martínez Expósito, *Escrituras*, 77.

60 'Veamos cómo funciona la operación homografética en el soneto inaugural de *Misteriosa Presencia*. Que un escritor homosexual decida componer sonetos amorosos debería, en principio, resultar chocante. ¿No ha sido acaso soneto consagrado por la tradición heterosexual como una de las más altas formas de expresión amorosa? ¿No se ha reservado acaso para expresar, con el mayor de los artificios, el más elevado de los amores, el amor platónico, el amor divino? ¿Qué interés podría tener un poeta homosexual en apropiarse de un género tan obviamente marcado por la exclusión de lo homosexual? […] El moderno soneto homosexual supone una forma privilegiada de apropiación y de imitación. Sus elaboradas convenciones, la necesidad de conjugar concisión verbal con sustancia conceptual, el rigor formal, hacen del soneto amoroso un género en el que la escritura homosexual puede evidenciar magníficamente las tensiones descritas por Edelman; por ejemplo, puede poner en entredicho la presunción heterosexual de que las expresiones de amor más elevadas son excluyentemente heterosexuales; o, en otro sentido, puede abrir insospechadas relaciones intertextuales con la tradición amorosa homosexual.' *Ibid.*, 87–8.

which I called 'Mazuf's gesture' above: the handling of homosexual themes (despised by Spanish criticism) as deserving their place in literature and the use of intertextuality which promotes such a manoeuvre. These observations are equally applicable both to the sonnets discussed by Martínez Expósito and to *Valentín*, a prose piece which I examine below.

As aptly argued by Villena, Gil-Albert's novella might have done perfectly well without its subtitle *Homenaje a William Shakespeare* (*A Homage to William Shakespeare*), since its references to Shakespeare's works are, if anything, all too numerous and conspicuous.[61] Its entire plot is based on Shakespeare's texts, including Sonnet 20, which is the primary paratext of the piece. Against the suggestion of the title, it revolves around Richard, the protagonist and narrator in one, who is a twenty-five-year-old member of a strolling players' company which stages Shakespeare's dramas across the British Isles and the continent. The action is set in the latter half of the 16th century, and one of the key episodes providing the background to the plot is St Bartholomew's night, which foreshadows the tragic course of the events.

At a certain moment, the players' company is joined by a fifteen-year-old boy named Valentín. His subtle girlish beauty makes him particularly suitable for female roles, which is in line with the historical conventions of Elizabethan theatre. Richard, who becomes the young player's guardian and mentor, gradually discovers, to his surprise to boot, that he is developing passionate feelings for his new friend. As Valentín grows into a man and begins to engage with women, Richard is swept away by uncertainty and jealousy, affects skilfully incensed by bad advisers. The plot culminates in Richard killing Valentín during a performance in front of an initially unwitting audience. This relatively straightforward story, which is told by Richard in jail as he is expecting his sentence, does not follow a chronological order, but is governed by the dynamics of the narrator's thoughts.[62] This is exactly what accounts for the actual value and the originality of the work, which Gil-Albert insisted on calling a 'Treatise' (like his *Heraclés*): 'The few to whom this text is addressed do not need the author to tell them: it is not an ordinary story, but a Treatise. It is only when "seen in this way" that its content acquires its true meaning.'[63] Importantly, these essayistic stakes of the novelistic text (i.e.

61 Luis Antonio de Villena, 'Prólogo. Gil-Albert: un clásico heterodoxo,' in Juan Gil-Albert, *Valentín. Homenaje a William Shakespeare*, (Alcalá de Guadaíra: Paréntesis, 2010), 8. All Spanish quotations from *Valentín* come from this edition.

62 For a detailed analysis of these issues, see José Luis García Martín, 'Juan Gil-Albert. Novelista. Notas sobre *Valentín*,' *Calle del Aire. Revista de Sevilla a Juan Gil-Albert*, 1977, 1, 281–5.

63 'Los pocos a quien va dirigido este texto no necesitan que el autor les diga: esto no es un suceso, es un Tratado. Sólo "viéndolo" así adquiere su contenido toda la verdad.' Gil-Albert, *Valentín*, 14.

critical probings into homosexual identity and culture, reflections which, as we shall see, appear in the writing of Álvaro Pombo and Luis Antonio de Villena as well) invite grouping *Valentín* with the texts published in the recent two decades, instead of with the literature of the *transición española*.

How is 'Mazuf's gesture' performed in Gil-Albert's novella? Similarly to the 'appropriation' of the sonnet in his poetry, the story intercepts Shakespearean tradition and rewrites it in the context of homosexuality. Gil-Albert clashes it with two 20th-century traditions of homosexual literature: with the homophile movement and the 'accursed homosexuality' trend, in order to produce a literary philosophical treatise of his own, whereby he makes an enduring imprint on the history of Spanish homoerotic literature.[64] It is no coincidence that in his afterword to the first edition of *Valentín*, Biedma took notice of its particular 'blend' of conventions, stating that the text 'does not fit in either with 16th-century conventions or all too well with the current ones.'[65] Admittedly, Biedma primarily meant the genre of the text, but his appraisal also aptly conveys the specific merger of various conceptualisations of homosexuality identifiable in the text. Among these representations, there are traces of Greek pederasty (which is actually often overinterpreted and demonised today), a typical coming-out discourse, and elements characteristic of what has come to be called the 'accursed homosexuality' pattern, in which homosexuality is identified with broadly conceived evil. At the time when *Valentín* was written, these discourses were more distinct, and combining them has only recently burgeoned into a widespread practice. Given this, the novella was also ahead of its times in terms of amalgamating divergent discursive traditions.

Returning to the intertextuality of *Valentín*, which makes 'Mazuf's gesture' possible, let us focus on the role of Shakespeare's Sonnet 20 as the paratext of the novella. Side by side with his insights about the subversive potential of the sonnet as a form traditionally reserved for expressing the 'noblest' (i.e. heterosexual) love, Martínez Expósito observes that, against this tradition, the homosexual sonnet was pioneered by Renaissance writers such as Michelangelo and Shakespeare.[66] The homosexual colouring of Shakespeare's sonnets has been subject to heated debates

64 'the most important homosexual poets and thinkers of our times (Gil de Biedma, Luis Antonio de Villena, Leopoldo Azancot) have weighed in on the relevance of Gil-Albert to the development of gay literature' ('los más importantes poetas y pensadores homosexuales de nuestro tiempo [Gil de Biedma, Luis Antonio de Villena, Leopoldo Azancot] se han pronunciado sobre la aportación de Gil-Albert a la literatura gay'). Martínez Expósito, *Escrituras*, 76.

65 'no se ajusta a las convenciones del siglo XVI, ni tampoco mucho a las actuales.' Jaime Gil de Biedma, 'Juan Gil-Albert entre la meditación y homenaje,' in Juan Gil-Albert, *Valentín. Homenaje a William Shakespeare* (Barcelona: La gaya ciencia, 1974), 176.

66 Martínez Expósito, *Escrituras*, 87.

within Shakespeare scholarship and criticism. Some commentators insist that it makes little sense to ponder this issue at all, a position espoused, for example, by W.H. Auden, whose opinion is quoted by Biedma.[67] Others tend to champion the pragmatic vein in literary theory and emphasise the supreme role of readers and their capability of launching a homosexual reading.[68] The latter approach promotes Shakespeare's sonnets as an important point of reference in what is referred to as homosexual culture, as *Valentín* perfectly exemplifies.

The quotations which writers employ as mottoes to their works mainly serve as interpretive guidelines and encapsulate ideas which readers should have in mind when making their way through the text and interpreting it. This is also the case in *Valentín*. Famous Sonnet 20, which depicts the delicate, feminine beauty of the addressee, whom nature itself predestines to be loved by women – a fact bewailed by the I-speaker – dovetails with the narrative of *Valentín*. Shakespeare's lines lead readers into the theme and the atmosphere of the text. Yet, the text-paratext relation can also be usefully analysed from the opposite perspective, that is, by inquiring into how the text of the novella affects the reading of the poem, its paratext. With this shift in viewpoint, Gil-Albert's decision to draw Sonnet 20 within the compass of his work, which straightforwardly rather than allusively delves into its homosexuality-related subject matter, implies him enacting his own interpretation of the intertext, in which what could otherwise remain understated is made explicit and brought into relief.[69] In this way, Gil-Albert 'appropriates' Shakespeare's

67 Biedma, 'Juan Gil-Albert,' 183.

68 Cf. 'In nutshell, it may be completely beside the point whether William Shakespeare was "gay" or "queer" or a "homosexual" or a "sodomite"; or if he and the male addressee of his sonnets were "just good friends"; or even if no such friend ever existed and the sonnets in questions were – as so many heterosexually identified critics have claimed – mere poetic exercises, common to their time. All of this is irrelevant if any of the sonnets is amenable to being read by a gay reader *as if they were* "gay poems." If they work as if they were, they *are*. The reader's pleasure is paramount.' Woods, *History of Gay Literature*, 18 (italics original).

69 This feedback loop in the relation between the quoted and the quoting is highlighted by Marian Bielecki in his discussion of Michał Witkowski's use of a passage from Miron Białoszewski in his *Lovetown* (*Lubiewo*): '[i]t is quite illuminating to realise what it is that Witkowski actually does when he allusively evokes or even quotes his forerunner. In particular, referencing excerpts from *Donosy rzeczywistości* in the context of Witkowski's novel as a whole amounts to something more than simply quoting; in other words, it shows that every quotation is far more complicated than citing or polemicising. The point is that, as re-contextualisations, this and other references in *Lovetown* are above all interpretations. It is relevant especially because Witkowski not so much […] literalises something that is a metaphor from modernist and thus sublimating discourse, as rather discovers the proper or concrete semantic shape of what Miron Białoszewski repeatedly described in his camouflaging and poetically inimitable style and what Michał Witkowski portrays completely overtly and with equal artistry, namely, the crude reality of the Polish homosexual world under communism.' Marian Bielecki, *Kłopoty z innością* (Kraków: Universitas, 2012), 105–16 (italics mine).

text and rewrites it in 'Mazuf's gesture' of unambiguously homosexual re-contextualisation.

Dialogicity thoroughly pervades Gil-Albert's work. How skilfully Shakespeare's textual legacy is interwoven with the plot of the novella is showcased in an episode connected with St Bartholomew's night. The English players' company is invited to France to perform *Romeo and Juliet* for the guests at the nuptials of Margaret of Valois and Henry Bourbon, the Huguenot king of Navarre. Unfolding on the stage, the conflict between the two quarrelling families, which precludes the happy union of Romeo and Juliet, prefigures the impending massacre of the Huguenots, an event which contributed to the exacerbation of religious conflicts in Renaissance Europe. The novella uses other dramas by Shakespeare in a similar manner to relate the identities of its protagonists. These re-contextualisations of commonly known texts come in various forms and manners.

The tradition of Elizabethan theatre is used to construct the narrative about Richard and Valentín. One reason why Valentín, who performs female roles, captivates his older friend is that he plays these parts in an unaffected way, with youthful grace and naturalness, unlike other players who exert themselves in exaggerated gestures and inept imitations of 'feminine' behaviour: 'he only used […] the opportunities afforded him by his teenage indeterminacy – his capacity to appear essentially feminine without the trappings of femininity.'[70] The continental audience of the performances are surprised at seeing female roles played by teenage males. On finding out that Juliet was played by a boy, princess Margot observes that 'Jules is as beautiful as Juliette.'[71] Overheard by Richard, the sentence appears in his memoir, and not coincidentally either, as further in the text readers learn about the jealousy about Valentín which consumes Richard and about the insecurity which Valentín's interest in women engenders in him. As this example indicates, Valentín's specialisation in playing female roles is used to paint a detailed portrayal of the dynamic of Richard's feelings. Richard also recollects how profoundly he experienced the scene in *As You Like It* in which Valentín as Rosalind said to Orlando/Richard: 'I would cure you if you would but call me Rosalind and come every day to my cote and woo me.'[72] Richard recalls:

> This sophisticated conversation only aroused me in this play. Oh, to think that Rosalind, dressed up as a boy as a result of the twists of

70 'no hacía sino utilizar […] la ocasión que le brindaba la ambigüedad adolescente de aparentar la esencia femenina sin los accidentes de la feminidad.' Gil-Albert, *Valentín*, 35.

71 *Ibid*., 43.

72 'Os curaré con sólo que me llaméis Rosalinda y vengáis todos los días a mi cabaña, a cortejarme.' *Ibid*., 59. Quotation from *As You Like It*, ed. Barbara Mowat and Paul

> the plot and asking me to court her, was none other than Valentín, and that it was with him, standing next to me in his own person, that I was talking about love in front of all those people, as if a mask had just fallen off my face.[73]

A commonplace staging device (cross-dressing) combined with the tradition of Elizabethan theatre opens up possibilities for queering Shakespeare at the level of the novella's plot: Richard obtains an opportunity to utter words which would be unthinkable in any other circumstances. As a result, the private-public pattern is inverted. The scene is contrasted with another, far more intimate episode. After the performance of Christopher Marlowe's *Edward II*, in which Richard also had an opportunity to publicly express his feelings for Valentín, when back in the dressing room but still stirred by his on-stage emotions, he addresses his friend: 'Oh my Gaveston, my insomnious Gaveston!,'[74] then embraces him and kisses his hair and temple in an upsurge of passion. Valentín draws back, asking in surprise: 'What is it, Richard?'[75] Crucially, his response is expressive of astonishment rather than rejection, which Richard will only realise after Valentín's death.

Showing Richard's homoerotic fascination with the young player through the lens of Shakespeare's dramas (and Marlowe's play) is a recurrent device in the novella. Secondary characters are also compared to Shakespeare's figures. The course of the events is influenced by two other members of the company whom Richard calls, respectively, Falstaff and Iago. Falstaff becomes Valentín's companion and guide through the pleasures of nightlife, which Richard later finds out. Iago, for his part, inflames Richard's jealousy through insinuations and intrigues. One of them ultimately leads to the novella's tragic ending, as Richard playing Othello strangles Desdemona/Valentín to death in a sudden fit of jealousy before the eyes of the audience. The riveting scene applauded by the unwitting audience is interrupted by Falstaff, who realises what has just happened on the stage and exclaims: 'You madman, you wretched madman! What have you done? Valentín loved you!'[76] These words will reverberate in Richard's memory for a long time.

Werstine (Folger Shakespeare Library), III, iii, 433–435, www.folgerdigitaltexts.org/html/AYL.html (accessed 17 January 2020).

73 'Aquel alambicamiento no podía menos que enardecerme en el juego. Piénsese que esta Rosalinda vestida de muchacho, como resultado de las peripecias de la obra, y que me pedía que le hiciera la corte, no era otro que Valentín, y que con él, a mi lado, en su propia figura, hablaba yo de amor ante los ojos de todos, como si de pronto se hubiera dejado caer de mi rostro un antifaz.' *Ibid.*, 59–60.

74 *Ibid.*, 60.

75 '¿Qué es esto Richard?' *Ibid.*

76 '¡Loco, loco y desgraciado! ¿Qué hiciste? ¡Valentín te quería!' *Ibid.*, 75.

'Rewriting' Shakespeare for the sake of the homoerotic narrative aims above all to elevate homosexuality to the status of a theme fitting for high-brow literature. When *Valentín* was written, and later when it was published, literary criticism deemed homoeroticism to be unnatural and its manifestations in art to violate culture, as attested by what happened to Lorca's *Sonnets of Dark Love*, which I discuss in Chapter 1. As Gil-Albert 'appropriated' the sonnet (as the most perfect form for a love poem) to convey homosexual experience, Shakespeare is similarly 'appropriated' (as the writer who most perfectly rendered human passions) in order to confer a desired rank on the story narrated in the text. By placing his tale in the context of Shakespeare's tragedies, Gil-Albert *universalises* it without erasing what is dubbed 'gay specificity.'[77] This specificity is in fact highlighted, as observed by critics[78] and corroborated by the author's injunction to consider *Valentín* a treatise on homosexuality.

Is it then a treatise on the 'essence' of homosexuality? Let us explore the ways of presenting homosexual identity in the text and determine whether Martínez Expósito was right to suggest Edelman's *homographesis* model as a framework germane to the interpretation of Gil-Albert's writings.

As already mentioned, 'Mazuf's gesture' is accompanied by straddling various discourses of homoerotic traditions, a device which makes it possible to perform the dual operation of 'inscription' and 'de-scription' within the same text. As the action of the novella progresses, a transition takes place from references to the ancient tradition, to coming-out discourse and finally to elements typical of the 'accursed homosexuality' trend. This sequence graphically exposes the discursive nature of various conceptualisations of identity.

The initial depictions of the acquaintance between Richard and Valentín evoke the relationship between an erastes and an eromenos as envisaged in Greek antiquity. Richard clearly adopts the role of the guardian of a young boy, initiates him into the acting craft, becomes his

77 By 'universalisation' I do not mean the strategy of literary criticism which is discussed in Chapter 1 and in which inconvenient (i.e. homosexually marked) motifs in strictly canonical texts are treated as inconsequential for their interpretation. I rather have in mind retaining what Leo Bersani referred to as 'a gay specificity.' Leo Bersani, *Homos* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), 4–6.

78 Villena forcefully argues that the murder of Valentín was only ostensibly caused by Richard's jealousy. His reasoning is underpinned by the pronounced motif of ephebophilia in the novella. Villena insists that Richard cannot bear the thought of Valentín falling in love with a woman as much as the thought of his beloved soon stopping to be a *puer aeternus*, an insight corroborated by Richard's self-scrutiny (Villena, 'Prólogo,' 9). Biedma subscribes to a similar line of thought and stresses that Richard kills the young actor to shelter him both against promiscuity and against the passage of time (Biedma, 'Juan Gil-Albert,' 187). For his part, García Martín discusses echoes of the story of Hadrian and Antinous in the novella and examines its other references to the ancient culture of homosexuality (García Martín, 'Juan Gil-Albert,' 285).

guide through culture and watches Valentín mature: '[W]ithout even realising it, I became a protector of my younger fellow player, who […] grew accustomed to my care, which though not paternal, did certainly resemble that of an elder brother.'[79] When they stay at the rural estate of Richard's family, they have long conversations about ancient times. Once, while strolling, Richard asks Valentín to recite a passage from *King Lear* in which Cordelia enumerates names of poisonous plants: 'I let him on in botany then.'[80] Their talk about hemlock soon evolves into a discussion on Socrates and his philosophy. Richard feels that Valentín is grateful to him for sharing his knowledge, and the teacher himself will admit several years later that it was 'under the hot sun of the classics'[81] that he sensed the first stirrings of desire, a feeling which was only to intensify when travelling in Italy. During one of their outings, the men bathe in a river, which marks the first time that Richard has seen his young friend naked in a setting redolent of scenes in bucolic poetry. He experiences an instant of revelation and describes Valentín's sunshine-doused body as an embodiment of divinity (Eros). At this epiphany-like moment, the awareness of what his true feelings are relentlessly dawns on Richard, who has been framing his affects in terms of purely Platonic friendship before. 'I saw my feeling laid bare for me,'[82] he says, admitting that his desire of intimacy is carnal.

At this point, the narrative begins to rehearse typical features of coming-out texts, a signature genre of gay literature. The idyllic scenery of the riverbank episode and gestures of male friendship (Valentín's nudges, which Richard interprets as 'signs of male favour'[83]) envelop the discovery of *homosexual identity*.[84] The protagonist retrospectively scrutinises his own identity, and the moment of revelation serves as an excuse for his contemplations. This is important insofar that it brings to mind the episodes in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and *Remembrance of Things Past*, analysed by Edelman, where the protagonists analogously look back on their lives and begin to see their past through the lens of homosexuality as a result of a sudden epiphany (they see because they have understood, instead of understanding because they have seen). Richard has comprehended the 'nature' of his feelings, and this triggers an abrupt change in

79 'me convertí, sin saberlo, en un vigilante de mi joven compañero que […] se acostumbró a que ejerciera sobre él una tutela que, si no de padre, podría hacer las veces de la del hermano mayor.' Gil-Albert, *Valentín*, 36.

80 'Le inicié, entonces, en la Botánica.' *Ibid.*, 39.

81 'bajo el tórrido sol de los clásicos.' *Ibid.*, 40.

82 'Vi mi sentimiento al desnudo.' *Ibid.*, 49.

83 'muestras de atención del hombre.' *Ibid.*, 50.

84 Importantly, the action of *Valentín* is set in Renaissance Europe, while the notion of homosexual identity was not forged until the 19th century. Despite that, Richard's ponderings imply that he has discovered his own identity as a homosexual.

viewpoint in him. Symptomatically, the protagonist is overwhelmed by his discovery, which reiterates another characteristic motif in gay literature. Aware of his otherness, he begins to pretend to people around him and to *himself* as well that nothing has changed even though he fully realises that he has discovered his *inner* truth:

> The point is that despite that warning which I had received, the warning about the inner truth of my feelings, I persisted in living as if I did not know anything and priding myself on my command of my nature, which the course of events had exposed to me so mercilessly and terrifyingly.[85]

Richard admits that his reaction was not motivated by religion; more than of sin, he was afraid of his own otherness: 'My struggle was of a different kind; I do not even know whether it was a struggle or rather a defence against acquiring the property which I regarded as distinguishing: an awareness of being different from others.'[86] This marks the moment when Richard begins to distance himself from life: 'I loved life, but I renounced it; I watched its course, but without any engagement on my part.'[87] He comes to dwell in an enclosed world of his own ruminations and obsessions. As a result of Iago's actions, he soon loses his mental balance and lapses into fits of jealousy. He reproaches Valentín, threatens him and then bursts into tears in front of him. After this incident, Richard decides to return to his family estate for a while in order to regain his equilibrium.

The coming-out narrative smoothly segues into the discourse of 'accursed homosexuality.' The place where Richard returns fails to give him the expected respite, instead bringing back memories of happy moments with Valentín, which exacerbates his acute loneliness. Richard's thoughts when he is in seclusion are crucial to understanding the following transformation he undergoes. When analysing his life, he concludes that he is not what he considered himself to be: 'My whole life […] was falsehood and fiction.'[88] Typical of coming-out discourse, this confession provokes further reflections. Against expectations, the identity crisis in

85 'El caso es que, a pesar de aquel aviso que yo había recibido sobre la verdad intrínseca de mis sentimientos, me empeñé en seguir viviendo como si nada supiera y haciendo gala ante mí mismo de un dominio sobre la naturaleza que los hechos han venido a desenmascarar de un modo tan despiadado y tan horrible.' *Ibid.*, 55–6.

86 'Mi lucha era de otra índole; no sé siquiera si había lucha; era, más bien, la defensa de una adquisición que yo consideraba distinguida: saberme distinto de los otros.' *Ibid.*, 56.

87 'Amaba la vida, pero me negaba a ella; la miraba hacer, pero sin comprometerme' (*Ibid.*). This attitude of withdrawal among homosexuals is criticised by Álvaro Pombo, particularly in the works of what is known as his 'lack-of-substance' series.

88 'Toda esa vida mía […] era una falsedad, una ficción.' *Ibid.*, 84.

this case does not lead to liberation or a positive re-appraisal; instead, Richard 'discovers' evil in himself: 'Briefly, I felt wickedness melt into my entrails. And, for the first time in my life, I loathed myself.'[89] The sense of inner depravity goes hand in hand with the disintegration of identity ('the decomposition of my nature'[90]). Richard does not recognise himself in the outburst of jealousy in front of Valentín. Because this aggravating imbalance makes him unreasonable, Richard interprets Valentín's words of forgiveness ('[N]othing matters when you are around'[91]) as an expression of indifference. Having come back to the theatre, he plays Richard Gloucester and fully identifies with his self-assessment:

> But I, that am not shaped for sportive tricks,
> Nor made to court an amorous looking glass […]
> And therefore, since I cannot prove a lover
> To entertain these fair well-spoken days,
> I am determined to prove a villain
> And hate the idle pleasures of these days.[92]

These words are a harbinger of the crime to be perpetrated by Richard during the performance of *Othello*, which will result in him regaining the unsettled balance and coherent identity: '[I]t was as if instead of death, or rather exactly through death, he achieved integrity; hopeless, but, like any other human being, craving to eventually find a particle of firmness, lost amidst the immensity, something in the semblance of a stable element.'[93]

Richard has fallen into a pitfall of identity and failed to find a way out. Biedma has proposed reading the novella as a tragedy. Within this framework, the tragic situation of the protagonist involves him being entangled in two divergent discourses: homophile discourse originating in the Hellenic tradition and the discourse of 'accursed homosexuality,' defining the identity of a homosexual in terms of evil. The alternative which the story has Richard confront is that either he recedes into bitter memories of Platonic friendship and lives in emotional agitation, having accepted the loss

89 'En una palabra, yo había sentido fundirse en mis entrañas la maldad. Y, por primera vez en mi vida, sentí aversión de mí.' *Ibid*., 87.

90 'descomposición consustancial.' *Ibid*.

91 'contigo nada tiene importancia.' *Ibid*., 62.

92 'Pero yo que no he sido formado para estas travesuras, ni para cortejar a un amoroso espejo […]. Y así, ya que no puedo mostrarme como un amante para entretener los días dedicados a la galantería, he decidido actuar como un villano y odiar los frívolos placeres de estos tiempos' (*Ibid*., 86–7). The English quotation comes from William Shakespeare, *Richard III*, ed. Barbara Mowat and Paul Werstine (Folger Shakespeare Library), I.i.14–15, 28–31, www.folgerdigitaltexts.org/html/R3.html#line-1.1.0 (accessed 19 January 2020).

93 'era como si en lugar de una muerte, o a través de ella, hubiera conseguido una integración; desposeído de la esperanza, pero como todo hombre, ansioso de encontrar por fin, perdida en la inmensidad, una partícula de firmeza, algo que me suene a firme.' *Ibid*., 90.

of the eromenos as the boy grows up and embarks upon a 'normal,' that is, heterosexual life,[94] or he resorts to crime, stops the workings of time by killing Valentín and thereby regains a sense of stability. Whatever he chooses to do, he loses his beloved. *Tertium non datur.*

As has been shown, Gil-Albert employs in his work certain traditional, ingrained clichés concerning homosexuality (e.g. a homosexual as an ephebophile, a homosexual as a criminal), which in Edelman's terms can be considered an 'inscription' of homosexuality in the text. At the same time, however, the text also performs a 'de-scription' by foregrounding the discursiveness of these clichés. Crucially, Richard's entire narrative is mediated by the literary tradition. The narrator, who seems not to have a language of his own, defines himself through 'externally' imposed notions and finds himself in the power of phantasms.[95] Versed in the Hellenic tradition, which is vividly conveyed by his 'I saw the whole of antiquity in front of me'[96] when Eros appears to him as Valentín coming out of the river, Richard is incapable of perceiving the adolescent differently than as an eromenos who is gradually growing up to engage in a relationship with a woman. The discursive character of his identification is also revealed when Richard 'discovers' evil in himself, which drives him to murder. Richard begins to define himself through a self-depiction of Gloucester, whose words he takes for his own. Besides, when he explains why he decided to make his confessions, he states: 'And yet, I feel compelled to relate it as if it were *dictated by a fictional character inside me*. And I do not know myself whether this character did not perhaps use me for his own purposes.'[97]

94 Scholars of antiquity explain that it was a 'natural' course of things to terminate the erastes-eromenos relationship when the younger male was ready to begin the life of an adult citizen, including getting married and starting a family. Paweł Fijałkowski, *Seksualność, psyche, kultura. Homoerotyzm w świecie starożytnym* (Warszawa: Eneteia, 2007), 72.

95 In a footnote to my discussion of Mazuf's literary pursuits above, I mentioned that homoerotic literature research 'does not seek to glean from the texts reflections of the author's actual experiences, but rather focuses on "figments of the imagination," that is, on the study of phantasms.' When addressing phantasms, we cannot but refer to Maria Janion's *Projekt krytyki fantazmatycznej* [*A Phantasmatic Critique Project*]. Janion's study inspired the queer sociologist Jacek Kochanowski, whose *Fantazmat zróżNICowany* [*The Différanced Phantasm*] combines queer sociology and literary research to analyse letters published in Polish gay magazines in terms of 'figments of the imagination.' In my own discussions, I emphasise first and foremost the attitudes of Spanish writers of homoerotic fiction to the entrenched literary tradition and discourses on (homo)sexuality in place. Still, every now and then I use the term 'phantasm' as an auxiliary concept to illustrate my reasoning, whereby I refer both to Janion and to Kochanowski.

96 'toda la antigüedad se me había hecho presente.' Gil-Albert, *Valentín*, 49.

97 'Y sin embargo siento el mandato de esta comunicación cual si estuviera al *dictado de un personaje fabuloso que hay en mí*. Y que no sé si lo que ha hecho ha sido utilizarme para sus fines' (*Ibid*., 88; italics mine). Incidentally, the analogy to Laurence in *Este latente mundo* is evident in this statement. When tape-recording his confessions, Laurence also felt that they were dictated by a mysterious inner

As mentioned above, the author outlined two alternative courses of action for his protagonist, without offering him a third option. At a certain point in the narrative, Richard delivers the following, oft-quoted statement: 'for we sin not only in deed, but also in negligence, and even more in misunderstanding.'[98] I propose reading Richard's misjudgement as the real cause of his tragedy. It consists in his failure to realise how dangerous it may be to surrender oneself to the power of externally imposed discourse, which affects one's perception. Richard mistook Valentín for an eromenos who grows up and leaves forever, and himself for Richard Gloucester, doomed to failure and pervaded with evil. He will only grasp his error when he hears Falstaff cry out loud: 'You madman, you wretched madman! What have you done? Valentín loved you!' – words which indicate that, as a matter of fact, there was a third option.

2.3. Tadzio's Death in Venice: From the Sublimation of Desire to *Tremendismo* in *La muerte de Tadzio* by Luis G. Martín

> These creatures achieve completeness in adolescence, which is anyway only a transitional stage; later, they may morph into grey figures that surprisingly blend in with the surroundings and that nobody could suspect, on meeting them, of having ever possessed a magnetic attraction.
>
> – Juan Gil-Albert, *Valentín*.[99]

The passage comes from Richard's musings as he contemplates Valentín through the lens of culturally entrenched notions about Greek homoerotic relations and envisions the boy as an eromenos. Luis Antonio de Villena and Jaime Gil de Biedma were in agreement that the protagonist of the novella killed his beloved in order to halt the damage wrought by time and eternise the evanescent beauty incarnated in Valentín. The motif of transience is revisited by Luis G. Martín[100] in his novel *La muerte de Tadzio* [*Tadzio's Death*] (2000).

As the title itself suggests, the book continues the story of the protagonist of Thomas Mann's famous novella. The action spans the period from

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voice – the same female voice which is identified with literature-writing throughout the novel.

98 'porque no sólo pecamos por acción sino por omisión y, más aún, por equivocación.' *Ibid*., 59.

99 'Estas criaturas suelen realizarse en la adolescencia que es, en lo demás, una estación de paso; luego pueden convertirse en unos seres grises, curiosamente diluidos en el medio que los rodea, y en los que nadie acertaría a sospechar, cuando nos cruzamos con ellos, el imán que fueron.' Gil-Albert, *Valentín*, 76.

100 Luis García Martín (b. 1962), a writer. He first published his works as Luis G. Martín and then as Luisgé Martín. The switch was in all probability caused by Martín's attempt to avoid misunderstandings and being confused with the Spanish poet and literary critic José Luis García Martín.

young Tadzio's departure from Venice till the 1980s, when the grown-up Tadeusz returns to Italy to die where Gustav von Aschenbach, his admirer from days of yore, himself passed away. Designed as a literary homage to Thomas Mann and the director Luchino Visconti, Martín's book abounds in references both to the novella and to the celebrated 1971 film. Its protagonist, Tadeusz Andresen, is not a writer but a classical music composer whose very surname brings to mind the actor starring as Tadzio in the screen adaptation of Mann's work. References to Visconti's film are quite numerous and sometimes extremely subtle. This is well exemplified in the grown-up Tadeusz's memories of the gazes exchanged with Gustav von Aschenbach. These recollections echo not so much the literary antecedent, where Aschenbach eyes the boy largely unnoticed, as Visconti's film, where Tadzio is very much aware of his good looks and explicitly teases the older man with his smile. Still, my purpose in this section is not to explore the web of intertextual connections entwining Mann's novella, Visconti's film and Martín's novel. Rather, I will focus on the position the novel takes among contemporary Spanish homoerotic writings and seek to determine whether it performs 'Mazuf's gesture' of undermining ingrained discourses and stereotypes or, on the contrary, whether it perpetuates them. Do the intertextual references in *La muerte de Tadzio* reflect 'the element of dialogism' or are they common *allégation*?[101] In other words, does Martín queer *Death in Venice*, or does he continue the inherited code characteristic of the modernist rendering of homoerotic desire?

Similarly to the two texts discussed earlier in this chapter, *Tadzio's Death* is a story spun by a first-person narrator who confesses to a crime. Tadeusz Andresen writes a farewell letter to Stefano Fornari, a reputed tenor, requesting him to sing at this funeral. At the same time, Andresen begs the singer to forgive him and have mercy on him. The point is that Fornari is the father of Gabriele, an adolescent murdered by the protagonist. In the letter, Tadeusz Andresen tells the story of his life in pre-war Warsaw, his failed marriage to Krystyna and his immigrant experiences in France and then

101 *Allégation* is a category in the typology of intertextual devices proposed by Gisèle Mathieu-Castellani. I apply it here as re-interpreted by Michał Głowiński, who defines *allégation* as 'all textual references which do not engage with the element of dialogism, ones in which a quotation or an allusion do not become a factor in polyvocality but, on the contrary, re-assert and consolidate univocity.' Michał Głowiński, *Intertekstualność, groteska, parabola. Szkice ogólne i interpretacje* (Kraków: Universitas, 2000), 23. In Głowiński's distinction between an intertextual reference and *allégation*, the former serve authors to produce new meanings and are part of the semantic structure of new works (as illustrated, for example, by references to Shakespeare's dramas in Juan Gil-Albert's *Valentín*, which I discussed in the previous chapter), while the latter denotes non-dialogic references, 'excluded from the operations of critical reflection': 'They occur when the evoked text is treated as authoritative and binding, *a priori* right and valuable. As a consequence, the citing text is subordinated to the cited text. The former is supposed to derive its own authority from the authority of the latter. […] Similarities between *allégation* and intertextuality are only external, and the two differ in all other respects.' Michał Głowiński, 'O intertekstualności,' *Pamiętnik Literacki*, 1986, 4, 90–1.

in Austria. He reveals to Fornari grim secrets about his sexual life and the fact that he has long been manipulating the singer's career. Fornari learns that as a young man he was Andresen's love interest and that Andresen has intently watched him through most of his life. The composer confesses that he has followed Fornari's love affairs with young choir singers, bribed his maids to have the singer under close surveillance and used his connections in music circles in order to further the unwitting tenor's career. He also met by chance Fornari's illegitimate son in Venice briefly before his own death. The concluding lies of the letter disclose the circumstances in which Andresen killed young Gabriele and defiled his dead body.

Andresen's tale is interspersed with numerous digressions in which he meditates on the fleeting nature of beauty, on ageing and disease and on their impact on artistic work. The novel features a range of subsidiary, often episodic plotlines, many of which are left without any closure, only serving as excuses for the protagonist to indulge in ruminations.

Similarly to Gil-Albert in *Valentín*, Martín relies on discourses developed in 20th-cetury homoerotic literature. The novel begins with descriptions of Tadzio's youth, which comply with the sublimating code employed by Thomas Mann. The modernist expression of homosexual identity typically involves premonitions of looming death, poor health and artistic pursuits: 'my health has always been weak and I've felt the coming [of death] since childhood. Indeed, throughout my lifetime I've been prone to disease and vulnerable.'[102] This depiction conforms with widespread representations of the homosexual in Western culture: 'My poor health made me a sensitive and effeminate boy, eager to engage with music and study the principles of poetry, fine arts and metaphysics.'[103] This exemplifies a textual 'inscription' of homosexuality, that is, Edelman's *homographesis* in the first sense of the term. From the very beginning of the novel, readers can easily identify Tadzio as a homosexual of 'melancholy and sombre mien.'[104] Likewise, when the ageing Tadzio's disease is mentioned, readers readily think of a stereotypical AIDS-afflicted homosexual. As his body bears the marks of disease, it transforms into a legible text: 'Though still inconspicuous, the symptoms of disease could not be concealed – first black growths, fits of fever, weight loss.'[105]

The eponymous Tadzio quickly mutates from an enticing and dainty ephebe, one we know from *Death in Venice*, into an adult man obsessed with ageing and the impermanence of beauty. Aware of having lost his

102 'tuve siempre una débil salud que me acostumbró desde niño a presentirla [la muerte]. Durante toda mi vida fui, en efecto, un hombre enfermizo y delicado.' Luis G. Martín, *La muerte de Tadzio* (Madrid: Alfaguara, 2000), 14.

103 'Me convertí, como dictaba mi salud, en un muchacho sensible y afeminado que cultivaba la música y se educaba en los saberes de la poesía, las artes plásticas y la metafísica.' *Ibid*., 15.

104 'expresión sombría y melancólica.' *Ibid*., 16.

105 'Los signos de la enfermedad, aunque aún mansos, no podían disfrazarse: las primeras carnosidades negras, las fiebres, el enflaquecimiento.' *Ibid*., 13–14.

former allure, he becomes a voyeur who spies on young males in train station toilets, parks and dark corners. He is fascinated with adolescents from the fringes of society who resemble characters in Jean Genet's novels. The narrative is coloured by characteristic imagery of 'accursed homosexuality' literature, for example:

> I'll tell you honestly that I like the debased world. I have a liking – I'd even say a weakness – for the fallen, for thugs and ruffians. […] They come to these places, to train stations, to brothels in search of all marvels. Don't you think that in order to attain this superior happiness, one must have some incurable addiction, be persecuted, afflicted by a painful disease or insane?[106]

The narrator reproduces *malditista* discourse, with its characteristic incorporation of the homophobic imaginary, where homosexuals are viewed as criminals and social outcasts who chase their 'sick' desires in places which are squalid and repulsive to decent citizens. Crucially, the discourse of 'accursed homosexuality' does not question such a conceptualisation of homosexuality. On the contrary, it accepts this notion for its own and converts the fringes of society into a site of resistance against the bourgeois values. Does this happen in *La muerte de Tadzio* as well?

The imitation of this distinctive Genetian rhetoric is not coupled with the acceptance of the fringes of society as a space of one's own. On the one hand, Andresen is captivated by young males with scarred faces, but on the other he feels a typically bourgeois revulsion at the thought of sexual contacts between older men and adolescent boys. He usually limits himself to voyeuristic practices, and when he overcomes his qualms, he feels contempt for himself: 'I've long loathed myself when going to bed with young and handsome boys. It's not the feeling of sin, but of ugliness, asymmetry. Of imperfection.'[107] He also adds: 'I felt ashamed, when kissing young boys whom I didn't deserve.'[108] These confessions are provoked by a recollection of an incident in a train station toilet that he witnessed during one of his trips to Milan. Amidst the crowd of passengers, he caught a glimpse of a young, handsome man who was at the same time eyed by an elderly, refined man. The narrator describes following them to the toilet, where the two males masturbated each other. The sight of the lecherous gentleman

106 'Le confieso que me gusta el encanallamiento. Tengo simpatía – diría incluso que cierta predilección – por los seres caídos, por los hampones y los rufianes. […] Acuden a estos lugares, a las estaciones de tren y a los prostíbulos, en busca de todas las maravillas. ¿No cree usted también que para alcanzar esa clase superior de felicidad hay que poseer un vicio incurable, sufrir una persecución, tener alguna enfermedad dolorosa o alguna demencia?' *Ibid.*, 23.

107 'hace ya mucho tiempo que siento aborrecimiento de mí mismo cuando me acuesto con chicos jóvenes y guapos. No es una sensación de pecado, sino de fealdad, de asimetría. De imperfección.' *Ibid.*, 31.

108 'me avergonzaba al besar a chicos jóvenes de los que no era merecedor.' *Ibid.*

filled him with abhorrence and triggered a memory of Gustav von Aschenbach. A meaningful look from the older man, whom he dubbed 'Mr Aschenbach,'[109] startled Andresen and made him realise that he had become one of the grotesque figures he despised deep down in his heart. The protagonist appears as a homosexual who has strongly interiorised homophobia and accepts intercourse between males only if they are beautiful adolescents. He writes to Fornari: 'Just imagine […] the pathetic motions of two ancient men clasped in mutual embrace, of two old and pot-bellied bodies, their dry skin smeared with ointments and covered in make-up.'[110] Andresen believes that such an act 'contravenes the law of nature [*sic!*].'[111]

That Andresen identifies with Gustav von Aschenbach can also be seen in the protagonist's art. Andresen is aware that he is incrementally turning into a mirror image of his former admirer. The difference between them lies in that Andresen engages in homosexual relationships. Nevertheless, all of Tadeusz's relationships are brief and unsatisfactory. The protagonist's promiscuity does not lead to fulfilment as he obsessively mulls over perfect beauty. Consequently, he never ceases in his quest for young boys who embody this ideal. He spends most of his time traversing streets, parks and train stations, where he follows and watches one object of fascination after another. Thoughts of ideal beauty and of death are sources of inspiration for his art. This is another point in which he resembles Gustav von Aschenbach. Such an approach overtly echoes the sublimating code of homoerotic literature specific to modernism.

After long years of searching, the dying 'Aschenbach' eventually finds his 'Tadzio' in Venice. Enter Gabriele, a friend to the son of Alessandra Meldolesi, an admirer of Andresen's music. Slowly coming to terms with death, Andresen is again aware of encountering exquisite beauty. The more Tadeusz's death nears, the more acutely he feels the veritably diabolic power of beauty and loses his sense of balance. Andresen's anxiety is additionally fuelled by Gabriele's ambiguous behaviour, as the young man is aware of being attractive and – like Tadzio in the film – engages in a game of seduction with his admirer. It is in these circumstances that Andresen finds out that Marco, Alessandra's son, is dying. Tadeusz composes a piece of music in his honour, all the while keeping it secret from Alessandra that the most beautiful music he has so far created was made with Gabriele, and not Marco, on his mind. In this way, the composer sublimates homoerotic desire into art, which is what he has been doing throughout his life: 'Whatever I have composed has always

109 'caballero Aschenbach.' *Ibid.*, 33.

110 'Figúrese […] el gesto ridículo de dos hombres viejos abrazándose, de dos cuerpos rancios y panzudos, cubiertos de resecamientos, entintados de ungüentos y de maquillajes.' *Ibid.*, 32.

111 'desobedece las leyes de la naturaleza.' *Ibid.*, 31.

been prompted by the death or contemplation of one boy or another.'[112] Nevertheless, the novel eventually abandons the sublimating code and, as I will seek to show below, lends to the discourse of 'accursed homosexuality' certain overtones typical of Spanish literature produced in the immediate aftermath of the Civil War.

La muerte de Tadzio includes references not only to *Death in Venice* and to the *malditista* tendency in homoerotic literature. Martín's book bears a certain similarity to novels such as Camilo José Cela's *La Familia de Pascual Duarte* (*The Family of Pascual Duarte*), which, as already mentioned, is an epitome of Spanish *tremendismo*. *Tremendismo* (i.e. tremendism) emerged as a literary style in the 1940s in conjunction with the traumatic experiences of the generation of writers who had witnessed the Spanish Civil War. While to classify *Tadzio's Death* within this historical tendency would be misguided and ungrounded, it is obvious that prior writings – especially works which have made it into the contemporary canon – come to serve as a framework of reference for later generations of writers and as components of a certain convention. This is the context in which I propose examining some aspects of *La muerte de Tadzio*.

Similarly to *Este latente mundo* and *Valentín*, *La muerte de Tadzio* is a first-person narrative delivered by a main protagonist who is implicated in a crime. The same convention is employed by Cela's 1942 novel, which is acclaimed as one of the greatest achievements of Spanish 20th-century prose and recognised as the pioneering work of a literary trend labelled by critics as *tremendismo* (from Spanish *tremendo* – terrible, awful). *Tremendismo* is a specifically Spanish development characterised by portrayals of reality in its most brutal, pessimistic and horrifying variety, as well as by a fascination with the deformed, the exaggerated and the grotesque.[113] Besides, the authors associated with *tremendismo* typically employ the narrative devices of internal monologue, introspection and retrospection.[114]

As already mentioned, in *Tadzio's Death*, Martín draws on the literature of 'accursed homosexuality' when depicting episodes of homosexual encounters in train station toilets or in Parisian clubs of ill repute. In his memories, the narrator revisits moments from the past (retrospection), which prompts him to examine his own ideas of beauty, transience and death (introspection). Allusions to Visconti's film serve as starting points for pondering old age in the context of homosexuality. Old men are framed as deformed, ridiculous in their ugliness, grotesquely made up (as Aschenbach in the film), 'smeared with ointments

112 'Todo cuanto escribí tuvo fundamento en la muerte o en la contemplación de algún muchacho.' *Ibid.*, 200.

113 Francis Donahue, 'Cela and Spanish "Tremendismo,"' *Western Humanities Review*, 1966, 20, no. 4, 305.

114 *Ibid.*

and covered in make-up,'[115] which is construed as an inept effort to disguise the passage of time: 'these camouflages, these cosmetics, these forgeries.'[116] The narrator adds that 'only old age is more carnivalesque and ridiculous than adolescence,'[117] whereby he contrasts the natural inclination of the young to indulge in unseemly jokes and behaviour with the degenerate dissimulations of coquettish, grotesque old men, who need make-up to perform their advances ('this is what we make ourselves up for').[118]

As a convention that deliberately wallows in the beastly and the horrifying, *tremendismo* resonates in the novel's two passages relating murders. One of the victims is Tadeusz's lover, Adrien Chénier, whom the protagonist met in the Parisian club Le Metal, where Adrien was to die a few years later. Le Metal is painted as a murky basement, where faces cannot be recognised in the dimmed light of a weak bulb. It is a scene of illicit deals, prostitution and trysts of homosexuals cruising for casual sex. Andresen remembers that it was in the times when sadomasochistic practices, Chénier's go-to sexual activity, came into vogue in Paris. Adrien dies in front of the club's regulars upon leaving a dark room where he sustained a lethal wound. The murderer

> picked a stranger and went to a dark room with him. There, having stripped him, he pushed his hand deep into his guts inch by inch. Then, when the guy was already moaning, he slowly opened his fist, drew a razor blade he had concealed in his clenched fingers and cut his bowel open.[119]

Breaching the greatest taboo, this depiction is designed to shock readers and stir homophobic fears in those of them who perceive homosexuals as a threat to their physical integrity. Interestingly, as the episode itself is inconsequential for the plot, it was only woven into the texture of the novel as an element designed to inspire horror and thus classifiable as *tremendo*.

Similar associations are bred by the scene of Gabriele's death, the difference being that this episode has a bearing on the interpretation of the novel. Marco's friend, in whom Tadeusz Andresen sees ideal and unattainable beauty incarnate, becomes a new obsession of the ageing composer.

115 'entintados de ungüentos y de maquillajes.' Martín, *Muerte*, 32.
116 'los camuflajes, los afeites, la falsificación.' *Ibid*., 31.
117 'sólo la vejez es más carnavalesca y ridícula que la adolescencia.' *Ibid*., 25.
118 'nos maquillamos para hacerlo.' *Ibid*.
119 'había elegido a un desconocido y había entrado junto a él en la habitación oscura. Allí, después de desnudarle, metió un brazo dentro de sus tripas poco a poco. Luego, cuando el otro ya gemía, abrió muy despacio el puño, sujetó entre los dedos la cuchilla que llevaba escondida en él y cortó el intestino.' *Ibid*., 226.

Nearly reconciled with death, Andresen feels renewed pangs of desire, and Gabriele himself reminds him of all the adolescents from the bygone days whom Tadeusz once rejected after a short acquaintance: 'I began to want – as I wanted Gabriele – all those past lovers, whom I let go without even giving them an opportunity to really be my lovers.'[120] Why is it Gabriele, rather than anybody else, that arouses such a powerful desire in him? The answer is to be found in an episode in which Gabriele reveals that he is a son of Stefan Fornari, a heterosexual tenor who represents supreme beauty, which can only be contemplated but never attained by the (homosexual) admirer. In this sense, Fornari was to Andresen what Tadzio had been to Aschenbach. The awareness of associating with a son of his past love interest makes the composer feel that he is communing with a beauty of diabolic provenance. Briefly before dying, Tadeusz strangles Gabriele, an act which he subsequently reports in his letter to Fornari:

> Then I asked Gabriele who his father was in order to hear him pronounce your name, my friend Fornari. 'Stefano Fornari,' he said. He didn't stir. I looked at him again and thought that beauty was the work of Lucifer, the passion of a monster. From my nightgown pocket I took out a strap I'd stolen from his room and wrapped it around his neck. […] He was staring into the sky with the expression of somebody who knew they were dying and that this was the last thing they'd see in life. Then he closed his eyes and slumped onto the floor. […] At dusk, I took Gabriele in my arms […], carried him to bed and undressed him. […] And when I opened his eyes so that he could look – the way it always should be done with dead people – I eventually understood that *beauty had not been created to be contemplated, but to feed lust. And then I had sex with him*.[121]

Tadeusz's last confidences reverberate with *lo tremendo*. In this way, the sublimation of homoerotic desire recedes to make room for an aesthetics

120 'comencé a tener deseo – al tenerlo de Gabriele – de esos amantes que había dejado marchar sin darles ocasión de serlo verdaderamente.' *Ibid*., 140.

121 'Luego le pregunté a Gabriele quién era su padre para escuchar cómo decía su nombre, amigo Fornari. «Stefano Fornari», dijo. No se movió. Volví a mirarle y pensé que la belleza era obra de Lucifer, la pasión de un monstruo. Saqué del bolsillo de mi batín el hilo de cuero que había robado en su habitación y lo puse alrededor de su cuello. […] Miraba hacia el cielo con la expresión de quien sabe que está muriendo y que aquello que ve es lo último que verá nunca. Luego cerró los ojos y cayó al suelo. […] Cuando anocheció, cogí a Gabriele entre mis brazos […], le llevé a la cama y le quité la ropa. […] Y al abrirle los ojos para que mirara – como ha de hacerse siempre con los cadáveres –, comprendí por fin que *la belleza no fue creada para la contemplación, sino para la lascivia. Y entonces forniqué con él*.' *Ibid*., 273–4 (italics mine).

typical of *tremendismo*. Martín 'rewrites' the motifs borrowed from *Death in Venice*, builds on the discourse of 'accursed homosexuality' and imbues it with some distinctive features of the Spanish literary tradition.

Martín's novel in many ways resembles the other texts discussed in this chapter. All of them – *La muerte de Tadzio*, *Valentín* and *Este latente mundo* – rely on various conceptualisations of homosexuality, have first-person narrators who disclose motives behind their crimes and address issues related to a homosexual artist's identity. However, *Tadzio's Death* is a book in which 'Mazuf's gesture' (conceived as intercepting a discourse in order to 'rewrite' it from a queer perspective) is an abortive gesture. Why this is so will be more readily graspable if we examine the novel through the lens of Edelman's *homographesis*.

In the foregoing sections of this chapter, I argue that both *Este latente mundo* and *Valentín* problematise homosexual identity by revealing it to be the effect of 'inscription.' For this purpose, their authors play with various conceptualisations of homosexuality, juxtapose them within one text and, more essentially, link them to writing as an act of meaning-making, of arbitrarily (re-)arranging 'scattered letters.' Homosexual identity (the way it is perceived in Western culture) appears as a product of literary production, as *in*scribed in the text. The narrator of *Este latente mundo* dictates his tale, propelled by his inner female voice, which is explicitly linked to subversive writing in the novel (it is the same voice that was used by the ventriloquist Mazuf). The narrator of *Valentín* writes down his confession directed by 'a fictional character inside [him],'[122] which corresponds to my interpretation of the narrator-protagonist as a figure commanded by an external discourse. Does *Tadzio's Death* include elements which support an equally deconstructive reading? Certainly, there are passages which suggest exactly this, for example, 'confessions which are to be recorded in conformity with fixed rules always mutate into literary musings and rhetorical devices.'[123] The narrator is aware that what he is relating is a literary construct. The words refer to one of the farewell letters he drafts before dying to send to his friends, along with his letter to Fornari. However, he never completes the letter to Gabriele's father, leaving it to be the only one unspoilt by literary artifice: 'I tore the letter into pieces having written but two or three paragraphs. For I immediately became entangled in relating inconsequential trifles from my life, *in twisted words* and allegories which obscured more than they illuminated.'[124]

122 'un personaje fabuloso que hay en mí.' Gil-Albert, *Valentín*, 88.

123 'las confesiones que han de ser hechas de acuerdo a un protocolo se convierten siempre en pensamientos literarios o retoricismos.' Martín, *Muerte*, 90.

124 'Rompí la carta cuando llevaba escritos apenas dos o tres párrafos, pues enseguida fui enmarañándome en el relato de las menudencias de mi vida, *en palabras torcidas* y en alegorías que más iban encubriendo que revelando.' *Ibid.* (italics mine).

The Spanish critic Alfredo Martínez Expósito has called subversive homoerotic literature 'twisted writing' (*escrituras torcidas*). The narrator announces that his intent is to avoid 'twisted words' (*palabras torcidas*) in his tale. Although the critic's expression comes from 2004 and the novel was written in 2000, it is quite rewarding to conclude the explorations of *La muerte de Tadzio* by arbitrarily juxtaposing these two utterances. My point is that Martín's novel is devoid of the investment recognisable in *Este latente mundo* and *Valentín*. Specifically, *Tadzio's Death* thematises homosexual identity, rather than problematising it, by reproducing and copying stereotypes rampant in the homophobic imaginary of Western culture. In Edelman's terminology, Martín performs an 'inscription' of homosexuality in the text by modelling his protagonist into a homosexual criminal and a diseased homosexual. But his novel is not an instance of *homographesis* since it lacks what Edelman refers to as 'de-scription.' Instead of 'twisted writing' and a copyist's rebellion against the ingrained tradition, the novel perpetuates motifs and codes, employing them in the *allégation* mode. At the same time, it is emptied of elements that destabilise meanings ascribed to homosexuality, which is patently visible in its articulation of AIDS, a theme that *La muerte de Tadzio* shares with *Este latente mundo*. Let us attend for a moment to a fine, but significant, difference between the ways in which the two novels handle the AIDS motif.

While Tadeusz Andresen's ailment is never directly named in the novel, there are multiple clues suggesting that the composer suffers from AIDS. Early in the novel, the narrator mentions 'black growths,'[125] which immediately make one think of Kaposi's sarcoma. When drafting his letter to Fornari, the protagonist is seventy-two years old, which makes it easy to calculate that he is dying at the time when an AIDS epidemic is breaking out across the world. Waiting for death in Venice, he has sex with Fabrizio, a young Italian who offers sexual services to the guests of the hotel where Andresen is lodged: 'I let him kiss me and be reckless – the plague was going to kill me – in some ways we used our bodies.'[126] The wording of the passage rather directly implies the sexually transmitted plague of the 20th century. Tadeusz tells Fabrizio that he is going to die of 'the plague' and adds: 'But that doesn't matter […]. One always dies of the plague.'[127] Though phrased as an impersonal sentence, the utterance does not sound as generalising as Laurence's words in *Este latente mundo*. Rather, it makes readers recall the death of Gustav von Aschenbach, a victim of the cholera epidemic in Venice. Emphatically, Aschenbach appears as a character in an acclaimed

125 'carnosidades negras.' *Ibid*., 14.

126 'Permití que me besara y que actuase con imprudencia – la peste que me mataría – en algunos tratos de la carne.' *Ibid*., 260.

127 'Pero eso da igual […]. Siempre se muere por la peste.' *Ibid*., 263.

book that equates homosexuality with disease and death within a well-known modernist code. If anything, the context provided by *Death in Venice* is only too suggestive here. The fact that the Spanish text uses the definite article *la* instead of the indefinite *una* at this point additionally gestures at a very concrete disease that Tadeusz has contracted, that is, AIDS as a new iteration of the homosexual-killing plague. This is significantly different from *Este latente mundo* with its prediction that 'We're all going to die of the common cold.'[128] Linking disease to the contingent and the non-culpable, the narrator in *This Breathing World* casts it as a metaphor for death itself as an inseparable part of life. In *Tadzio's Death*, *la peste* is consciously transmitted by the older homosexual to the younger, which re-affirms readers' belief that AIDS is a plague visited as a punishment for acts against nature. Martín's 'rewriting' of *Death in Venice* should thus be considered an instance of *allégation* rather than as an inherently subversive 'Mazuf gesture.' The point is that the novel only further perpetuates the deep-rooted and widespread cultural representations instead of engaging in a critical dialogue with the tradition of homoerotic literature and disrupting its conventional codes. In copying a certain discourse, the author upholds the perspective of the homophobic imaginary and fails to adopt the queer perspective.

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128 De Juan, *Breathing*, 218; 'todos vamos a morir de un simple resfriado.' De Juan, *Latente*, 357.

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3 Rewriting the National Tradition

3.1. The 'Intercourse of Saints' in *A Cock-Eyed Comedy* (*Carajicomedia*) by Juan Goytisolo

The metaphor of the recalcitrant copyist who deliberately alters inherited discourses in order to rewrite literary tradition in a new cultural conjuncture perfectly encapsulates the work of Juan Goytisolo (1931–2017). Hailing from a rich bourgeois family, Goytisolo invented and honed his own, inimitable style and made his mark on the history of contemporary Spanish letters as perhaps the most subversive of its writers. Similarly to his brothers, the poet José Agustín (1928–1999) and the novelist Luis (born in 1935), he proved to be one of the fiercest critics of General Franco's regime and, at the same time, a dedicated demystifier of national myths, which he denounced in what has come to be known as a 'trilogy of treason.' Focused on Álvaro Mendiola, the series includes *Señas de identidad* (1966), *Reivindicación del conde don Julián* (1970) and *Juan sin Tierra* (1975), published respectively in English as *Marks of Identity* (1969), *Count Julian* (1974) and *Juan the Landless* (1977).

Juan Goytisolo is one of those writers whose work can barely be comprehended without some attention given to their respective biographies. As was the case with Marcel Proust, both Juan and his two brothers imbued their texts with an unmistakably autobiographic tenor, converting their own lives into literary material. Given this, before discussing *Cock-Eyed Comedy*, Goytisolo's central novel from a queer-critical viewpoint, a closer look at key events in the author's life is in order. His work has been profoundly shaped by a series of circumstances, including his membership in Barcelona's bourgeoisie, his mother's tragic death during the Spanish Civil War and his decision to emigrate, which eventually resulted in him discovering the world of Islam and accepting his own homosexuality.

In his comprehensive study titled *Los Goytisolo*, Miguel Dalmau recounts that the progenitor of the family emigrated to Cuba in the first half of the 19th century, where he made a fortune as an owner of a sugar cane plantation and, importantly, multiple slaves. The source of

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the Goytisolo family's wealth was to become a shameful story of 'original sin,' which bedevilled the young writer and made him despise his own social class and its enshrined values.[1] This was one of the triggers of Goytisolo's communist sympathies as a young man and his support for Fidel Castro's Cuban revolution.

Another reason for the Goytisolo brothers' leftist leanings arose from the experience of a family tragedy during the Spanish Civil War. Barcelona, which was held by the Republicans, was targeted by the raids of Italian aircraft dispatched to the Spanish skies by Mussolini to help General Franco. On 17th March 1938, Julia Gay, the writer's mother, who ventured downtown that day, was killed in one such raid. Interestingly, when the war ended, the father made every effort to reassure the three brothers that their mother had been killed by 'the Reds,' which may have been a ploy designed to safeguard the family's security amidst the uncertainty of the post-war years.[2] Growing up, the sons soon discovered the truth and in their adult lives worked to overthrow the right-wing dictatorship by cultivating contact with the supporters of communism as the 'natural' political opposition in the Spanish reality.

Indoctrinated with right-wing ideology at school and university, but at the same time, increasingly critical of the history of his paternal family, Juan Goytisolo decided to emigrate early in his career as a writer. His destination – Paris – was the capital of the artistic world and, as it seemed to him, a space of political freedom. In 1955, he received an offer to publish with the famous Librairie Gallimard, which was quite interested in a Spanish, anti-regime writer with left-wing convictions. When visiting the publishing house, Goytisolo met his future partner, Monique Lange, who was working in the translation department and was friends with Jean Genet. Lange invited the two writers to dinner, during which an interesting conversation took place:

> Barely had Goytisolo worked through to the playwright's manner when he blurted straight into his face: 'And you? Are you a fag?' Paradoxically, the question instantaneously dispelled the writer's reserve. Having overcome his qualms, he confessed that he'd already had homosexual experiences, something that he never told anyone and that won him Monique's liking. However, this made no impression on Genet, who nailed him with the following memorable words: 'Experiences! Everybody has had experiences! You talk like some Anglo-Saxon homosexual! I meant dreams, desires, fantasies.'[3]

1 Miguel Dalmau, *Los Goytisolo* (Barcelona: Anagrama, 1999), 16–24.

2 *Ibid*., 134.

3 'Cuando Goytisolo apenas había asimilado los modos del dramaturgo, éste le preguntó a bocajarro: "Y usted, ¿es maricón?" Paradójicamente, esa pregunta hizo que la reserva del novelista saltara hecha añicos. Vencido su pudor, le confesó que había

Indeed, at that time Goytisolo had already had some tentative homosexual experiences in Barcelona's so-called Chinese quarter (El Raval), which was the city's hub of artistic bohemian life. Yet it was not before moving to France, where attractive males of Arabic origin were to be seen everywhere and where he associated with people like Jean Genet, that he began to think of himself as a homosexual. Still, it took more than the first meeting with 'Saint Genet' for this to happen; the realisation only crystallised a few years later, when the first signs of crisis appeared in his relationship with Monique Lange.[4]

The talk of 'dreams, desires, fantasies' must have imprinted itself on Goytisolo's memory and reverberated in his mind when he first visited Barbès, a Parisian neighbourhood inhabited by immigrants from the Maghreb. The trigger that propelled the writer to more boldly explore this enclave of the Arab minority was provided by the *ratonnade*,[5] a series of political developments in France initiated by what has been dubbed the Paris massacre in mid-October 1961: 'For somebody like Goytisolo, who sought in France what could not be found in Spain, that is, freedom, the "rat hunt" was a double shock.'[6] His biographer explains that Goytisolo's disappointment with the French government's operations was accompanied by the discovery of 'the beauty of the Maghrebis, whose good looks replicated those of the clear faces from the past that appeared in what he himself calls his "remote fantasies and dreams."'[7] For Goytisolo, the events in Paris brought to light not only the brutality of modern European civilisation but also his own homoerotic desires deeply suppressed by his rigorous Catholic upbringing. Long years of containing his homosexual inclinations resulted in aggravating mental tensions, which adversely affected his relationship with Monique Lange. When she was away from Paris in spring 1963, Goytisolo rambled in the Barbès neighbourhood, looking for contact with the minority that fascinated him. Soon enough, he met Mohammed, his first Arab lover, and

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tenido experiencias homosexuales, algo que nunca había dicho a nadie y que le granjeó la simpatía de Monique; no obstante, eso no impresionó a Genet, quien volvió a la carga en frase memorable: "¡Experiencias! ¡Todo el mundo ha tenido experiencias! ¡Habla usted como los pederastas anglosajones! Yo me refería a sueños, deseos, fantasmas."' *Ibid.*, 307.

4 Incidentally, Monique Lange eventually came to terms with her husband's homosexual preferences and the couple lived in an open relationship until Lange's death in 1996.

5 *Raton* is a diminutive of the French *rat* (English: rat) and at the same time a racist term for Maghrebi migrants in France. The *ratonnade* denotes a period of brutal persecutions of Muslim immigrants who supported Algeria's demands of independence in the war with France in 1954–1962.

6 'Para alguien como Goytisolo, que buscaba en Francia la libertad inexistente en España, la "caza de ratones" supuso un doble *shock*.' Dalmau, *Goytisolo*, 383.

7 'la belleza de los magrebíes, cuyos rasgos eran idénticos a los rostros que aparecían con nitidez en lo que él llama sus "remotas fantasías y ensueños."' *Ibid.*

from that moment on there was no denying that 'he was entirely, definitely and irrevocably homosexual.'[8] This realisation was coupled with a strong resolution to learn about Arabic culture, which had been ousted from the Iberian Peninsula in the name of the Catholic, imperial and monolithic Spain – a Spain that Goytisolo was equally 'entirely, definitely and irrevocably' turning his back on.

Let us return to literature, though. In the mid-1960s, Goytisolo was aware that he owed his literary position not so much to his art as to his political engagement and connections with Parisian intellectuals. An identity and artistic crisis made him look for inspiration in North Africa, whence he eventually could take stock of his prior private and professional life with some distance. Eyeing the Spanish shores from afar, he concluded that his future works must by written from the position of the periphery. At that moment, however, he was not yet capable of giving these thoughts a tangible shape. According to Miguel Dalmau, a miscarried love affair with a Moroccan he had met in Tangier, which terminated in an outburst of violence, was the turning point.[9] Badly beaten by his lover, Goytisolo resolved to adopt an aggressive stance toward his own hegemonic culture, of which he was a representative in the eyes of the inhabitants of the former colony.[10] From then on, he would write 'against those windmills or giants called religion-motherland-past-childhood.'[11] It was after this breakthrough that an idea for the second instalment of the Álvaro Mendiola trilogy germinated in his mind. This time, the writer's alter ego identified himself with the legendary figure of the medieval don Julián, an arch-traitor and an ally of the Muslims.[12] Tellingly, Goytisolo repeatedly repudiated his work from before the publication of *Marks of Identity*, embracing the writing of this novel as his second, genuine debut.[13] In one of his texts, he even paraphrased Flaubert's oft-quoted words and asserted: 'Don Julián, c'est moi.'[14]

The new literary project, which inveighed against the hegemonic tendencies in Spanish culture ignited by the Catholic Monarchs in the times of Reconquista, required a profound knowledge of both the language and classic Spanish literature, especially of the Golden Age, dating back

8 'que era total, definitiva e irremediablemente homosexual,' qtd. in *Ibid.*, 403.

9 *Ibid.*, 468.

10 Goytisolo would later reference this attitude in the title of his collection of essays: *Pájaro que ensucia su propio nido* [*A Bird that Fouls Its Own Nest*].

11 'contra esos molinos o gigantes llamados religión-patria-familia-pasado-niñez,' qtd. in Dalmau, *Goytisolo*, 487.

12 Don Julián was a semi-legendary Visigoth governor in North Africa whose daughter's honour was stained by Roderick, the last king of the Visigoths. Julián avenged the disgrace by allying himself with the Saracens and helping them invade the Iberian Peninsula in 711.

13 Dalmau, *Goytisolo*, 493.

14 *Ibid.*, 491.

to the 16th and 17th centuries. Goytisolo certainly counts among its most prominent scholars,[15] his expertise translating into the erudite and intertextual character of his novels. One drawback of this refinement lies in the fact that it may make reading his novels challenging to readers who are not familiar with the Spanish literary tradition.

As the quotation above makes quite explicit, religion – specifically, Catholicism – is one of the 'windmills or giants' which Goytisolo assails in his writing. Published in 2000, his novel entitled *Carajicomedia de Fray Bugeo Montesino y otros pájaros de vario plumaje y pluma* (*A Cock-Eyed Comedy Starring Fray Bugeo Montesino and Other Fairies of Motley Feather and Fortune*) expresses utterly anti-clerical sentiments and is at the same time one of the best examples of the queer 'rewriting' of literary tradition that recent Spanish fiction has to offer.

There is an interesting coincidence to this. Goytisolo, who drew on the classics such as St John of the Cross, St Teresa of Ávila, Juan Ruiz, Mateo Alemán and Cervantes, as well as Islamic mystics, whose works he used in his own literary writings as a hypotext[16] (in Gérard Genette's terms), frequently referred to himself as a 'scribe' and a 'copyist'[17] appropriating other people's texts. Such self-ironic allusions to his own writing techniques abound in *A Cock-Eyed Comedy*:

> First in Barcelona, then in Paris and different missionary territories, he preached by word and deed the way to holiness and mingled with writers of the caliber of Genet, Barthes, Sarduy, Jaime Gil de Biedma

15 Juan Goytisolo lectured on Spanish Literature in the US from 1969 to 1975. Thus, his study of the Spanish literary tradition was driven not only by his artistic aspirations but also by his university obligations. In all probability, the two factors combined to affect the path that the writer chose to follow in his creative writing.

16 Goytisolo's intertextual repertoire is far more inclusive than that. For example, his *Las semanas del jardín* (literally: *Weeks in the Garden*, published in English as *The Garden of Secrets*) features intertextual references to Jan Potocki's *The Manuscript Found in Saragossa*. In a notable episode, the narrator spots a tombstone with an epitaph reading 'Alphonse van Worden, 1903–1972,' and the bizarre inscription makes him contemplate the possibility of the life-after-life of the protagonist of this favourite novel. See Juan Goytisolo, *Obras completas IV. Novelas (1988–2003)* (Barcelona: Galaxia Gutenberg, 2007), 612–13.

17 The hallmarks of Goytisolo's writing include not only the strongly counter-cultural message but also profuse formal experimentation (second-person narration, idiosyncratic punctuation, non-linear plots, etc.). Goytisolo even decided to have *Las semanas del jardín* published without his name on the cover. It features a photo of Goytisolo, while the place where the publisher Alfaguara usually puts authors' names is occupied by a phrase reading 'Un círculo de lectores' (A readers' club). There is also a suggestion for readers that the texts were arranged in a random order and that an 'anonymous scribe' was tasked with sequencing them. For a more detailed discussion of formal experimentation in this novel, see Alison Ribeiro de Menezes, *Juan Goytisolo: The Author as Dissident* (Woodbridge: Tamesis, 2005), 170–6.

> and Juan Goytisolo, whom he occasionally alludes to as 'the copyist' and his 'disciple in Barcelona,' making fun of his literary poaching and undue appropriation of the diaries, drafts and notes in the First Part of his work in order to concoct fictitious novels and biographies of his own.[18]

In and for this book, I have coined the phrase 'Mazuf's gesture' to refer to the practice of turning other writers' texts inside out from a dissident standpoint. I suspect that some tampering with the already famous paraphrase 'don Julián, c'est moi' in order to clandestinely re-cast it as 'Mazuf, c'est moi' in the quiet seclusion of the library would make Goytisolo applaud. His enthusiastic approval would be all the more likely is the Goytisolean 'scribe' – particularly in the context of his novel *Las virtudes del pájaro solitario* (*The Virtues of the Solitary Bird*) – is not only a metaphor for formal experiments but also a placeholder for what, from a queer perspective, can be described as 'contagious writing' (*escritura contagiosa*). Let us investigate this issue.

In his introduction to *Obras completas IV. Novelas (1988–2003)* [*Collected Works IV: Novels (1988–2003)*] Goytisolo explains the circumstances in which he wrote *Las virtudes del pájaro solitario* (1988), a novel intended as a tribute to St John of the Cross and to the gay victims of the AIDS epidemic. In the mid-1980s, Goytisolo was afflicted with various treatment-resistant ailments which worryingly resembled the symptoms of HIV infection. As it turned out later, these were false alarms, but the strains of that time and intense thoughts about the new epidemic sparked inspiration for Goytisolo's first novel of a queer, rather than gay, colouring. The eponymous 'solitary bird' refers on the one hand to a Sufi metaphor[19] and on the other to Cuban homosexuals,[20] who were condemned and interned by the Castro regime and quarantined for fear of spreading the epidemic. In the novel, this contemporary *auto-da-fé* parallels the Holy Inquisition's obsession with the purity of blood and mind.

18 Juan Goytisolo, *A Cock-Eyed Comedy Starring Fray Bugeo Montesino and Other Fairies of Motley Feather and Fortune*, trans. Peter Bush (San Francisco: City Light Books, 2005), 12. 'Primero en Barcelona, luego en París y en diferentes tierras de misión, predicó la palabra y con el ejemplo el camino de escala a la santidad y se relacionó con escritores del fuste de Jean Genet, Roland Barthes, Severo Sarduy, Jaime Gil de Biedma y Juan Goytisolo, al que alude en ocasiones como "el copista" y "discípulo barcelonés," ironizando sobre su fisgoneo literario y apropiación indebida de los dietarios, borradores y notas de la Primera Parte de su obra para la elaboración de novelas y autobiografías ficticias.' Goytisolo, *Obras*, 643–4.

19 Alison Ribeiro de Menezes observes that, in the novel, Goytisolo sought to reproduce St John of the Cross's lost work *Tratado de las propiedades del pájaro solitario* [*Treatise on the Qualities of the Solitary Bird*], a text purportedly inspired by Sufi mysticism. Ribeiro de Menezes, *Juan Goytisolo*, 145.

20 As already explained in Chapter 1, *pájaro* (bird) is a popular term for a homosexual, for example in the Antilles.

The famous incarceration of St John by the Carmelites from Toledo is another analogy to the predicament of the Cuban HIV carriers. In the novel, St John of the Cross epitomises all dissidents persecuted for non-conformity and cultural heterodoxy,[21] and his writings bear the signs of 'contagion' with a foreign element.

In this way, Goytisolo lent artistic expression to the problems that haunted the LGBT community in the wake of the AIDS epidemic and accused mainstream culture of disseminating intolerance and continuing inquisitorial attitudes, which the Spanish mentality had harboured for ages. Later, he described the origin of the novel, recalling: 'The theme of death and physical contagion and of "polluting" ideas and words completely possessed me.'[22] He added in the same context: 'I had a feeling that somebody (who?) had programmed this in my mind, and that I was only following words dictated to me; that somebody else was the author, and that what I was doing was the work of a common scribe.'[23] Given that in his other, autobiographical texts, Goytisolo repeatedly defined himself as a homosexual writer in terms of a 'ventriloquist,'[24] it is beyond reasonable doubt that 'Mazuf, c'est lui.'

The discussion in the previous chapter indicates that 'Mazuf's gesture' (whether successful or not entirely, as is the case with *La muerte de Tadzio*) performed by the authors who apply themselves to 'rewriting' foreign literary traditions leans towards the 'accursed homosexuality' trend, which is firmly established in the history of Spanish homoerotic literature. Arguably, over the last twenty years, this has been a distant echo of the Law on Dangerousness and Social Rehabilitation of 1970 (Spanish: Ley de peligrosidad y rehabilitación social), which introduced restrictive and repressive state policies vis-à-vis the gay minority.[25] Alberto Mira views the adoption of this law as the reason why the 1970s witnessed a record upsurge in homoerotic fiction enacting the 'accursed homosexuality' model. This framework was also espoused by Goytisolo, who – rather meaningfully – was friends with Jean Genet. I revisit Mira's insights at this point because my explorations imply that the publication of *A Cock-Eyed Comedy* in 2000 marks an important shift in Goytisolo's writing. If *The Virtues of the Solitary Bird* was a turning point in the sense that 'Mazuf's/don Julián's gesture' – Goytisolo's trademark as it

21 *Ibid*., 143.

22 'El tema de la muerte y del contagio físico y «contaminación» de las ideas y palabras me poseía por entero.' Goytisolo, *Obras*, 10.

23 'Tenía la impresión de que alguien (¿quién?) lo había programado en mi mente y de que yo me limitaba a seguir su dictado; de que el autor era otro, y mi trabajo, el de un mero escribidor.' *Ibid*.

24 Robert Richmond Ellis, *The Hispanic Homograph: Gay Self-Representation in Contemporary Spanish Autobiography* (Urbana: Chicago University of Illinois Press, 1997), 27.

25 The law defined homosexual individuals as a threat to the social order. As such, homosexuals were imprisoned and subjected to 'rehabilitation.' For more information on this issue, see Fernando Olmeda, *El látigo y la pluma. Homosexuales en la España de Franco* (Madrid: Oberon, 2004), 169–206.

were – involved queering for the first time in his career,[26] *A Cock-Eyed Comedy* ushers in camp as a novel perspective.

The eponymous solitary bird in *Las virtudes del pájaro solitario* had not only homosexual but primarily mystical connotations of a Sufi metaphor employed by Goytisolo. The entire title of *Carajicomedia* is thoroughly playful, veritably camp: *Carajicomedia de Fray Bugeo Montesino y otros pájaros de vario plumaje y pluma*. It also contains the jargon term *pájaro*, which denotes a homosexual, and additionally the keyword *pluma*, which signifies a feather, a quill as a writer's tool and homosexual mannerism.

As we shall see, the book displays a palette of devices typical of Eduardo Mendicutti's camp style, which becomes particularly conspicuous when juxtaposing *A Cock-Eyed Comedy* with Mendicutti's novel *Yo no tengo la culpa de haber nacido tan sexy* [*I'm Not to Blame for Having Been Born So Sexy*] of 1997. Published three years later, *A Cock-Eyed Comedy* uncannily resembles Mendicutti's work. Both the frivolous language used in the context of Catholicism and nearly identical motifs strongly suggest that Goytisolo found inspiration in the camp tradition of Spanish homoerotic literature, another important tendency identified by Alberto Mira.[27] This corroborates my idea that the turn-of-the-millennium fiction I examine exhibits a pronounced eclecticism, whereby the division into

26 The novel's last chapter portrays a joyous assembly of birds ('Asamblea de los Pájaros!'). The Cuban *pájaros*, infected with HIV and imprisoned at the municipal stadium by the regime, are pictured as convening in scenery redolent of the garden of Eden. The narrator joins them and becomes involved in a riot of colours, tweeting and cheerful excitement before the final take-off into a liberating flight. The infected 'birds' are rendered as the elect ones who prepare for a mystical journey, that is, for an ultimate triumph over the humiliation-ridden past. The *sero*positive transfigures into the positive. As Brad Epps argues, in this novel, 'Goytisolo proposes a provocative encounter with loss and disappearance, a vindication of all that is discounted as odd and insignificant, all that is queer.' Brad Epps, 'The Ecstasy of Disease: Mysticism, Metaphor, and AIDS in *Las virtudes del pájaro solitario*,' in *Bodies and Biases: Sexualities in Hispanic Cultures and Literatures*, ed. David William Foster and Roberto Reis (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 388. In his nuanced analysis, Epps extensively comments on the ambivalence of Goytisolo's text and observes that 'what is perhaps most ethically and politically challenging in *Las virtudes* is the faithful assertion that AIDS is the positive destiny of gay men, a destiny that, far from being resisted, should be embraced as the loving price of (un)earthly union and transcendence.' *Ibid*., 383. Goytisolo's vision has indeed proven controversial. For example, Ribeiro de Menezes criticises the ending of the novel, objecting to the author opting for 'a stoical acceptance of shared persecution, rather than a call for the alleviation of suffering.' Ribeiro de Menezes, *Juan Goytisolo*, 158. A similarly negative appraisal of the finale of *Las virtudes del pájaro solitario* is voiced by Paul Julian Smith, who interprets the episode as a 'spectacle of suffering' and an 'improper attack on a gay community.' Paul Julian Smith, *Representing the Other: 'Race,' Text, and Gender in Spanish and Spanish American Narrative* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 212. Goytisolo addressed such criticisms in *A Cock-Eyed Comedy (Carajicomedia)*, which will be discussed further in this chapter.

27 According to Mira, the third – homophile – trend is the least frequent one, as mentioned in Chapter 1.

three clear-cut trends is seriously blurred. Authors writing in this period, such as Goytisolo, deliberately engage in a game with these 20th-century discourses, as a result of which the entire body of gay-themed literature appears as a mosaic of multiple traditions rather than as a set of distinct, easily classifiable styles.

The frivolity of *A Cock-Eyed Comedy* ensues not only from its camp stylistics but also from the fact that it interacts with a specific hypotext – an anonymous 16th-century *Carajicomedia*, which is itself a parody of *Laberinto de Fortuna* [*The Labyrinth of Fortune*] by Juan de Mena.[28] Verging on pornography, the text of the Renaissance *Carajicomedia* forms the largest part of the *Cancionero de obras de burlas provocantes a risa* [*Songbook of Burlesque Works to Provoke Laughter*] of 1519 and relates the fortunes of Diego Fajardo, a clergyman who tries to regain his compromised potency. He is aided by an old bawd, who helps Fajardo resume sexual activity and serves as his guide through Spanish whorehouses and quarters of ill repute. Purportedly composed by the venerable friar Bugeo Montesino (Fray Bugeo Montesino[29]), the parody opens with a dedication to 'the very old cock of the honourable cavalier Diego Fajardo.'[30] Multiple sexual adventures finally lead the robust protagonist to utter exhaustion as he succumbs, vanquished by the boundless sexual energy of prostitutes. His genitals make it to Rome as holy relics to be devoutly worshipped there. The life and martyrdom of Diego Fajardo are supposed to encourage readers to imitate his exploits, which are compared to the heroic deeds of El Cid himself. The story thus parodies not only *Laberinto de Fortuna* but also medieval exempla.[31]

In an essay written in 1974, Marta E. Altisent emphasises that Goytisolo appraised *Carajicomedia* as a multidimensional masterpiece

28 Juan de Mena's work is an allegorical epic poem written in the 15th century and regarded as one of the most important texts of Spanish medieval literature. The protagonist is led by a guide (Providence) through the palace of Fortune the way Dante was guide by Virgil through the Inferno and Purgatory and by Beatrice through Paradise. In the palace, there are three circles which allegorise, respectively, the past, the present and the future. The work has an expressly moralising purpose and concludes with an appeal to king John II of Aragon to fulfil the prophecies heard by the poet and thus contribute to the future glory and greatness of the realm.

29 Carlos Varo claims that *Carajicomedia* contains copious allusions to queen Isabella the Catholic practising the injunctions of Juan de Mena. Among her favourite preachers was Fray Ambrosio Montesino, who profoundly affected the queen's moral and political outlooks. As part of his preaching, Fray Ambrosio composed religious works commissioned by Isabella. Hence the anonymous writer of *Carajicomedia* attributed its authorship to a clergyman named after Fray Ambrosio. *Carajicomedia* contains a multitude of other allusions of this kind, which indicates that it was meant as a political articulation. Carlos Varo, 'Estudio,' in *Carajicomedia. Texto facsimilar*, ed. Carlos Varo (Madrid: Playor, 1981), 21–2.

30 'muy antiguo carajo del noble cavallero Diego Fajardo.' *Carajicomedia*, edited, introduced and with notes by Álvaro Alonso (Archidona: Aljibe, 1995), 43.

31 Varo, 'Estudio,' 62–6.

scathingly critical of the Catholic clergy, doctrine and liturgy, as well as of official history with its characteristic philosophico-juristic discourse.[32] This is, indeed, a noteworthy insight, seeing that *Carajicomedia* was a forgotten work, barely mentioned in historical and interpretive studies of Spanish literature until the mid-1970s for its reputation as amoral and undeserving of attention.[33] This situation changed when an edition of *Cancionero de obras y burlas provocantes a risa* published in 1974 encouraged Spanish literature scholars to study *Carajicomedia* and made it available to a broad readership, including Goytisolo.

Goytisolo immediately recognised the merits of this obscure parody. Nevertheless, it was only in 2000 that he used it as material for his own writing and published his own *Cock-Eyed Comedy*. As he confesses in the prologue to the fourth volume of his *Obras completas*, having turned 60, he sketched literary portrayals of his former Maghrebi lovers. He realised, however, that vignettes of erotic adventures would only be any good if given a parodic thrust and spiced up with humour. This was when he recalled the 16th-century *Carajicomedia*, and an idea for a new novel sprang to mind.[34] The Renaissance *Carajicomedia* is not the only hypotext in Goytisolo's novel, which also relies in a similar fashion on *The Way* (*Camino*) by Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer, the founder of Opus Dei and a saint of the Catholic church. First published in 1934, *The Way* is a collection of 999 maxims which encourage believers to enter the path of holiness. The booklet, written in 'meagre Spanish,'[35] contains a plethora of advice on masculinity, perseverance, discipline, mortification and zeal in preaching the faith. A great deal of it more than invites a camp reading, which confers subversive meanings onto the adages in the context of homosexuality. Because camp is above all 'a way of looking at things,'[36] it is easy to imagine how much pleasure a homosexual writer – erotically attracted to arch-masculine members of his sex – derived from passages such as: 'Be firm. – Be virile. – Be a man. – And then be … an angel.'[37] A similarly flippant reading is invited by 'How little penance is worth without constant mortification,'[38] which evokes

32 Marta E. Altisent, 'El poso de la tradición: la *Carajicomedia* de Juan Goytisolo o un kamasutra homotextual,' in *Venus venerada. Tradiciones eróticas de la literatura española*, ed. José Ignacio Díez and Adrienne Laskier Martín (Madrid: Editorial Complutense, 2006), 241.

33 Varo reports that the existing 19th-century editions were held in library archives inaccessible to readers. Varo, 'Estudio,' 13–14.

34 Goytisolo, *Obras*, 33–4.

35 'un castellano pobre.' *Ibid.*, 35.

36 Susan Sontag, 'Notes on "Camp"' (1964), https://monoskop.org/images/5/59/Sontag_Susan_1964_Notes_on_Camp.pdf (accessed 28 October 2020).

37 Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer, *Camino/The Way: Spanish Text and English Translation*, 2nd ed., trans. A.P.H. Byrne (Leominster: Gracewing, 2002), 26. 'Sé recio. – Sé viril. – Sé hombre. – Y después … sé un ángel.' José Maria Escrivá, *Camino* (Madrid: Rialp, 1963), 22.

38 Escrivá de Balaguer, *Way*, 81. '¡Qué poco vale la penitencia sin la continua mortificación!' Escrivá, *Camino*, 72.

sadomasochistic practices in gay clubs. As will be shown below, Goytisolo employs re-contextualisation devices in his treatment of Escrivá de Balaguer's many other maxims, parodying his style with its profusion of such original phrasings as 'holy shamelessness' and 'let us bless pain.'[39] Doing this, Goytisolo does not conceal his motives and offers his readers a doubt-dispelling statement delivered by the narrator of *A Cock-Eyed Comedy*, concerning the literary venture of Juan Goytisolo's alter ego:

> He was apparently preparing – or perpetrating – a novel that the author himself dubbed a doorstopper, tome or artifact – whose production required extensive reading and years of labor. A history of sexuality in the light of Catholic doctrine via a journey through the Spanish language from the Middle Ages to the present. He wanted to transcribe his cruising experiences in church language, including that of the author of the contemporary Kempis, in order to parody it from within and strip bare its hypocrisy; what, perhaps contaminated by his *Tel Quel* readings, he called 'textual libido.'[40]

The following explanations only confirm that what is intended and executed is nothing other than 'Mazuf's gesture': 'Our mutual friend is trying to train his ear to catch the voices from the past in order to appropriate them and become lord and master of his own writing.'[41]

Besides *Carajicomedia* and the new Thomas a Kempis, that is, José María Escrivá, these 'voices from the past' also encompass *Retrato de la Lozana andaluza* (*Portrait of Lozana: A Lusty Andalusian Woman*) by Francisco Delicado,[42] *Guzmán de Alfarache* by Mateo Alemán,[43] *Vida de Don Gregorio Guadaña* [*The Life of Gregory Scythe*] by Antonio Enríquez[44] and an

39 Escrivá de Balaguer, *Way*, 147–8; 'santa desvergüenza,' 'Bendito sea el dolor.' Escrivá, *Camino*, 127–8, 69.

40 Goytisolo, *Cock-Eyed*, 8. 'Preparaba – o perpetraba – al parecer una novela – que el propio autor calificaba de armatoste, mamotreto o artefacto –, cuya realización le exigía muchas lecturas y años de trabajo. Una historia de la sexualidad a la luz de la doctrina católica por medio de un viaje por la lengua castellana desde la Edad Media hasta hoy. Quería transcribir sus experiencias de ligón en el lenguaje eclesiástico, incluido el del autor del *Kempis* moderno, a fin de parodiarlo desde dentro y poner su hipocresía al desnudo: lo que, contagiado tal vez por sus lecturas telquelianas, llamaba "libido textual."' Goytisolo, *Obras*, 639.

41 Goytisolo, *Cock-Eyed*, 9. 'Lo que nuestro común amigo pretende es disponer el oído a la escucha de las voces del pasado para apropiarse de ellas y convertirse en dueño y señor de su escritura.' Goytisolo, *Obras*, 639.

42 A prose text composed in a series of dialogues, written in 1526 as part of the convention whose paradigmatic example is to be found in Fernando de Rojas's *Celestina*. It tells the story of Aldonza, an Andalusian prostitute who plies her trade in the Eternal City.

43 One of the most famous Spanish picaresque novels, published in two volumes at the turn of the 16th century.

44 Part of a longer work from 1644 entitled *El siglo pitagórico* [*The Pythagorean Century*], which combines fantastic elements with the picaresque convention. One of the

array of other texts which Goytisolo more or less directly references in his novel.[45]

A Cock-Eyed Comedy Starring Fray Bugeo Montesino and Other Fairies of Motley Feather and Fortune begins when a genteel clergyman, a member of Opus Dei who translates Kavafis's poetry in his leisure time and introduces himself as Father Trennes (*père de Trennes*)[46] comes to Barcelona. As a purported alter ego of Juan Goytisolo (one of the many in the novel, which is characteristic of Goytisolo's predilection for intricacy), he soon leaves for Cuba, whence he returns to Europe and settles in Paris. After a long series of intense 'apostolic endeavors in places of very dubious sanctity,'[47] he returns to Barcelona to reveal to the narrator of the first chapter (a character resembling poet Jaime Gil de Biedma) that he is working on a new *Carajicomedia* as another incarnation of its author, that is, Friar Bugeo. Several years later, the narrator receives a certified letter containing the manuscript and sends it over to the editor. The following chapters of the novel are made of the text of this manuscript, preceded by 'Prólogo para entendidos' ('A Prologue for Insiders'), whose title includes a participial form of the verb *entender* in the jargon sense of the word.[48] Later in the book, readers witness subsequent transmigrations of Father Trennes, whose soul is reborn as the protagonists of the Spanish literary texts listed above until he finally returns in the shape of an enterprising Opus Dei activist who commits himself to

novel's notable motifs is metempsychosis, that is, the transmigration of the soul, which Goytisolo uses extensively in his *A Cock-Eyed Comedy*.

45 Goytisolo's novel also contains a pastiche of Severo Sarduy's neo-Baroque prose, passages from Jaime Gil de Biedma's poems, allusions to the work of Roland Barthes and Jean Genet and references to the writings of Marcelino Menéndez Pelayo, José María Blanco White and José Marchena. As to discuss this maze of intertextual leads would require a separate study in its own right, I present only the selected references which are requisite for my argument.

46 Father de Trennes is a character in *Les amitiés particulières* (*Special Friendships*), a 1943 novel by Roger Peyrefitte (1907–2000). The action revolves around a 'special' (i.e. homoerotically coloured) friendship between Georges and Alexandre, two teenage students of a Catholic boarding school. Father de Trennes, a dormitory supervisor, invites selected students to his study at night and offers them alcohol and cigarettes, for which he is eventually dismissed, when Georges writes an anonymous note to Father de Trennes's superior, denouncing these practices. The conversations Father de Trennes has with the boys are quite explicit about his inclinations: '"Your friendship with Lucien Rouvère seems to be an excessively close one. Has it never strayed from the narrow path?" Georges flushed. It seemed to him that Father de Trennes was really going too far'; or: 'Before I give anyone my affection, I study his face very carefully. I studied all your fellows in this way, as well as yourselves, and it was you I chose. And every night that choice is more thoroughly vindicated. I sit down for a moment beside your beds, switching on my torch from time to time to better admire you.' Roger Peyrefitte, *Special Friendships*, trans. Edward Hyams (London: Hamilton & Co. [Stafford], 1964), 127, 135.

47 Goytisolo, *Cock-Eyed*, 7. 'afanes apostólicos en lugares de muy dudosa santidad.' Goytisolo, *Obras*, 638.

48 See Chapter 1, footnote 79.

indoctrinating bankers, managers and future politicians destined to head the most important political and financial institutions of the country.

Let us focus on the parts of the novel which are crucial in terms of my argument, that is, on the chapters which contain the new *Carajicomedia* and queer the 16th-century original. The style which contemporary readers recognise as campy in the context of Goytisolo's novel already makes its appearance in the satirical source text. The erotic conquests of the Catholic clergyman Diego Fajardo are sometimes described as 'prayers' (*preces*), 'canonical works' (*obras canónicas*[49]) or 'devotions' (*devoción*).[50] Goytisolo chisels this language, seasons it with Escrivá de Balaguer's maxims and applies it to gay sex[51] in the manuscript of Fray Bugeo's new incarnation.

The first part of the manuscript is titled 'Mis santos y sus obras' ('My Saints and Their Works') and – modelled on *Carajicomedia*, which lists the names of a throng of prostitutes visited by Diego Fajardo – tells the story of Friar Bugeo's 'apostolic mission' among the Maghrebi immigrants in France. Stories of Lakdar, Ahmed and Omar, Zinedin, Abdelkadir and others are related, all of them in an idiom that parodies church discourse. The meeting places of homosexuals, which are portrayed as murky and sleazy in *La muerte de Tadzio*, are depicted in the second part of the manuscript ('Las secretas moradas'; Eng. 'The Secret Mansions') as 'chapels' (*capillas*) which stretch from Pigalle Square up to the Stalingrad metro station and 'where the devout sought "inspiration from the saints" and spiritual cautery.'[52] Fray Bugeo,'[f]aithful to the imperative mandates of the missionary tasks of [his] apostolacy, dallied evening and night around the chapels, watched entrances and exits, until [he] encountered a friend or stranger ready to join [him] in prayer.'[53] The narrator recounts how one of them, Abdelkadir, 'pursued his exemplary manipulation […] and not a single facial muscle flinched when [Fray Bugeo] advanced [his]

49 The footnote explains that the phrase is meant as 'horas canónicas' (canonical hours). *Carajicomedia*, 115.

50 *Ibid*., 76, 93.

51 One of the plots in the original *Carajicomedia* stages an act of sodomy as well. Having spotted a shepherd named Santilario indulging in masturbation in the open air, the devil wanted to tempt him into an even worse sin in order to drag his soul to hell. To accomplish this, the devil jumped on the shepherd, sat on his crotch and in this way coerced him into sodomy. But the plucky villager was not scared, and he seized the opportunity so violently that the aching and terrified devil took to his heels and never wanted to have anything to do with him again. This vindicates the power of natural impulses enshrined in folk wisdom as opposed to the sexual compliance with Catholic principles preached by Juan de Mena. Varo, 'Estudio,' 68–70.

52 Goytisolo, *Cock-Eyed*, 45. 'acudían los devotos en busca de "inspiraciones santas" y cauterio espiritual.' Goytisolo, *Obras*, 677.

53 Goytisolo, *Cock-Eyed*, 46. 'fiel al mandato imperativo de las obras de misión y apostolado, merodeaba tarde y noche en torno a las capillas, al acecho de las entradas y salidas, hasta dar con el amigo o desconocido listos para compartir las preces.' Goytisolo, *Obras*, 677–8.

incredulous hand to his *sancta sanctorum* in order, like Thomas the Apostle, to check out the palpability of his miracle.'[54]

Alison Ribeiro de Menezes points out that, by means of his intertextual play, Goytisolo rewrites not only *Carajicomedia* but also the second volume of his biography entitled *En los reinos de Taifa* [*In the Kingdoms of Taifa*], with depictions of his Maghrebi lovers and recollections of brutal erotic scenes based on the domination of one of the parties.[55] Menezes adds that, likewise, in *A Cock-Eyed Comedy* Goytisolo parodies not only the 'textual libido' – that is, a fascination with maleness which broils beneath the surface of Escrivá de Balaguer's text – but also his own former manner of writing about homosexual contacts with Arab men.[56] Though for the most part perceptive and brilliant (e.g. in underscoring that Goytisolo – as an intertextual critic of his earlier works – knits elements typical of mystical writings, 'oscillating between the mystical and the burlesque,' in this book as well[57]), Menezes's insights pass over an important aspect of the novel. Specifically, she fails to notice camp as the overriding mode of *A Cock-Eyed Comedy*. To talk merely of parody or burlesque is not enough in this case. Thomas E. Yingling argues that 'gay writers […] have found literature less a matter of self-expression and more a matter of coding: from Byron through John Ashbery, the consistent locus of parody in gay texts suggests a self-consciousness about what texts may and may not do.'[58] What Ribeiro suggests is part of the meta-literary investment characteristic of Goytisolo's late writing (exemplified, for instance, in the use of autobiography as a hypotext) should rather be recognised as a strategy of camp that he newly adopts. However, Ribeiro does not explicitly articulate this, even though she makes it clear that 'the Arab lovers from *Reinos are not simply* reintroduced in *A Cock-Eyed Comedy*,'[59] with their portrayals being, instead, profoundly parodic. Ribeiro's comments imply that Goytisolo employs burlesque in order to distance himself from his earlier ways of depicting things, which were pervaded by problematic power relations.[60] However, Yingling's insights about camp cast quite a different light on this issue. If we construe *En los reinos de Taifa* as an example of Goytisolo's self-expression as a gay man, the application of

54 Goytisolo, *Cock-Eyed*, 26. 'proseguía su manipulatio demostrativa […] y no movió un músculo del rostro cuando adelanté mi mano incrédula al *sancta sanctorum* a fin de comprobar, como el apóstol Tomás, la tangibilidad del milagro.' Goytisolo, *Obras*, 656.

55 Arab men represent physical domination, while Goytisolo embodies intellectual domination as a representative of the old metropolis and Western civilisation. Ribeiro de Menezes, *Juan Goytisolo*, 180.

56 *Ibid*.

57 *Ibid*., 181.

58 Qtd. in David Bergman, 'Strategic Camp: The Art of Gay Rhetoric,' in *Camp Grounds: Style and Homosexuality*, ed. David Bergman (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1994), 94.

59 Ribeiro de Menezes, *Juan Goytisolo*, 180 (italics mine).

60 *Ibid*., 180–1.

ecclesiastical language to parody his autobiography comes across less as a reappraisal of his own discourse from the post-colonial position and more as 'Mazuf's gesture,' in which prior stories are intercepted to be rewritten and infused with anti-clerical overtones: in other words, to see what an old text may 'do' if revised and turned against the homophobia of the Catholic Church. In discussing *A Cock-Eyed Comedy*, one should not forget that Goytisolo himself admitted: 'I sought to parody the Church's language on sex, enormous misogyny and hypocritical aversion to homosexuality …'[61] For this purpose, he mobilised camp as the most effective 'solvent of morality.'[62] In my view, the reappraisal of the old manner of describing homosexual trysts, which Ribeiro de Menezes foregrounds, is merely *a side-effect* of this conversion of language into camp.

As already argued, reading *A Cock-Eyed Comedy* solely through the lens of parody is reductive. Emphatically, not all parody is related to camp, though camp indeed is usually parodic. What is it then that makes a given instance of parody lend itself to reading it as campy? What is this specific 'value added'? To offer a relevant answer to this question, we must refer to Susan Sontag's 'Notes on Camp' and consider queer critical responses to this famous essay. As stressed by Błażej Warkocki, queer critics' major objection against Sontag's text is that it only considers camp in aesthetic terms, while misguidedly overlooking the original context of gay subculture in which camp was born.[63] Admittedly, Sontag states that 'if homosexuals hadn't more or less invented Camp, someone else would.'[64] In the subordinate clause she acknowledges the connection between camp and homosexual subculture, but she immediately removes camp from its context in the main clause. Her claim that 'it's not true that Camp taste *is* homosexual taste'[65] has stirred a similar controversy.[66] Queer criticism insists that the opposite is the case, as argued by Jack Babuscio, for whom camp is an expression of 'gay sensibility,'[67] and as asserted in 'Queering the Camp,' the tellingly entitled introduction

61 'Quería parodiar el lenguaje de la iglesia con respecto al sexo, la tremenda misoginia y la aversión hipócrita hacia la homosexualidad …' Qtd. in Altisent, 'El poso,' 244.

62 Sontag, 'Notes,' 12, note 52.

63 Błażej Warkocki, *Homo niewiadomo. Polska proza wobec odmienności* (Warszawa: Sic!, 2007), 48–9.

64 Sontag, 'Notes,' 12, note 53.

65 *Ibid*., note 51 (italics original).

66 At the same time, Sontag by no means obliterates the relation of camp to homosexual subculture; on the contrary, she calls attention to their 'peculiar affinity and overlap' (*Ibid*.) Nevertheless, many of her assertions, such as '[c]amp taste is much more than homosexual taste' (*Ibid*., note 53) could be perceived as problematic since they foregrounded the general aesthetic issues and consequently contributed to eclipsing this original 'affinity.'

67 Babuscio directly states that his paper aims to prove the interrelatedness of camp and what he dubs 'the gay sensibility.' Jack Babuscio, 'Camp and the Gay Sensibility,' in *Camp Grounds*, ed. David Bergman, 19.

to *Camp: Queer Aesthetics and the Performing Subject*.[68] The Spanish scholar Alberto Mira also makes this point in his discussion of Jaime Gil de Biedma's essay on a more contemporary understanding of camp:

> We come across one of the most succinct and precise statements on gay camp that have been produced in our country. Camp requires a knowing look, readers who 'understand' [*entendidos*]. Unlike its other classical manifestations (which are based on subtle allusion and coding impenetrable to the uninitiated), post-Stonewall camp is identified with recognisably gay voices and with texts which are more than patently committed to homosexual themes. Its other features are those marshalled by Gil de Biedma: excess – both in content and in language – which serves to focus the reader's attention on the idiom of parody; a ludic dimension (especially provocation), which emphasises the histrionic; and the construction of a knowing look through intertextuality and attempts to *elicit the complicity of the gay reading public*.[69]

This characterisation perfectly corresponds to Goytisolo's *A Cock-Eyed Comedy*, a work published in the post-Stonewall era and containing provocation, explicitly homosexual content rendered through intertextual devices, direct references to gay subculture and overtures to homosexual readers (for one, 'Prólogo para entendidos,' English: 'A Prologue for Insiders'). The above inventory of characteristics should be extended to include the political dimension of the species of camp that Mira labels as gay. Importantly, Goytisolo's *A Cock-Eyed Comedy* is by no means merely an intertextual game, an exercise in style or an aestheticised rendering of homosexual experience. It is a subversive text that targets the discourse of the Catholic Church, which in the novel is emblematised in the alter ego of the Opus Dei founder. Indeed, the novel is parodic, as rightly observed by Ribeiro de Menezes, but this scathing parody is

68 Fabio Cleto, 'Introduction: Queering the Camp,' in *Camp: Queer Aesthetics and the Performing Subject*, ed. Fabio Cleto (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008), 1–42.

69 'Se trata de una de las formulaciones más concisas y precisas del camp gay en nuestro país. El camp requiere complicidad, lectores "entendidos." A diferencia de otras manifestaciones clásicas (basadas en guiño sutil y la codificación impenetrable para profanos), el camp post Stonewall se identifica con voces marcadas como gays y con textos en los que el contenido homosexual suele quedar bien patente. Por lo demás, sus rasgos son los enumerados por Gil de Biedma: el exceso, lingüístico y de contenidos, sirve para centrar la atención del lector en el lenguaje como parodia; los aspectos lúdicos (en especial la provocación) que enfatizan lo performativo; se construye una mirada a través de lo intertextual y *se busca una complicidad con el público gay*.' Alberto Mira, *De Sodoma a Chueca. Una historia cultural de la homosexualidad en España en el siglo XX* (Barcelona and Madrid: Egales, 2004), 149 (italics mine).

rooted in and informed by 'post-Stonewall' gay camp, which is manifest in passages such as:

> The convents of Ávila, where petite nuns spent their free time […] manufacturing small whips and scourges to mortify the flesh in pursuit of a healthy soul, began in the seventies to receive numerous orders from abroad, particularly from Amsterdam, San Francisco and Manhattan. The ropes or switches lovingly plaited into whips of differing shape and hardness – to fit the different stations of penitents in their ascesis – attracted a growing trade, clients whose devotion manifested itself in the need for novel, more savage instruments of torture […]. Mother Superiors and Abbesses couldn't contain their joy […]. The orders from shops selling holy objects on Christopher Street and other sanctuaries of New York piety rained down daily.[70]

The same notes ring in descriptions of sadomasochistic practices in which the customers of the Ávila nuns indulge. The narrator recalls his visit to New York's Mine Shaft club 'with its old tunnels, galleries, cages and pits. Modern lighting reinvented there the harsh torments suffered at the hands of our blessed Inquisitors in days of yore.'[71] He adds that '[b]lood, sweat and tears flowed [there] to wailing, groaning and swooning,'[72] and concludes that he is still alive only because he entered the Mine Shaft for a moment, saw what was going on and immediately left. The place appears utterly dangerous, similarly to the Parisian Le Metal in *La muerte de Tadzio*. However, where Luis G. Martín portrayed the S/M club within the aesthetics of *tremendismo*, whereby he perpetuated homophobic stereotypes, Goytisolo applies the poetics of camp humour to turn the club's regulars into Christian martyrs and resorts to his typical irony to re-channel readers' attention to the despicable practices of the Holy Inquisition.

AIDS-related themes are also approached in this way. As a reminder, the protagonist of *La muerte de Tadzio* – a frustrated, grotesque old man

70 Goytisolo, *Cock-Eyed*, 54. 'Los conventos de Ávila en los que las monjitas consagran el tiempo libre […] a la fabricación de cilicios y latiguillos para la mortificación del cuerpo y salud del alma, empezaron a recibir en los años setenta numerosos pedidos procedentes del extranjero, en especial desde Amsterdam, San Francisco y Manhattan. Las correíllas o cuerdas amorosamente trenzadas en látigos de distinta dureza y formato – adaptados a las diferentes estaciones del penitente en su ascesis – atraían a una clientela creciente, cuya devoción se manifestaba en la exigencia de nuevos y más acerbos instrumentos de castigo […]. Las superioras y abadesas no cabían en sí de satisfacción. […] Los encargos de las tiendas de objetos píos de Christopher Street y otros santuarios de la piedad neoyorquina llovían a diario.' Goytisolo, *Obras*, 683–4.

71 Goytisolo, *Cock-Eyed*, 56. 'viejos túneles, galerías, jaulas y sumideros. Allí, los modernos alumbrados reinventaban los recios tormentos a los que les sometían antaño nuestros benditos inquisidores.' Goytisolo, *Obras*, 685.

72 Goytisolo, *Cock-Eyed*, 56 'Sangre, sudor y lágrimas escurrían en medio de ayes, gemidos, deliquios.' Goytisolo, *Obras*, 658.

at the threshold of death – consciously puts young Fabrizio at risk of HIV infection. Martín does not undermine the modernist code that binds Eros to Thanatos, but conserves it by framing AIDS as a new iteration of plague evoked in Mann's novella. For his part, Goytisolo engages in a discursive game with the sensitive issue of AIDS at its core. The narrator describes the outbreak of the epidemic with an impressive flair:

> Years later, the pandemic swept through those temples of devotion. The Lord, in His infinite Goodness, aggravated the suffering and torments of the Sisters of Perpetual Succor to the point of extreme expiation, thus granted them right of entry to Heaven. But, by virtues of the designs of his also infinite Wisdom, He deprived me (may He be blessed a thousand times!) of that cruel, brutal torture and kept me in this base world on the lookout for fresh opportunities to visit my charitable fervors on select souls.[73]

There are multiple points of interest in this passage. First and foremost, it revisits the notion of HIV carriers as martyrs, which appeared in *The Virtues of the Solitary Bird* and was criticised by Ribeiro de Menezes and Smith. While in the 1988 novel, a group of infected 'birds' readied themselves for a mystical flight and the ultimate union with God, the irony pervasive in the passage above indicates that it is a camp derision of the attitude of the Roman Catholic Church to the AIDS epidemic. Such a reading is additionally promoted by an allusion to the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence,[74] an American organisation founded in 1979 and dedicated to combating AIDS. The activists of the foundation stage happenings in which they perform dressed in nun's habits, combining the apparel of nuns with the aesthetics of drag queens and carnivalesque masquerading in the vein of *commedia dell'arte*.[75] Echoing the organisation's name, the Sisters of Perpetual Succour (Hermanas del Perpetuo Socorro) in the novel are transvestites who constantly accompany the Cuban neo-Baroque writer Severo Sarduy and appear at public readings, exhibition openings and social meetings, such as a party held by Manuel Puig, the author of *Kiss of the Spider Woman* (*El*

73 Goytisolo, *Cock-Eyed*, 56–7. 'Años después, la pandemia barrió todos aquellos templos de devoción. El Señor, en Su infinita Bondad, arreció los suplicios y pruebas de las Hermanas del Perpetuo Socorro hasta la expiación suprema, otorgándoles así una entrada segura en los cielos. Pero, en virtud de los designios de su también infinita Sabiduría, me privó a mí (¡mil veces bendito sea!) de aquel cruel y sañudo martirio y me mantuvo en este bajo mundo al acecho de nuevas ocasiones de fervor y caridad con las almas selectas.' Goytisolo, *Obras*, 686.

74 With the various denotations and connotations of 'indulgence,' the name revels in a pun-based camp joke.

75 Bergman cites the example of the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence in his analysis of the carnivalesque facet of camp. See Bergman, 'Strategic,' 100–1.

beso de la mujer araña).[76] If theatricality and provocation are among the salient features of camp, this reference to the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence is a veritable definition of camp. Similarly to his strategy for describing sadomasochistic practices, Goytisolo parodies the ecclesiastical language to bring into relief the 'Goodness' and 'Wisdom' of God, who condemns people to unimaginable sufferings on a whim, without compromising his image of a merciful Father cherished by his believers. This marks a significant difference from *The Virtues of the Solitary Bird*, where the intimation that HIV carriers were God's elect provoked rather mixed critical responses, to put it mildly. As opposed to this, *A Cock-Eyed Comedy* brims with an all too evident mockery of the fashion in which God's mysterious ways are interpreted by the Catholic hierarches and of their attitudes vis-à-vis the HIV epidemics.

Examining the nexus of queer themes, the problem of AIDS and literary-critical responses to the handling of these issues in Goytisolo's writing, we can fruitfully look into another passage in the novel, in which the author confronts the approaches adopted by gender and queer literary scholars. In enigmatic circumstances, Fray Bugeo interrupts his project of writing about his evangelising missions among the Islamic minority and prepares for another series of transmigrations of the soul. He is reborn in a succession of texts as Sietecoñicos, the homosexual protagonist of *Portrait of Lozana*; as Fray Francisco Ortiz,[77] a symbol of disobedience to petrified doctrines; as Guzmán de Alfarache, a picaro from Mateo Alemán's famous novel; and as Gregorio Guadaña. The chapter entitled 'Transmigraciones de Fray Bugeo' ('Transmigrations of Venerable Friar Bugeo') is part of the announced literary 'journey through the Spanish language from the Middle Ages to the present.'[78] In our own times, *père*

76 In an episode of the literature-focused TV show *A fondo* in 1977, Manuel Puig (1932–1990) said that he actually owed his literary debut to Goytisolo. Puig was an Argentinian writer who pioneered a variety of the camp style in which popular Hollywood films are employed as a hypotext in Spanish-language gay literature. Besides his most famous *Kiss of the Spider Woman*, Puig also penned *La traición de Rita Hayworth* (*Betrayed by Rita Hayworth*), *Boquitas pintadas* (*Heartbreak Tango*) and *The Buenos Aires Affair*. That Goytisolo facilitated Puig's debut speaks to the 'gay sensibility' of the author of *A Cock-Eyed Comedy*, who recognised the potential inherent in the 'rewriting' not only of classical literary texts but also of mass culture classics. A comprehensive discussion of connections between popular culture and Spanish-language homoerotic camp literature deserves a separate volume of its own, including comparative examinations of the work of writers such as Manuel Puig, Eduardo Mendicutti and Terenci Moix.

77 Francisco Ortiz was the author of *Jardín de amores santos* [*The Garden of Saintly Loves*] (1598) and *Mystica Theologia* [*Mystical Theology*] (1608). He was persecuted by the Holy Inquisition for alleged heresy. Angela Selke analysed Friar Francisco Ortiz's trial, during which the monk exhibited dignity in disputing with his perpetrators to lay bare their ignorance and arrogance. See Angela Selke, *El Santo Oficio de la Inquisición. Proceso de fray Francisco Ortiz* (Madrid: Guadarrama, 1968).

78 'un viaje por la lengua castellana desde la Edad Media hasta hoy.' Goytisolo, *Obras*, 639.

de Trennes, who dreads militant feminists[79] and their crushing criticism of his new *Carajicomedia*, comes up with the idea of being reborn as Princess Diana, Mariana Pineda,[80] immortalised in a Lorca play, or Monja Alférez – the Ensign Nun of the 17th century.[81] The narrator makes him realise that such a gesture would be pointless, adding:

> Forty years ago I was rebuked because of the proletariat's miniscule role in my fables and, particularly, their lack of positive heroes. It wasn't good enough to express your hatred of the exploitative bourgeoisie to which your family belonged: you must infuse belief and hope in the working class, bolster its political consciousness, open its eyes to the light approaching from the East, etc. […] And if the professor from California goes quiet, the professor from Oxford steps forward. […] You are, or you say you are, a confirmed democrat, but contradiction and ambivalence nourishes your literary work. Your characters lack the pride and consciousness of today's militant, don't communicate radical political notions to the gay reader or incite them to defend his rights: marriage, legislation for couples, entry into the army … [82]

The critic's assessment brings to mind the ideas of the 'team from Poznań' in Witkowski's *Lovetown* and the suggestions they make to Michalina La Belletriste on what her texts should be like. Goytisolo possibly alludes to Paul Julian Smith, who was highly critical of, among others, *The Virtues of the Solitary Bird*. With his signature perversity, Goytisolo knits into *A*

79 'feministas de choque.' *Ibid.*, 751.

80 Mariana Pineda was a 19th-century Spanish heroine of opposition against the absolutist rule of Ferdinand VII. She was sentenced to death and executed for her liberalist beliefs and involvement in a plot against the king.

81 La Monja Alférez (the Ensign Nun) was a sobriquet of Catalina de Erauso, one of the most flamboyant figures of the Spanish Golden Age. Put in a convent as a child, she rebelled against the constraints imposed on her choices in life and fled the convent at 15 years of age, leaving for America in male disguise. She lived an adventurous life as a soldier and became famous when discovered to be a woman. King Philip IV recognised her military merits, and the pope Urban VIII received her in an audience and permitted her to continue donning the male attire. Catalina de Erauso is the protagonist of *La Monja Alférez*, a play written by Domingo Miras in 1986. The drama was staged at Madrid's Teatro María Guerrero in mid-2013.

82 Goytisolo, *Cock-Eyed*, 128–9. 'A mí me reprochaban hace cuarenta años el escaso papel del proletariado en mis fábulas y, sobre todo, la falta de héroes positivos. No basta con que expreses tu odio a la burguesía explotadora a la que pertenecía tu familia: debes infundir valor y esperanza en la clase obrera, robustecer su conciencia política, abrir sus ojos a la luz que nos llega del Este, etcétera. […] Y si calla la profesora de California, la reemplaza el profesor de Oxford. […] Es usted, o dice ser, un demócrata convencido, pero su obra literaria se alimenta de la contradicción y ambivalencia. Sus personajes carecen de la conciencia del orgullo del militante de hoy, no transmiten al lector gay opciones políticas radicales ni le incitan a defender sus derechos: matrimonio, ley de parejas, ingreso en el ejército ...' Goytisolo, *Obras*, 751–2.

Cock-Eyed Comedy the story of a transsexual who falls victim to rape, HIV infection and indifference (therein of literati) to the fate of the most excluded individuals. The episode should be viewed as a unique rejoinder to carping representatives of Spanish queer studies in which Goytisolo makes it absolutely clear that while he is conversant on such issues, his handling of the theme is a deliberately chosen writing strategy. Let us examine this in some detail.

In Chapter 8, titled 'Consejos y varapalos al *père de Trennes*' ('Advice and a Drubbing for Father Trennes'), a soul, fatigued with being reborn time and again, drifts in space amidst stars, where it meets the venerable Friar Bugeo and tells him about its many lives devoted to serving the biological needs of the body. Bugeo gives the soul a pep talk: 'You mustn't lose heart […]. Carnal sin is the devil at work to soften and womanize us. Haven't you heard the tale of Pelayo, that most beautiful ephebe, who preferred torture and death to yielding to the torpid desire of Caliph Abdelrahman?'[83] The desperate soul comes up with the idea of being reborn as a woman or at least as a 'manly woman,'[84] against which Bugeo warns, citing the aversion of Monsignor (an alter ego of José María Escrivá) to all things non-male: 'By now you ought to know how light-heeled and prone to vice women are. Characters soft and sweet like meringues offend Monsignor. I've found his maxims invaluable. Thanks to them I've pledged my life to the pursuit and conquest of real saints.'[85] The soul, who chooses not to heed these warnings, is reborn after more than fifty years of absence in the world as a Philippine servant of Jaime Gil de Biedma and … undergoes sex reassignment surgery. As recommended by the author of *The Way*, she engages with the saints as a transsexual named Paulina and is a target of 'Christian' invectives and stigmatisation: 'look at those hands, her shoulders and collar bone aren't feminine, a transvestite, the cheek of it!'[86] In Paris, she is beaten by skinheads who drive her out of town to rape her. Abused, infected with the HIV virus and seeking help from church-affiliated charities, she is chased away. She reviles them as 'profiteers from pain' and 'do-good jokers' who 'leech on misery.'[87] She has her revenge and is jailed in a prison for women, where

83 Goytisolo, *Cock-Eyed*, 108. 'No debes desanimarte […]. El pecado de carne es obra del diablo a fin de reblandecernos y afeminarnos. ¿No conoces la historia del bellísimo efebo Pelayo, que prefirió la tortura y la muerte a ceder a los torpes deseos del califa?' Goytisolo, *Obras*, 732.

84 Goytisolo, *Cock-Eyed*, 109. 'mujer varonil,' Goytisolo, *Obras*, 732.

85 Goytisolo, *Cock-Eyed*, 109. 'Ya sabes que las mujeres son ligeras de cascos y propensas al vicio. A Monseñor le desagradan los caracteres dulzones y tiernos como merengues. Sus máximas han sido preciosas para mí. Gracias a ellas, he enderezado mi vida a la busca y conquista de verdaderos santos.' *Ibid*., 733.

86 Goytisolo, *Cock-Eyed*, 135. 'mira qué manos, sus hombros y clavículas no son de mujer, es un travestido, si será descarado!' Goytisolo, *Obras*, 757.

87 Goytisolo, *Cock-Eyed*, 139. 'los farsantes de la caridad,' 'las sanguijuelas de la miseria.' *Ibid*., 761.

she tells her story, voicing her resentment against a member of Opus Dei and Saint Juan of Barbès:

> I ended up in the women's jail where I'm waiting to be sentenced in the special wing for those with the virus, loathing you to death, you hypocrite and pharisee,[88] your sanctimonious selfishness, you're happy putting me inside or letting me die in a plague hospital, I'm sick of your bleating words of sympathy and wretched excuses, spread yourself over the pages of this book, go fuck your saints![89]

By introducing Paulina, a character who is aware of being dependent on the 'scribbler' narrator, Goytisolo anticipates and pre-empts possible charges of failing to consider the problems of all excluded people and of focusing exclusively on gay themes, which might be advanced by queer critics. Self-irony serves to justify the choice of the writing strategy which is based both on the parody of *Carajicomedia* and on the parody of the 'textual libido,' which is abundant in de Balaguer's *The Way*. Hence, the last line of the passage above envisages the 'intercourse of saints.'

Irony and, in particular, irony-bolstered camp may be confusing, and even literary critics may fail to make sound sense of these devices. A reading that glaringly strays from the overall tenor of *A Cock-Eyed Comedy* is proposed in a PhD dissertation titled *The Construction of the Gay Spiritual Identity in Novels of Juan Goytisolo and Eduardo Mendicutti*, which was written by the American researcher Francisco Eduardo Castilla Ortiz in 2008. While Ortiz is aware that Goytisolo extensively builds on camp and discerns the subversive potential inherent in this style, his final conclusions imply that he misses out on what lies at the core of camp irony. Castilla Ortiz aptly observes that '[the meaning] of St Escrivá's frequent calls for masculinity and absolute dedication of the individual is thoroughly inverted by Goytisolo in male-to-male sexual acts. This irreverent and parodic "camp" technique is the source of humour in the novel

88 In fact, the exact meaning of what Paulina says is 'loathing both of you to death, you hypocrite and you scribbler.' The English translation of the novel overlooks the fact that, at this point, she is actually addressing two people: Monsignor and the narrator. She refers to the former as a hypocrite, and scornfully calls the latter '*escribidor*.' This is a relevant detail insofar that it corresponds to the idea of a gay writer as a scribe that reproduces hackneyed patterns. Importantly, Goytisolo time and again self-ironically depicted himself as a 'scribe' or a 'copyist,' as mentioned at the beginning of this Chapter (see p. 91–3).

89 Goytisolo, *Cock-Eyed*, 140. 'y aquí espero el juicio en la sección especial de las contagiadas por el virus a tope de odio hacia ustedes dos, el hipócrita y el escribidor, hacia su santurronería y egoísmo, que lo mismo les da meterme presa que hacerme agonizar en un hospital de apestados, estoy harta de sus palabras de consuelo y miserables excusas, sigan, sigan con las páginas de este libro y váyanse a follar con sus santos!' *Ibid*., 762.

and of the author's sarcastic message.'[90] Despite these apposite insights, Castilla Ortiz's literal reading of the passages that parody ecclesiastical language yields conclusions which are nothing short of bizarre. When commenting on the episodes of 'the intercourse of saints' in Parisian 'chapels,' Castilla Ortiz avers that Goytisolo employs irony and sarcasm 'to entertain readers by rendering details of sexual encounters in a comic rather than an erotic way,'[91] and adds that the writer 'shows us that for the protagonists of the novel these are humanitarian acts of spiritual nature [*sic!*] which offer vital satisfaction.'[92] This leads Castilla Ortiz to the conclusion that 'such a usage of linguistic signs with altered meanings helps ritualise and *consecrate sexual acts*.'[93] Similar assertions across the dissertation help Castilla Ortiz argue that both Mendicutti and Goytisolo employ ecclesiastical language and mystical literature in their novels in order to present their protagonists as gays who succeed in reconciling their homosexual and religious identities. In his final conclusions, Castilla Ortiz bluntly states: 'These works indicate that a physical homosexual identity may indeed coexist with the development of a spiritual identity.'[94] In this declaration, the 'intercourse of saints' is stripped of the inverted commas, and camp itself is viewed solely in aesthetic terms, in line with Sontag's essay, which is in fact the only study of camp in Castilla Ortiz's bibliography.

That there is no 'redefinition of spiritual identity'[95] in *A Cock-Eyed Comedy* is powerfully borne out in the passages which do not so much parody the language of the Church as rather recontextualise quotations from Escrivá's *The Way*. 'Post-Stonewall' gay camp is not reducible to the parodic attitude alone. It equally effectively employs re-contextualisation, as already exemplified by Gil-Albert's *Valentín*. Yet if the novella applied quotations from Shakespeare in the context of homosexuality in an attempt to elevate homoerotic fiction, which was denied the status of high art by critics, re-contextualisation in *A Cock-Eyed Comedy* becomes part of the strategy for debunking the discourse of 'spiritual identity' as

90 'Las frecuentes insistencias del santo Escrivá sobre la masculinidad y la entrega total del individuo aparecen invertidas por Goytisolo en actos sexuales entre hombres. En esta técnica "camp," burlesca y paródica, radica el humor de la novela, así como el mensaje sarcástico del novelista.' Francisco Eduardo Castilla Ortiz, *The Construction of the Gay Spiritual Identity in Novels of Juan Goytisolo and Eduardo Mendicutti* (Ann Arbor: ProQuest, 2008), 152.

91 'divierte al lector presentando detalles de ligues sexuales en forma cómica y no erótica.' *Ibid*., 116.

92 'nos hace ver que para los personajes de la novela son actos humanísticos con un carácter espiritual y llenos de satisfacción vital.' *Ibid*.

93 'Este uso de signos lingüísticos con significados alterados permite ritualizar y *sacralizar las actividades sexuales*.' *Ibid*. (italics mine).

94 'Lo que estas obras indican es la posibilidad de esa coexistencia de la identidad física homosexual con el desarrollo de una identidad espiritual.' *Ibid*., 186.

95 'redefinición de la identidad espiritual.' *Ibid*.

promoted by Opus Dei. The protagonists of the novel braid literal quotations from *The Way* into their own utterances across a surprising range of contexts. When *père de Trennes* avails himself of the story of St Pelagius to edify an embittered soul he meets in the spirit world, he adds that he has chided the ephebe for using his youthful allures in homosexual conquests in which the boy indulged after his martyrdom. The reprimand rehearses one of Monsignor's maxims:

> He's not half gone rotten on me! (he smiled). Now he spends his whole time looking for pick-ups […]. I knocked into him the other day and rebuked him affectionately but firmly with these our Founder's words: 'Leave those childish, effeminate poutings and flouncings! Be a man!'[96]

In the chapter titled 'Introito a destiempo' ('An Introit out of Tune'), which divides two parts of the manuscript on the 'evangelisation of saints,' Fray Bugeo confesses:

> I always kept with me a copy of the Kempis of modern times and we meditated on the deep meaning of some of my favorite maxims ('Your duty is to be an instrument, big or small, rough or subtle … Be an instrument!' or 'It hurts, doesn't it? Of course, it does!, That's precisely why you have been hit there').[97]

The 'deep meaning,' which enthrals Fray Bugeo, only surfaces in the context of gay sex. 'The intercourse of saints' cannot possibly be discussed in its literal meaning, that is, without the inverted commas.

Consequently, the re-contextualised quotations from Escrivá de Balaguer, rhapsodising about spirituality, sacrifice, the imitation of Christ and being an instrument in the hands of God, must not be read otherwise than as 'Mazuf's gesture' – as appropriating somebody else's words to turn them inside out and use them for one's own ulterior purposes. In *A Cock-Eyed Comedy*, 'Mazuf's gesture' is at the same time an evidently camp gesture. It calls for readers capable of deciphering allusions to gay subculture with its sexual practices and of grasping the very

96 Goytisolo, *Cock-Eyed*, 109. '¡Viciosillo se me ha vuelto! (sonrió). Ahora anda todo el tiempo en busca de ligues […]. El otro día tropecé con él y le amonesté cariñosa, pero firmemente con palabras de nuestro Fundador: ¡deja esos meneos y carantonas de mujerzuela o de chiquillo! ¡Sé varón!' Goytisolo, *Obras*, 732–3. *Père de Trennes* quotes pieces from maxims 3 and 4. See Escrivá de Balaguer, *Way*, 18.

97 Goytisolo, *Cock-Eyed*, 42–3. 'Guardaba siempre conmigo un ejemplar del *Kempis* de los tiempos modernos y meditábamos en el hondo sentido de algunas máximas favoritas ("tu deber es ser instrumento … grande o chico, delicado o tosco … ¡Sé instrumento!" o "– Duele, ¿eh? – ¡Claro, hombre!, por eso precisamente te han dado ahí").' Goytisolo, *Obras*, 672. The passage includes maxims 484 and 158; Escrivá de Balaguer, *Way*, 72, 177.

core of the subversive joke. If the 'gay sensibility' is bracketed off in discussions of camp works, their interpretations wander off in a completely different direction, sometimes leading to overinterpretations. Camp is by no means a regular parody and a common histrionic gesture. In the homoerotic literature discussed here, camp is primarily 'Mazuf's gesture.'

3.2. CAMPaign[98] Against Transphobia: *Yo no tengo la culpa de haber nacido tan sexy* by Eduardo Mendicutti and the Pitfalls of Identity

In a dark night,
With anxious love inflamed,
O, happy lot!
Forth unobserved I went,
My house being now at rest.

St John of the Cross,
'Dark Night'[99]

In a dark night,
With anxious lust inflamed,
On a happy cruise,
Forth all reckless I went,
My house being now desert.

Jaime Gil de Biedma,
'Divertimentos antiguos'[100]

Eduardo Mendicutti (born in 1948) is a writer primarily appreciated by mainstream critics for his ingenious, witty style, camp take on things and consistent employment of colloquial language. He first garnered acclaim and made his mark on the history of Spanish literature with his novel *Una mala noche la tiene cualquiera* [*Anyone May Have a Bad Night*] (1982), which is now a common fixture in university literature courses and contemporary literature handbooks. Its action takes place at the beginning of the *transición española*, when Spain's transition to democracy

98 I borrow the coinage 'CAMPaign' (Polish: *CAMPania*) from the title of an anthology published by Krytyka Polityczna. Piotr Oczko (ed.), *CAMPania. Zjawisko campu we współczesnej kulturze* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Krytyki Politycznej, 2008).

99 St John of the Cross, *Dark Night of the Soul*, trans. David Lewis, ed. Benedict Zimmerman, O.C.D. (Charlotte: Tan Classics, 2010), 83.

100 'En una noche oscura, / con ansia, y en ardores inflamada, / en busca de aventura / salí, toda alocada, / dejando atrás mi celda sosegada.' Jaime Gil de Biedma, 'Divertimentos antiguos,' *Fin de Siglo. Revista de Literatura*, 1983, 4, 4.

was anything but a done deal. The eponymous *mala noche* references the notorious failed coup d'état attempted by the Francoist Lieutenant Colonel Antonio Tejero.[101] Known as '23-F,' the event is related in the novel from the perspective of a transsexual nicknamed La Madelón,[102] who epitomises Spanish society in the process of transformation, still jeopardised by totalitarian attitudes and grappling with pervasive uncertainty and indeterminacy.[103] The humour which permeates Mendicutti's account of the historical moment captivated not only literary critics but also a throng of readers, who popularly associated the author with sexual minority writing.

The entire body of Mendicutti's prose is suffused with the camp stylistics. His novels are populated by gays sporting all kinds of mannerisms and affectations, transvestites, transgender and transsexual individuals. His frequent references to popular culture, particularly to the 'golden era of Hollywood,' irony and camp flippancy bring to mind films by Pedro Almodóvar,[104] but to offer a proper comparative analysis of the two

101 On 23rd February 1981, when the Spanish Parliament was supposed to hold a vote on the candidacy of Leopoldo Calvo-Sotelo for the prime minister, Tejero stormed onto the stand and tried to terrorise the MPs with firearms. Having held them hostage throughout the night, he surrendered without any further violence. The attempted coup was condemned by the general public and elicited an adamant response from the king. This historic event is regarded as the symbolic end of the first stage of the *transición* and the beginning of a more concerted democratisation of the country. Teresa M. Vilarós, *El mono del desencanto. Una crítica cultural de la transición española (1973–1993)* (Madrid: Siglo XXI de España, 1998), 2.

102 *La Madelon* is the title of a French song from the times of WW1, which was sung by gay icons such as Marlene Dietrich and Sara Montiel. The lyrics express patriotic sentiments, telling a story of soldiers who flirt with a young waitress. A reference to this song in *Una mala noche la tiene cualquiera* is one of the many examples that illustrate Mendicutti's characteristic strategy of implanting elements of popular culture in his fictions.

103 Rosa Tapia, 'Cuerpo, transición y nación en *Una mala noche la tiene cualquiera*,' in *Una ética de la libertad. La narrativa de Eduardo Mendicutti*, ed. José Jurado Morales (Madrid: Visor Libros, 2012), 83–4. The queer critic Gema Pérez-Sánchez, who examines the discourse of gender and sexuality in relation to nation and motherland, explains that *Una mala noche* crowns the process in which the aesthetics of *tremendismo* with its 'homosexual panic' and misogyny was gradually abandoned for postmodernist parodies of the paradigm imposed by Francoism. See Gema Pérez-Sánchez, *Queer Transitions in Contemporary Spanish Culture: From Franco to* la Movida (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2008), 61–112. As shown in the previous chapter, the aesthetics of *tremendismo* returns, albeit in an entirely different context, and saturates *La muerte de Tadzio* with homophobic overtones. My reading suggests that its author failed to dismantle the inherited discourse on homosexual identity.

104 Mendicutti has penned *El ángel descuidado* [*The Neglected Angel*], a novel which – similarly to Almodóvar's *Bad Education* – tells the story of a homoerotic friendship between two boys who grow up in a boarding school run by Catholic priests. The boys' budding affection is squashed by their jealous guardians, which affects their lives as adults. There are more parallels between the work of Mendicutti and of Almodóvar. The camp approach to Spanish Catholicism espoused by the two merits

artists would require a separate study. In this subchapter, I will only focus on how Mendicutti performs 'Mazuf's gesture' in order to address transsexual identity and the mechanisms of the 'heterosexual matrix.'

Mendicutti's 1997 novel entitled *Yo no tengo la culpa de haber nacido tan sexy* [*I'm Not to Blame for Having Been Born So Sexy*] is one in a whole line of works which 'rewrite' literary tradition from the queer perspective. Similarly to Juan Goytisolo's *A Cock-Eyed Comedy*, it builds on the works of the Spanish Golden Age as its hypotext, and, more precisely, it engages in an intertextual game with the tradition of mystical literature. The plot of the novel is underpinned by the pattern sourced from Cervantes's *Don Quixote*, which generates additional meanings and aesthetic effects.

Axial to *Yo no tengo la culpa de haber nacido tan sexy* is a forty-something transsexual cabaret artist who performs as Rebecca de Windsor. Aware of the inexorable passage of time and apprehensive of ageing processes that encroach on her body, she decides to reinvent herself. She resolves to become a saint, and in this pursuit, she chooses to emulate the exemplary life of St Teresa of Ávila. She voraciously reads the writings of St John of the Cross, Luis de León, Ramon Llull and her favourite Spanish female mystic. Like the author of *Dark Night*, she finds inspiration in *The Song of Songs*. Her readings affect her conduct and perception of reality, analogously to the impact that the perusal of chivalric romances had on Don Quixote. And in the semblance of Cervantes's protagonist, Rebecca sets out on an eventful, adventure-packed quest across Castile. At a certain point during her journey, she is joined by a chance companion, Danny, a young closeted gay man who similarly craves to follow the path of holiness. Their visits to multiple Castilian monasteries and abbeys will make them reassess their previous ideas about life and finally embrace their non-normative identities.

'Mazuf's gesture' performed in the novel resembles Goytisolo's in that it appropriates the language of the Spanish mystics to submit it to a queer reworking and wield it from dissident positions. It was not for no reason that the work, whose parts are numbered as 'mansions' (*moradas*) instead of as 'chapters,'[105] is glossed with two important quotations: the

particular attention. It is no coincidence that Bogumiła Wyrzykowska, the Polish translator of Mendicutti's *Ganas de hablar* [*Feel Like Talking*] of 2008, rendered the title as *Porozmawiaj ze mną* (literally: talk to me), purposefully alluding to Almodóvar's well-known *Porozmawiaj z nią* (*Hable con ella/Talk to Her*). While the phrasing was primarily meant as a marketing device, the title also conveys certain features of Mendicutti's prose style which invite comparison with Almodóvar's cinematic style.

105 This is a reference to *The Interior Castle* (*Castillo interior*), the most famous work of St Teresa of Ávila, where she uses the metaphor of a castle with seven mansions – or dwelling places – through which one must go in order to meet the Bridegroom. The mansions symbolise the sequential stages of the mystical path.

first stanza of St John of the Cross's 'Dark Night of the Soul' and its gay parody penned by Jaime Gil de Biedma. A more detailed scrutiny of this paratext is in order since it offers a meaningful clue to readers.

The text parodied by Biedma is one of the most famous mystical works and belongs to the classical canon of Spanish literature. Its I-speaker – a soul – leaves its house on a 'dark night' in search of unity with God. In his poetry, St John of the Cross, who was profoundly inspired by the biblical *Song of Songs*, repeatedly resorts to erotically coloured metaphors as instrumental for conveying the fullness of a mystical experience. This is the feature on which the Barcelona-based poet grounds his parody in 'Divertimentos antiguos' ['Aforetime frolics'], written with Julio Maruri in mind, a Santander-born poet and Discalced Carmelite known as Fray Casto del Niño Jesús (Brother Castus of the Infant Jesus).[106] The quoted stanza does not differ much from the 16th-century original. Instead of *amores* ('loves'), Biedma uses *ardores* ('lusts'), suggesting the carnal nature of the impulse to which the I-speaker succumbs. *¡Oh dichosa ventura!* ('O, happy lot!') is replaced by *en busca de aventuras* ('On a happy cruise"), which is supposed to mean 'in search of (homo)sexual adventures,' with the specifically gay nature of these 'adventures' revealed in the following line, where St John's words *salí sin ser notada* ('Forth unobserved I went') are re-cast into *salí, toda alocada* ('Forth all reckless I went').[107] While *alocada* literally means 'mad,' 'crazy' and 'wild,' *loca* (a female lunatic) is a jargon term for an affected, flamboyant homosexual. Consequently, the text which superficially comes across as a common parody, is in fact 'Mazuf's gesture,' because it is based on a camp wink to the readers capable of decoding allusions to gay subculture.

The quotations that open *Yo no tengo la culpa de haber nacido tan sexy* provide readers with an important clue since Mendicutti employs a device corresponding to that used by Goytisolo in *A Cock-Eyed Comedy*. When the protagonists arrive at the sanctuary of San Juan de la Jara, which offers accommodation exclusively to men, they read a leaflet advertising the establishment as having a swimming pool, a tennis court, a gym, a sauna, a reading room and a salon where the visitors can 'enjoy each other's company without any damage to their

106 Miguel Mora, 'Mendicutti novela el rapto místico de un transexual,' *El País*, 31 October 1997, https://elpais.com/diario/1997/10/31/cultura/878252406_850215.html (accessed 15 August 2021).

107 The following parts of the texts describe the protagonist's encounter with a policeman, instead of with the Bridegroom, which readers may expect. In a happy ending, the I-speaker is released after an interrogation at the police station in Hortaleza St. (Chueca neighbourhood). 'Divertimentos antiguos' was published in the literary journal *Fin de Siglo* in 1983 (Biedma, 'Divertimentos,' 2–4) and then reprinted in Jaime Gil de Biedma, *Obras. Poesía y prosa*, ed. N. Vélez, introd. J. Valender (Barcelona: Galaxia Gutenberg, 2010), 829–33.

masculinity.'[108] However, it is not only about cultivating homosocial relations[109] away from women. The leaflet 'waxed on about the delights of divine camaraderie, exclusive delirious sensations reserved for the love among friends in the enrapturing verdure of celestial life, and sublime spasms induced by *properly understood* fellowship.'[110] Like in Goytisolo, the ecclesiastical style in which spiritual experiences are eulogised is re-contextualised to refer to carnal sensations of same-sex male encounters. The short passage comprises two allusions to homoeroticism. Firstly, it plays on the colour green – *verde* – which connotes 'lust' and 'lechery,' and as such was extensively used in Lorca's poetry to encode homosexual love, as already discussed in Chapter 1. Secondly, it contains *entendida* – a participial form of the verb *entender*, which betokens homosexuality as well. Given this, there is a strong implication that expressions such as 'delirious sensations,' 'delights' and 'spasms' are synonymous with 'orgasm.'

Dany, who has so far been given to levitation, bodily mortifications and meditation, easily finds himself at home in the sanctuary of San Juan de la Jara. He eagerly spends his time doing sports with other men, especially with 'a twenty-year-old with the looks of a model from an eau de Cologne commercial.'[111] In Rebecca's recollections, 'Dany's hand grazed the shoulder of that perfection incarnate, leaving no doubt that he was

108 'a disfrutar de la mutua compañía sin menoscabo alguno de la virilidad.' Eduardo Mendicutti, *Yo no tengo la culpa de haber nacido tan sexy* (Barcelona: Tusquets, 1997), 96.

109 The notion of 'male homosocial desire' was put forward by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick to capture an inclusive spectrum of male-to-male relationships based on the exclusion of women and sustaining the patriarchal system. Sedgwick analyses male bonds to identify an implicit and often unrecognised desire of being together, spending time in each other's company and building friendships. The desire is pursued in the shadow of the cultural taboo of homosexuality, which is believed to jeopardise the patriarchal order. This order demands that men cultivate male-to-male relations and at the same time prohibits establishing too close, that is, homoerotic, bonds. Sedgwick explains that 'homosexual panic,' which fuels homophobic behaviour, stems from the impossibility of clearly demarcating homosocial desire from homoerotic desire since the two are arranged along the same axis as parts of a continuum. Patriarchal culture places males in an awkward position and makes them vulnerable to blackmail. Every 'real' male should aspire to closeness with other males, which however may invite suspicions, if not accusations, of homosexuality. This perplexity is evinced in the atmosphere of a male locker room, where common nudity produces an erotic tension which is vented off in homophobic jokes serving to fend off any suspicions of homoerotic inclination. The same function is fulfilled by constantly proving one's 'real' masculinity through showing off one's repeated conquests of women. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985).

110 'hablaba de los gozos de la divina camaradería, del delirio exclusivo que está reservado en el verde embeleso de la vida celestial al amor de los amigos, de los sublimes espasmos que proporciona la fraternidad *bien entendida*.' Mendicutti, *Yo no tengo*, 96 (italics mine).

111 'un veinteañero de anuncio de colonia para hombre.' *Ibid.*, 136.

a God-sent gift for him, for them both to attain the highest elevation together.'[112] Descriptions worded in this way bring to mind passages in Goytisolo's *A Cock-Eyed Comedy*, for they contain wordplays based on similar combinations of the erotic and the religious (in this particular case 'elevation' refers as well to the raising of the Host after consecration during the mass). In this manner, Mendicutti's camp quill (*pluma*!) queers male homosocial desire and the discourse of the Church at the same time.

Soaked to the core with her mystical readings, Rebecca de Windsor often uses metaphors characteristic of St John. However, what was only a sensual figurative expression in the Carmelite is divested of the metaphorical in Mendicutti and stripped down to its bare literalness. At the sight of a muscular gardener, the heroine goes into a 'mystical' trance and is close to 'ecstasy.' Much of the novel's comic appeal is based on such semantic shifts. Rebecca herself discovers this amusing misunderstanding when she eventually encounters her Bridegroom in the seventh 'mansion.' An embodiment of all the men on whom she has ever had a crush, the Bridegroom is more interested in her body than in her spirituality, and he sends her into entirely literal thrills: 'And then I realised that […] if this was ecstasy then I had already felt it, and several times to boot – with Jaime, with Paul, Juan, and even once with Santos and with Anselmo.'[113] At this point, Rebecca figures out that she will not become a saint, but she is not to blame for having been born so sexy.

In my discussion of *A Cock-Eyed Comedy*, I mentioned that it should be analysed side by side with *Yo no tengo la culpa de haber nacido tan sexy*, as both texts queer ecclesiastical discourse, both 'rewrite' the literature of the Spanish Golden Age, and both revel in 'post-Stonewall' gay camp. To my knowledge, the only study which brings the two novels together is Castilla Ortiz's dissertation on the spirituality of gays in the writings of Goytisolo and Mendicutti. However, Castilla Ortiz's examination seems rather superficial, especially as far as the queering of the discourse of the Catholic religion is concerned, and his conclusions rather disappoint. He fails to grasp the specific character of gay camp and consequently interprets the mingling of religious and gay themes in *Yo no tengo la culpa de haber nacido tan sexy* as a device for framing queers as individuals who reconcile their sexual identities with spiritual life. The passages in which Mendicutti empties the mystics' sensual language of metaphorical meanings, leaving readers with sheer literalness, is commented on by Castilla Ortiz as follows: 'Ultimately, what is noticeable

112 'Dany le pasó un brazo por los hombros al dechado de perfecciones y dejó claro que el cielo lo había puesto en su camino para alcanzar juntos la mayor elevación.' *Ibid.*

113 'Y entonces me percaté de que […] si aquello era un éxtasis yo los había tenido a montones – con Jaime, con Paulo, con Juan, incluso alguna vez con Santos y con Anselmo.' *Ibid.*, 265.

is that spirituality and eroticism are two sides of the same coin.'[114] His argument springs from the same mistake as in the case of Goytisolo's *A Cock-Eyed Comedy*.

'Post-Stonewall' gay camp permeates many more passages of *Yo no tengo la culpa de haber nacido tan sexy*, bringing to mind Goytisolo's novel. Mendicutti's protagonists arrive at the abbey of San Esteban de los Patios, where visitors can stay overnight and purchase deluxe leather products at a souvenir shop. Like the nuns of Ávila in *A Cock-Eyed Comedy*, the monks manufacture hand-made penance instruments with inlaid crumbled rocks, purportedly those used to stone St Stephen to death, as the tradition has it. The faithful who are sceptical about the authenticity of the rocks have it explained to them that the rocks are miraculously multiplied the way Christ multiplied bread and fish. Readers entertain no doubts whatsoever that the 'penance' for which these luxurious whips are utilised should be understood as sadomasochistic practices, which is confirmed further in the novel.

The motif of leather accessories is resumed in chapter 6, where Rebecca and Dany come across an off-roader full of muscular 'Seraphs,' in whom the heroine sees 'messengers of the Bridegroom.'[115] The humour of the description derives not only from the manipulation of the ecclesiastical language into sexual connotations (which is the case in Goytisolo), but also from a device which was previously employed by Cervantes in *Don Quixote*. Having devoured stacks of mystical literature, Rebecca views the men as 'select centurions of the celestial army' and 'a spiritual patrol,'[116] similarly to the way the ingenious gentleman of La Mancha saw giants instead of windmills. Paralleling Sancho Panza, Dany perceives the men as a threat and warns Rebecca that they are sexual maniacs who derive pleasure from inflicting and/or feeling pain. The 'angels' tell the protagonist that, along with several other people, they are heading for a Grand Congress, which Rebecca interprets to mean a mystical encounter with the Bridegroom: '"Real luxe, Rebecca: your meeting with the Bridegroom will be luxury up to the nines," I said to myself. "You'll have only angels all around you."'[117] Yet before the long-awaited 'Grand Congress' takes place, the 'angels,' whose looks remind the heroine of characters in Tom of Finland's comics,[118] take our mystical disciples to

114 'Últimamente lo que se ve es que la espiritualidad y el erotismo son caras de una misma moneda.' Castilla Ortiz, *Construction*, 88.

115 'mensajeros del Amado.' Mendicutti, *Yo no tengo*, 208.

116 'centuriones selectos del ejército celestial,' 'patrulla de espíritus.' *Ibid*., 207–8.

117 'Un lujo, Rebecca; tu encuentro con el Amado va a ser un lujazo, me dije. Vas a tener ángeles por todas partes.' *Ibid*., 220–1.

118 Tom of Finland (Touko Laaksonen, 1922–1991) was a Finnish draughtsman who authored pornographic comics and illustrations featuring super-manly gays in apparels of seamen, cowboys and uniformed services. Fascinated with leather culture, he

the abbey of San Servando. When there, they pop into a leather shop which offers 'besides clothing – trousers, coats, waistcoats, short and tight-fitting briefs, male strings […] even whips, hair shirts and other products for the mortification of the flesh or penance.'[119] As in Goytisolo, the monastery shop exports its merchandise 'not only to London, Amsterdam and, since the fall of communism, to Prague and Warsaw, but also to New York, Chicago and San Francisco.'[120]

The novel boasts a wealth of other characteristically 'post-Stonewall' camp references to gay subculture. It summons the names of well-known clubs from the world's biggest metropolises and describes garments which encode their wearers' preferred sexual practices. According to Dieter Ingenschay, *Yo no tengo la culpa de haber nacido tan sexy* is a novel that 'thematises the internationalisation of the gay community on the eve of globalisation.'[121] This is a noteworthy observation because one of the features that sets homoerotic literature of the turn-of-the-millennium apart from its counterpart produced in the 1970s and 1980s is that the former undertakes a critical examination of gay culture, which is perceived as already quite well-established. For the authors who wrote after the Spanish transition to democracy, the major object was not so much to freely express homoerotic experience (which was what Martínez's scribes pursued) as rather to forge their own language, to convey another point of view and to communicate an individual position on the increasingly trivialising and uniformised homosexual culture of the globalisation era. While the literature of the last two decades is still dedicated to writing against the culture of heteronormativity, it more and more frequently articulates a critique of homonormativity as well, which I address in my discussion of Álvaro Pombo and Luis Antonio de Villena. Ingenschay aptly highlights this aspect Mendicutti's critical stance, arguing that the irony of the novel weighs in on new, emergent tendencies, such as the cult of hyper-masculinity and the fetishisation of gym-sculpted musculature, trends which were rather marginal in the Spanish homosexual community before.[122]

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portrayed males in tarty postures, exaggerating their anatomical features. His art is campy for its images of hypermasculinity, stylised fancifulness and comic-strip artificiality. Philip Core, *Camp: The Lie That Tells The Truth* (London: Plexus, 1984), 177–9.

119 'además de prendas de vestir – pantalones, cazadoras, chalecos, calzones cortos y ajustados, taparrabos […] incluso látigos, cilicios y otro material de martirio o de penitencia.' Mendicutti, *Yo no tengo*, 224.

120 'no sólo a Londres, a Berlín, a Amsterdam y, desde la caída del comunismo, a Praga y Varsovia, sino también a Nueva York, Chicago y San Francisco.' *Ibid*.

121 'tematiza la internacionalización del mundo gay en vísperas de la globalización.' Following Dennis Altman, Ingenschay labels this phenomenon as the 'Americanisation of homosexuality.' Dieter Ingenschay, 'Sobre machos reales y santos ficticios: *Yo no tengo la culpa de haber nacido tan sexy*, entre lo global y lo local,' in *Ética,* ed. Jurado Morales, 192.

122 *Ibid*., 197–200.

Both protagonists' gender and sexual identities are a crucial issue from the point of view of queer criticism. The journey across Castilian abbeys and monasteries proves liberating in this respect for Dany and Rebecca alike. Dany, for whom religiousness seems to be an escape from homosexuality, ultimately joins a group of 'leathermen,' among whom he finds acceptance. The man is perfectly acquainted with gay circles and versed in their specificity; it is he who sets Rebecca right when she takes the 'pilgrims' they encounter for 'messengers of the Bridegroom.' It becomes clear for readers that Dany had frequented gay clubs before he embarked on the mystical path. His story parallels a quite typical pattern; as a child he was frail and shy, and he did not know how to fight with other boys. In order to overcome these weaknesses and cast aside complexes, he took to working out at a gym and building his muscles with an admirable keenness. This is why Rebecca, who – like Dany, though for entirely different reasons – sought bodily transformation and pursued an ideal image, is unable to understand how one can mortify the body whose current shape has taken so much effort: 'I told Dany that it was beyond me, that to have a body like his was no sin and that it was God's blessing, but he said that it was the blessing of the Holiday Gym.'[123] He added the he had chosen the wrong way and that he regretted caring about the improvement of the body, but not of the soul. This was why he had to atone for his former idolatry. In this context, 'the wrong way' that Dany walked should be understood as the so-called gay life-style, and his problem with the body as a problem with homosexuality. For its part, idolatry in this sense is characteristic of gay circles, where – as the novel intimates – a hyper-masculine toned muscular physique is erected into an idol, which was already one of the points made by Ingenschay.[124] Dany feels an urge to mortify his body because he wants to repudiate that which this body represents and of which it reminds him. Nevertheless, it proves impossible to relinquish the past and homoerotic desires. When accompanying Rebecca, Dany finds out that even – if not *especially* – the monastic life is saturated with homoeroticism. He succumbs to this atmosphere, for example at the sanctuary of San Juan de la Jara.

Reminiscent of the adventures of Don Quixote and Sancho Panza, an episode in which Dany spots youths playing football and takes them for angels reverberates with similar overtones. Dany watches one of them score a goal and be congratulated by his teammates who rush to him and express their approval through fraternal and – as befits footballers – very passionate embraces. Crying 'Hallelujah,' Dany also throws himself

123 'le dije a Dany que no me cabía en la cabeza, que un cuerpo como el suyo no era ningún pecado, que era una bendición de Dios, pero él me dijo que era una bendición de Holiday Gym.' Mendicutti, *Yo no tengo*, 71.

124 Ingenschay, 'Sobre,' 197–200.

onto the hero, his body pressing the boy to the turf. The other players try to free the scorer. 'But Dany did not stir. Dany was in seventh heaven. He was beaming as if he could see the Bridegroom in His incomparable resplendence amidst a choir of angels.'[125] In the comic twist, what is accepted in homosocial relations was interpreted by Dany as homoerotic, and hence his spontaneous reaction and an impulse to 'fraternise' with the boys. As expected, they respond with aggression to such a breach of the thin line between the homosocial and the homoerotic. After the incident, Rebecca's mauled companion persistently claims that these had been angels in order to keep up appearances and save face in the situation. This experience motivates his efforts to avoid any dealings with a group of SM-preferring gays on their way to the 'Grand Congress.'[126] However, he eventually joins them, leaving Rebecca to her own devices. His new pals make him abandon the path of penance for the sake of, as readers may easily guess, mortifying his body for entirely different purposes. This aspect also reveals the perverse leanings of Mendicutti's novel.

Yet Dany's identity predicament and way to self-acceptance are merely secondary in the book. The major focus is on the heroine, who, like her companion, endeavours to run away from her past. Her story exemplifies the operations of what is known as the 'heterosexual matrix.' As mentioned in Chapter 1, the notion was introduced by Judith Butler[127] to explore the social pattern of producing and naturalising heterosexuality. The process is associated with the concept of gender performativity, that is, the body-styling practices whose iterability produces an illusion that gender is natural while it is in fact inherently cultural. Butler's insights mark a breakthrough as they unstitch sex from gender. In other words, Butler shows that gender neither directly results from sex nor forms its simple infrastructure. Rather, the opposite process occurs in which sex is 'naturalised' through culturally determined, repeatable gestures and enactments. Butler's explorations suggest that there is no 'original' on which we can rely when considering masculinity

125 'Pero Dany no se movía. Dany estaba en la gloria. Sonreía como si vislumbrara el resplandor incomparable del Amado en medio de un coro de ángeles.' Mendicutti, *Yo no tengo*, 55.

126 One of them asks Dany an embarrassing question: '"Haven't we met by any chance? […] At the Strong Center." […] Dany turned pale from fear, which meant that he perfectly knew the place as well. […] he began to wave his hands in the who-are-you-taking-me-for manner. And the angel who looked quite a joker was staring at him as if wanting to say: "easy, easy, why so reddened all of a sudden? Everything will be rumbled sooner or later anyway"' ('"¿No nos conocemos? […] Del Strong Center." […] Dany puso cara de terror, lo que significaba que también él conocía perfectamente el sitio. […] se puso a hacer aspavientos del tipo ¿pero por quién me ha tomado usted?, y el ángel parecía bastante guasón porque le miraba como diciéndole no te sofoques, hombre, que tarde o temprano se sabe todo.'). *Ibid.*, 212–3.

127 Judith Butler, *The Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), 47–106.

and femininity, and that the very notions of 'femininity' and 'masculinity' we employ are culturally marked and do not result *directly* from biology, instead stemming from a fixed continuum of behaviour which we only perceive as naturally male or female. This happens because this behaviour has constantly been reiterated and re-enacted over generations.[128] As Butler puts it: 'If the inner truth of gender is a fantasy instituted and inscribed on the surface of bodies, then it seems that genders can be neither true or false, but are only produced as the truth effects of a discourse of primary and stable identity.'[129] These processes are accompanied by socialisation, in and through which the heterosexual status quo is perpetuated as a person born a biological woman is brought up to reproduce the cultural norm assigned to femininity. This norm excludes the possibility of desiring a person of the same sex. Consequently, the operations of the heterosexual matrix generate an illusion that heterosexuality is natural and as such the only option. Concomitantly, homosexual identity is classified as 'against nature.' Similarly, other identities that deregulate the pattern identified by Butler (sex → gender → obligatory heterosexuality) are excluded by the system and treated as threats to its stability.

Grouped under the umbrella term of queer, these identities that break out of the mould have become pivotal to the study of sexuality because they are 'cracks' in the system and thus expose the mechanisms which remain transparent in the case of normative identities. Researchers examine phenomena such as cross-dressing, transvestism[130] and transsexuality (which is my point of interest in Mendicutti's novel) in order to scrutinise how the norm works in the context of sex and sexuality. For example, Butler's analysis of drag served as an illustration of her theory of gender performativity. The parodistic and imitative conventions of drag queen/king shows are, in her view, a key to understanding the system: '[p]arodic proliferation deprives hegemonic culture and its critics of the claim to naturalized or essentialist gender identities.

128 Hence plentiful misunderstandings about Butler's concepts. The accusation of questioning the very existence of biological sex, which is frequently levelled at her, is unfounded and stems from miscomprehending her ideas. Butler does not claim that there is no biological sex as such. She is interested in the categories of femininity and masculinity, whose cultural operations are misinterpreted by us as resulting from sex, that is, from biology.

129 Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 174.

130 Cross-dressing, in the sense of wearing clothes typical of the opposite sex and performing roles associated with this sex, is most frequently linked to artistic practices (drag queen/king shows) or results from certain social conditions. The notion of cross-dressing is also applied to women who donned male attire in the past to be able to do jobs reserved for men (e.g. Catalina de Erauso – the Ensign Nun). Cross-dressing does not presuppose identification with the other sex, simply denoting the very fact of appearing in disguise. Transvestism is connected to such a temporary identification for the purpose of emotional or sexual satisfaction.

[…] they imitate the myth of originality itself.'[131] This is a parody, but a parody without an original, a performance that 'postures as an imitation.'[132] Butler concludes that gender is an obligatory task to be performed – something that constantly is and should be enacted.[133] Yet gender has no real point of reference and, always being a phantasm, it may never be fully and completely realised in life, even though individuals unceasingly strive after the ideal with greater or lesser success. If this is all about phantasms, the question is in what situations the system can be destabilised and when performances become subversive.

Similarly to the phenomenon of drag investigated by Butler, transsexuality provides an avenue for a closer scrutiny of how the heterosexual matrix operates. One reason for this is that, as a radical transgression of the sex-gender dichotomy perpetuated by this matrix, transsexuality destabilises the system founded on binaries. Given this, transsexuals are not only excluded but also resented; they provoke utter anxiety, abhorrence and aggression. As 'queers' whose existence is 'against nature,' their status is that of the abject.[134]

Yo no tengo la culpa de haber nacido tan sexy is a vocal literary protest against transphobia. Like in his novels with gay protagonists, Mendicutti resorts to the poetics of humour to convey the way his transsexual heroine grapples with exclusion. When Rebecca de Windsor, a performer and a would-be mystic, traverses Spanish monasteries, her memories revisit the past, and the 'mansions' through which she goes will prove to be steps on her quest to the 'inner castle' of her identity.

The adventures that Dany and Rebecca face on their way are interspersed with numerous retrospections. The heroine time and again goes

131 Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 138.

132 *Ibid.*

133 This does not mean that gender is like an outfit which one can put on and take off at will. Butler repudiates this view (which is by the way often attributed to her) and emphasises that the incorporation of gender norms is a complicated process involving constant and *iterable citation*. Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex* (New York and London: Routledge, 1993), 228.

134 The stigmatising exclusion of non-normative identities is perhaps best captured by the notion of the abject introduced by Julia Kristeva. Kristeva draws an analogy between the construction of the Other's identity and the process of evacuating that which evokes disgust from the body. The notion of the abject, which denotes that which is neither the subject nor the object but the excreted, should be understood as a by-product of constructing an identity that seeks to perceive itself as stable: 'A certain "ego" that merged with its master, a superego, has flatly driven it away. It lies outside, beyond the set, and does not seem to agree to the latter's rules of the game. And yet, from its place of banishment, the abject does not cease challenging its master. Without a sign (for him), it beseeches a discharge, a convulsion, a crying out. To each ego its object, to each superego its abject' (Julia Kristeva, *The Power of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez [New York and Chichester: Columbia University Press, 1982], 2). Butler refers to Kristeva's metaphor in a far more direct way: '[t]his excretic function becomes, as it were, the model by which other forms of identity-differentiation are accomplished. In effect, this is the mode by which Others become shit.' Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 170.

back to the past, which she has made every effort to erase from her consciousness throughout her life. One night, she has a dream in which the face of the Bridegroom which appears among angels is the very semblance of Che Guevara, whom Rebecca idolised as an adolescent. Bent on experiencing spiritual raptures, the protagonist concludes that this mystical dream is simply an effect of indigestion. She involuntarily remembers the time when her father's and his friends' leftist beliefs made her fascinated with the South American revolutionary in ways worlds apart from what her father could wish. Rebecca recalls: 'when my father talked about me, he didn't really talk about me, but about a son he did not have but craved to have.'[135] He talked about his fantasy of a son, a vision that this son was slowly proving unable and unwilling to embody. Young Jesús was once caught trying on women's garments, a discovery which elicited a single word from the father: 'Fuck.'[136] In an attempt to save the day, the father's friend asked Jesús who he had disguised himself as, and the child answered 'La Pasionaria.' His father did not break his silence because 'he may have been caught up in an immense inner conflict […], not knowing exactly whether to hit the roof on discovering his son to be a fag or to go mushy over the kid's desire to be like La Pasionaria.'[137] As early as in his childhood, Jesús inhabited a world of his own phantasms:

> Boys become all-out men and can make it as doctors, scholars, poets, mayors, actors or astronauts; girls, too, become all-out women and can, though almost always with more difficulty, make it as lady doctors, scholars, poetesses, mayoresses, actresses or astronauts, but I was, for everybody, a boy and, despite that, wanted to be the most eminent lady doctor, the most famous female scholar, a brilliant poetess, a mayoress loved by her citizens, a divine actress, a very brave and clever astronaut and, on top of that, a gorgeous beauty. I wanted to be Miss Spain and marry an American millionaire. All this was nowhere near easy to achieve, not one of these things was, especially if your name was Jesús and you'd just had your first communion dressed in a little sailor suit.[138]

135 'mi padre, cuando hablaba de mí, en realidad no hablaba de mí, del hijo que tenía, sino del hijo que le habría gustado tener.' Mendicutti, *Yo no tengo*, 43.

136 'Coño.' *Ibid.*, 47.

137 'a lo mejor lo que tuvo fue un grandísimo conflicto interior […], sin saber si enfurecerse al descubrir que su hijo era maricón o si emocionarse porque su hijo quería ser como Pasionaria.' *Ibid.*, 47–8.

138 'Los niños se convierten en hombres hechos y derechos y pueden ser médicos, científicos, escritores, alcaldes, actores o astronautas, y las niñas se convierten en mujeres hechas y derechas y pueden, aunque casi siempre con más fatiguita, ser médicas, científicas, escritoras, alcaldesas, actrices y astronautas; pero yo era un niño para todo el mundo y, sin embargo, quería ser una médica conocidísima, una científica famosísima, una escritora fenomenal, una alcaldesa queridísima por el pueblo, una actriz divina, una astronauta muy lista y muy valiente y, además, guapa de morir. También quería

There are two special points of interest in this passage. First, it is Mendicutti's writing in miniature, as it were – expressed in colloquial language with multiple repetitions characteristic of oral language and, above all, rich in humour and ironic distance when depicting extremely dramatic situations. This works to bridge the gap between readers and otherness and to dispel the image of a transsexual as a degenerate monster. Second, it exposes the stereotypical phantasm of femininity at work in culture. It is not for no reason that Rebecca talks about wanting to become Miss Spain, to marry an American millionaire and, were she to become an actress, a writer or an astronaut, to be supreme in these categories – most famous, most clever, most beautiful and the like. The heroine's drive to perfection, especially in terms of femininity, also surfaces in other episodes in the book and results from the already evoked imperative to embody the gender ideal, impossible though it is to achieve this perfect model in full. A transsexual person's situation is particularly challenging insofar that even a sex-correction operation and the most meticulous stylisation of the body as male or female do not prevent individuals from being vulnerable to exclusion and exposed to locker-room commentaries and digs about not being 'a real woman' or 'a real man.' This problem lies at the core of Mendicutti's novel.

In 'Spare Parts: The Surgical Construction of Gender,' Marjorie Garber examines medical discourse and the utterances of transsexual people themselves to conclude that 'both male transvestites and transsexuals radically and dramatically *essentialize* their genitalia.'[139] This results from our culture's mandatory phallocentrism, that is, 'the conviction that masculine identity, male subjectivity, is determined and signified by the penis.'[140] Garber observes that the medical literature in English refers to M-to-F transsexuals as 'male transsexuals' even though at the very core their identity is female. Despite this, 'the culture still designates them male,'[141] as revealed by the choice of the modifier.

The examples marshalled by Garber illustrate the processes of essentialising gender, which were explored by Butler. Similar mechanisms are portrayed in *Yo no tengo la culpa de haber nacido tan sexy*. Rebecca de Windsor – like the transsexuals cited by Garber – feels an obsessive drive to get rid of her male genitals as signs of a male identity:

> ten years ago I made another momentous decision; I decided to have a surgery and to do away with, in the operating theatre, the last

ser Miss España y casarme con un millonario americano. No era fácil precisamente conseguir todo eso, y ni siquiera una sola de esas cosas, cuando te llamas Jesús, acabas de hacer la primera comunión vestida de recluta de Marina.' *Ibid*., 43.

139 Marjorie Garber, 'Spare Parts: The Surgical Construction of Gender,' in *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader*, ed. Henry Abelove, Michelle A. Barale and David M. Halperin (New York and London: Routledge, 1993), 325 (italics original).

140 *Ibid*., 324–5.

141 *Ibid*., 328.

> nuisances of that mistaken maleness, and at long last to turn into the sexiest woman in the world, truly and for ever.[142]

The heroine is unable to feel like a 'real' woman exactly because the heterosexual matrix binds gender to biology. The coupling of sex and gender is not the only property of this matrix. Its operations are based on exclusion: the masculine precludes the feminine and the other way round. Mendicutti's protagonist is ensnared in a gender/sex pitfall and, as we shall see, only comes to realise this towards the end of the novel. The pitfall is that even after the sex reassignment surgery Rebecca cannot feel like a woman 'in full.' In order to do so, she must definitively reject her past as a male and completely chase it away from her memory. In building her feminine identity, she plunges herself into extremes and endeavours to completely incarnate the gender norms without realising that this is an unfeasible venture. She comprehends femininity in a stereotyped way that conforms to the culturally binding *phantasm*. Hence her drive to perfection and her obsession of being 'the sexiest woman in the world,' as well as her sudden fascination with St Teresa of Ávila, whose *Way of Perfection* (*Camino de perfección*) Rebecca erroneously construes as suggesting their spiritual kinship. The way in which Mendicutti depicts his heroine's attitude to her own femininity is consistent with Garber's investigations, who notes that transsexual people tend to attach far more weight to masculinity and femininity than non-transsexual individuals: 'They are emphatically not interested in "unisex" or "androgyny" as erotic styles, but rather in gender-marked and gender-coded identity structures.'[143]

However, Rebecca de Windsor will be compelled to confront her past, which she has so doggedly crossed out of her memory. When she arrives with Dany at the men-only sanctuary of San Juan de la Jara, she cannot but assume a male appearance again, which proves nothing short of vexing. She has already trimmed her hair to prevent her exaggerated femininity from scandalising her co-devotees, a gesture described in Mendicutti's signature camp style: 'I cut my hair the lesbian mode, tastefully, fairly

142 'hace diez años, tomé otra drástica decisión: operarme, dejar en el quirófano los últimos estorbos de una hombría equivocada, y convertirme por fin, de verdad y para siempre, en la mujer más sexy del mundo.' Mendicutti, *Yo no tengo*, 12.

143 Garber, 'Spare Parts,' 334–5. Garber's conclusion puts forth a certain objection that feminist criticism levels at transsexual people, alleging that their enactment of gender reinforces the patriarchally imposed system. The latest findings of research on transsexuality undermine this view and show that a many transsexual individuals undertake conscious play with masculinity and femininity by locating themselves in between them, thus questioning the categorial stability of gender and revealing its oppressive mechanisms. Sally Hines insists that: 'Findings challenge the other mainstay of feminist critiques of transgender practices, that transgender men and women seek to ape traditional gender roles.' Sally Hines, *TransForming Gender: Transgender Practices of Identity, Intimacy and Care* (Bristol: The Policy Press, 2007), 94, https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt9qgpqw (accessed 15 August 2021).

short, but not too short, to retain the aura of amiable femininity because it's not about the Bridegroom taking the Bride for some firefighter.'[144] At the sanctuary, the heroine must undergo a more incisive metamorphosis. Having bought male clothes, she goes to a nearby hotel, where after a poor night's sleep she wraps up her body to conceal her curves from the world. On this occasion, she recalls how she tied her other, hateful body parts in the past. Now, however, the situation is entirely different. Rebecca feels that she abuses her bodiliness and apologetically addresses her body: 'Perhaps I must mortify you a bit, but I will never whip you the way Dany does with this cute frame of his; I'll be gentle and go about it sensitively. I trust you'll understand.'[145] She is so successful that she can barely get over her reflection in the mirror. She cannot recognise herself and is distressed by the upsetting memories from the times when she had to look at a stranger in the mirror. Dany is also vastly impressed, and his words of recognition ('Even your face is like a man's.'[146]), though meant as a complement, echo the ominous admonition she once heard from her transsexual girlfriend of old: 'You may become gorgeous as far as your features allow, but a male face will always peep from beneath.'[147] It is this face that Rebecca has been fleeing throughout her life, trying to leave it behind as far as possible by throwing herself into utmost femininity.

The episode at San Juan de la Jara culminates in a funny scene founded on a truly Cervantesque charade. Rebecca's male act is so convincing that it catches the attention of a homosexual admirer. Besides delving into the protagonist's transsexual identity, Mendicutti also toys with the notion of male homosocial desire by intertwining it with homoerotic desire. As part of his stratagem, the monk who opens the door to Rebecca and Dany at the first monastery (Santa María de Bobia) stares desirously at Dany and welcomes the guests saying 'Blessed be the Virgin.'[148] As a member of a male order, he cannot savour enough the beauty of the male body he sees in front of him. The friar's exclamation is by no means a conventional greeting; rather, it is an expression of admiration, which Rebecca, who eyes the scene from aside, rightly grasps. At San Juan de la Jara, too, the men at the sanctuary do not worship God, but adulate the idol of masculinity in a homoerotically saturated atmosphere. Dressed up as a male, Rebecca inevitably becomes an object of desire: 'almost

144 'me había cortado el pelo en plan lesbiana con buen gusto, muy corto pero con volumen suficiente para conservar un aire de simpática feminidad, que tampoco era cosa de que el Amado confundiera a la Amada con un bombero.' Mendicutti, *Yo no tengo*, 29.

145 'A lo mejor tengo que mortificarte un poco, pero nunca apaleándote, como hace Dany con ese cuerpazo que tiene, sino con mucho tiento y con la confianza de que tú lo vas a comprender.' *Ibid.*, 107.

146 'Hasta se te ha puesto cara de hombre.' *Ibid.*, 114.

147 'Según qué facciones tengas, puedes llegar a estar guapísima, pero la cara de fondo siempre es la cara de hombre.' *Ibid.*

148 'Ave María Purísima.' *Ibid.*, 26.

everybody, as soon as they spotted me in sight, stared at my chest and my crotch, and the more agile eyes even at both all at once, one by one.'[149] It does not take long before she lands in the arms of one of the men, which, as a woman prone to ecstasies, she recalls by citing St John of the Cross: 'I entered into unknowing/and there I remained unknowing.'[150] This state has a mystical closure, meaning that it culminates in a swoon in the aftermath of which the men discover that a woman has sneaked into their enclave.

This flirtation with masculinity unleashes scandal and dread. The dreadful scandal of identity produces a dual denouement: the men discover a female intruder in disguise, and Rebecca re-discovers a masculine element in herself at the moment of homoerotic ecstasy. She swoons in her admirer's embrace, which she recounts using masculine grammatical forms:

> His strong hands trembled when caressing my chin, my neck, my chest, my waist, my crotch. I moaned. A fleshly burgeoning galvanised my loins. I had not yet recovered, but apparently, I was conscious enough not to fail to realise that it was a massive erection. […] I concluded that it must be some kind of a retrospective erection, there was no other option. That, or a gigantic misunderstanding.[151]

The point is that it is neither the first nor the last time that this has happened. When Rebecca meets Dany and watches him undress to go to bed, she chides him:

> 'Dany, for God's sake, don't you ever undress like that when I'm around. I feel I have an erection.'
> He almost jumped at this. 'What did you say you had?'
> 'An erection.'
> Dany found it hard to believe.
> 'Didn't you say you'd had a surgery?', he asked, totally flummoxed.
> 'I did,' I directly admitted. 'I guess it's a psychosomatic erection'.[152]

149 'Casi todos, cuando me tenían enfrente, me miraban el tórax y la entrepierna y algunos, especialmente rápidos de pupila, las dos cosas, una detrás de otra.' *Ibid*., 137.

150 'Entré donde no supe, y me quedé no sabiendo.' *Ibid*., 139. The English quotation from St John of the Cross, 'Stanzas Concerning an Extasy Experienced in High Contemplation,' in *The Collected Works of St John of the Cross*, trans. Kieran Kavanaugh, O.C.D., and Otilio Rodriguez, O.C.D. (Washington: ICS Publications, 2010), 53.

151 'Unas manos fornidas, aunque temblorosas, acariciaban mi barbilla, mi cuello, mi tórax, mi cintura, mi entrepierna. Yo gemí. Un relámpago de carne estalló en mis ingles. Yo seguía traspuesto, pero ya no tanto, por lo visto, como para no comprender que aquello era una señora erección. […] No tiene más remedio que ser una erección retrospectiva, me dije. O un malentendido mayúsculo.' Mendicutti, *Yo no tengo*, 140.

152 '– Dany, por Dios, no vuelvas a desnudarte delante de mí de esa manera. Me siento erecta. Dio un respingo:

A 'psychosomatic erection' takes Rebecca by surprise at San Juan de la Jara for the second time, which makes her anxious about meeting the real Bridegroom. After all, it was 'not about the Bridegroom taking the Bride for some firefighter.'[153] Phantom maleness haunts Rebecca all the more as she endeavours to wipe out the memories of living in a male body. The heroine eventually comes to terms with her past in the penultimate chapter, entitled 'The Seventh Mansion,' where she arrives at the monastery in the High (*monasterio de la Altura*), which offers luxury accommodation to pilgrims. Having collected the key, she heads to her room and notices that she is being intently watched by a strange figure at the stairs. It is a young girl wearing a first-communion dress and having a boy's face. It is the same figure that accompanied her in the most important moment of her life, at the hospital just after the sex-correction operation. This sight brings back the most intimate experiences of that time in Rebecca's mind. She ponders her emotional states from before the surgery and the surgeon's warnings that 'there are places that no scalpel can reach; for example, the voice will always remain unchanged, low and harsh, as much somebody else's property as Gibraltar is England's. The voice is like an unconquerable fortress.'[154] The patient, however, is worried about something else, namely about memory. Rebecca realises that 'you cannot trim your memory the way you trim your fringe,'[155] and the truth of this insight dawns on her again in 'the seventh mansion.' Her major mistake has been exactly that: trying to erase memory, whatever it takes. The reappearing girl with a boy's face, an embodiment of the past, will not let her forget about it.

At the monastery in the High, Rebecca de Windsor reviews her life up to this point, including its erotic sphere. She remembers all the men with whom she has had affairs, including the sweethearts of her teenage years. The atmosphere of seclusion and contemplation sends her into an intimate reverie in which she once again passes out. In this mystical scenery, half asleep and half awake, she feels inexplicable sensations and ultimately experiences the coveted encounter with the Bridegroom. He appears in the form of her past lovers, exhibiting features of all of them at the same time. At this second most important moment of her life, Rebecca is exposed to another humiliation. When the Bridegroom presses for a 'mystical' intercourse, the heroine feels the nightmarish,

– ¿Que te sientes qué?
– Erecta. Dany no daba crédito.
– ¿Pero tú no estabas operada? – me preguntó, desconcertadísimo.
– Hijo, sí – admití yo, aturdida –. Será una erección psicosomática.' *Ibid.*, 24.

153 'que tampoco era cosa de que el Amado confundiera a la Amada con un bombero.' *Ibid.*, 29.

154 'que hay sitios adonde el bisturí no llega: la voz, por ejemplo, que siempre estará ahí, grave y encasquillada, perteneciendo a otro, como el peñón de Gibraltar pertenece a Inglaterra. La voz es como el alcázar que no se rinde.' *Ibid.*, 254–5.

155 'Nadie se corta la memoria como se corta la melena.' *Ibid.*, 255.

distressing sensation return: 'again, I felt that enormity bulge down there again, which was physically impossible, but which I've already gone through; that psychosomatic *faux pas*, that retrospective quirk, even though the moment was anything but suitable for that.'[156] To her surprise, Rebecca realises however that: 'The Bridegroom […] guessed my anxiety […] and whispered into my ear – as Santos did before – that I shouldn't worry, that all of this was *part of my soul* and that I made him feel like nobody else had ever made him feel before.'[157] Only at this moment does Rebecca come to completely accept her 'incomplete' femininity and thus to break away from the pitfall of identity. She admits that 'my nature has always been impulsive and strong, since childhood, since I was a young boy, and it makes little sense to despise for the rest of your life what I happened to be for so many years.'[158] The heroine is not only at ease to refer to her past using the masculine noun 'young boy' (*desde chiquitito*), but she is also freed from an obsession with her body, which, as it ages, less and less corresponds to the imagined ideal of a young and attractive female. It was the fear of the unstoppable change of looks – and consequently the loss of feminine allures – that fuelled her pursuits:

> As becomes a man, St Paul had his epiphany when galloping on horseback to Damascus, and I had mine when removing my make-up. […] I was just wiping […] the cleansing lotion off with a cotton ball, when I saw my mortal body in the mirror, my forty-something-year-old complexion, the whole truth of my face without cosmetic trickery, and suddenly I started to look at myself with future eyes, with a gaze I will have at fifty, sixty, at seventy […], fortunately, I was all of a sudden illuminated by some inner light, and I realised that I couldn't go back, that the desire of perfection was not a whim you grow out of with age.[159]

156 'volvía a notar el crecimiento de aquella atrocidad, lo que no era técnicamente posible, pero ya había sufrido en otras ocasiones aquel inconveniente psicosomático, aquel accidente retrospectivo, aunque el momento nunca fuese tan inoportuno.' *Ibid.*, 265.

157 'El Amado […] adivinó mi turbación […] y me susurró al oído, como lo hacía Santos, que no me preocupase, que todo formaba *parte de mi alma* y que nunca había sentido con nadie lo que sentía conmigo.' *Ibid.* (italics mine).

158 'mi naturaleza fue siempre temperamental y pujante, desde chiquitita o desde chiquitito, que tampoco tiene sentido pasarse el resto de la vida pisoteando lo que durante tantos años no tuviste más remedio que ser.' *Ibid.*, 267.

159 'A san Pablo, como era machito, la iluminación le llegó mientras galopaba camino de Damasco; yo la tuve mientras me desmaquillaba. […] Estaba quitándome […] la crema limpiadora con un algodón, cuando vislumbré de repente en el espejo mi carne mortal, mi cutis de cuarenta y nosecuantos años, toda mi verdad facial sin el engaño de la cosmética, y de pronto me encontré mirándome con mis ojos venideros, con la mirada que tendré cuando tenga los cincuenta, los sesenta, los setenta […], menos mal que de repente una luz interior me iluminó y pude ver que no podía dar marcha atrás, que el ansia de perfección no es un capricho que se cure con la edad.' *Ibid.*, 11.

If corporeal beauty can no longer be retained, Rebecca resolves to strive for perfection in her care of inner beauty. She decides to become a saint. Yet she adds: 'I didn't want to become a common saint; I wanted to be a first-class saint. One of those saints that swoon, go into raptures, have wounds in their hands like Christ's and who live without living in themselves.'[160] Her pursuit of perfection in this respect will also prove to be fighting against windmills, but all these Cervantesque adventures will make her accept the way she is and the way she was. In the last chapter ('A la intemperie,' English: 'In the Open Air') she addresses the Bridegroom saying:

> The only thing I actually haven't done is that I haven't mortified my body. But it was my body that was my salvation, do you understand? It was the body that made me learn how to love myself, and for this body I risked my life, for this body I invented my name, and without this body I wouldn't have been able to stand up to the world. […] I will be maturing in style, and I will learn to handle the devastation […]. And I won't whip myself, and I'll have neither remorse nor complexes. Because I'm not to blame for having been born so sexy.[161]

The phrase 'having been born' in the novel's title is pivotal. The heroine eventually discards all the complexes, including those related to her being born as a biological boy. She leaves the pitfall of identity behind; she shakes off the power of phantasms, which drives the heterosexual matrix, and she comes across not as an abject queer figure but as a queer subject who is fully aware and proud of their identity.[162] This dimension of the protagonist's self is brought into relief owing to Mendicutti's camp reworking of the tradition of Spanish literature. As in Goytisolo,

160 'yo no iba a ser una santa corriente, yo iba a ser una santa de lujo. Una de esas santas que tienen deliquios, éxtasis, heridas en las manos como las llagas de Cristo, y que viven sin vivir en sí.' *Ibid*., 12.

161 'Lo único que no hice, es cierto, fue castigarme el cuerpo. Pero es que este cuerpo ha sido mi salvación, ¿comprendes?, con este cuerpo he aprendido a quererme, por este cuerpo me he jugado la vida, para este cuerpo me he inventado mi nombre, sin este cuerpo habría sido incapaz de enfrentarme al mundo. […] Maduraré con estilo, aprenderé a llevarme bien con mis destrozos […]. Y no voy a echarme a perder ni voy a tener remordimientos ni voy a acomplejarme. Porque yo no tengo la culpa de haber nacido tan sexy.' *Ibid*., 272–3.

162 A shorter version of this subchapter was read in Spanish at the conference *Ilusión. Expresión. Mundos posibles* at the University of Wrocław in November 2011. The printed version of the presentation appeared in *Estudios Hispánicos*, vol. 20 (Łukasz Smuga, 'Literatura que entiende*: Yo no tengo la culpa de haber nacido tan sexy* de E. Mendicutti y las identidades transgresoras,' *Estudios Hispánicos*, 2012, 20, 11–9). In February 2012, Francisca Paredes Méndez published a paper whose conclusions largely overlap with mine. See Francisca Paredes Méndez, 'El trazo de la identidad posmoderna en *Yo no tengo la culpa de haber nacido tan sexy* de Eduardo Mendicutti,' in *Ética*, ed. Jurado Morales, 205–23.

'Mazuf's gesture' in Mendicutti involves a re-contextualisation of the works of the Golden Age and is equally subversive. Mendicutti queers not only the identity of Rebecca de Windsor but also the very style of writing specific to Spanish mystics. It is in this nexus of content and form that the persuasiveness of the novel resides.

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4 Against Culture

Homosexuality and Counter-Culture in Luis Antonio de Villena

4.1. A Dandy's Gesture: Aestheticising Homoerotic Experience and the Law of Desire

Comparing attitudes to the body and sexuality in the poetry of T.S. Eliot and Kavafis in his *A History of Gay Literature: The Male Tradition*, Gregory Woods emphatically consigns the two poets to opposite poles. While '[f]or [Eliot] the body was the object of fear and revulsion, perhaps especially when most intensely desired,'[1] for Kavafis the corporeal and the erotic were the source of gratifying experiences and consequently of poetic inspiration.[2] Kavafis's poems abound in descriptions of dark corners and cheap hotels where men surreptitiously indulge in erotic delights – places which, we might add, Eliot would denounce as sordid. The Epicurean aura is a hallmark of the Greek poet, whose name appears in my argument by no means gratuitously. The point is that Kavafis was among the favourite writers and literary masters of Luis Antonio de Villena, a very special figure in Spanish cultural life.

The previous chapter explored how the body and its perceptions determined the ways in which the protagonists of *Yo no tengo la culpa* approached their own identities. In Villena, identity issues, though not entirely evacuated, are pushed aside, and the focus is on the 'laws of desire' and the aestheticisation of homoerotic experience. Villena is above all a poet and, as a poet, he published his debut volume *Sublime Solarium* in 1971. Villena's poetic disposition has affected his fiction, in which copious sophisticated descriptions and philosophical considerations tend to be given precedence over the narrative component and a well-poised structure. His fiction should thus be discussed as supplementary to his poetry, which dates back to the period of the *transición española*. Villena enters the literary scene as a writer who consciously draws on so-called homosexual culture and is destined to become its advocate and most recognisable continuator. Woods's succinct characterisation of

1 Gregory Woods, *History of Gay Literature: The Male Tradition* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1999), 187.
2 *Ibid*.

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Kavafis – 'Constantine Cavafy chose to write *as* a homosexual, with homosexual desires, within a homosexual tradition'[3] – captures the stance of the Greek poet's Spanish disciple as well. Villena has consistently upheld this position till the present day. In this sense, he fits Martínez's description of a scribe, since he works to preserve the inherited tradition of homoeroticism and enshrines the texts of his predecessors in an *allégation*-like manner.[4] However, what sets him apart from writers who simply reproduce entrenched motifs in a basically *naïve* gesture of a copyist is that Villena *deliberately* commits to self-fashioning as a dandy author. His work does not enact a typical 'Mazuf gesture,' which is to say that it does not engage in evidently subversive intertextual play, where *allégation* recedes before a critical dialogue with tradition and the inversion of meanings through re-contextualisation, which is to be found in Juan Goytisolo and Juan Gil-Albert. In my reading, Villena navigates *between* these two positions, and for this reason I discuss his work in a separate chapter. When rewriting texts, Villena performs neither a common scribe's gesture nor 'Mazuf's gesture' but opts for what can be dubbed 'a dandy's gesture' – a studiously adopted strategy of writing against current fads and literary tastes, *against* mainstream *culture*.[5] Paradoxically, what could easily pass for a common *allégation* becomes a carefully designed strategy of writing *otherwise* in Villena. He capitalises on the dual positioning of homoerotic literature, which – as pointed out by Kosofsky Sedgwick[6] – is relegated to the margin, while at the same time forming the very core of the canon. Villena gives saliency to this puzzle by consistently multiplying references to Wilde, Kavafis,

3 *Ibid*. (italics original).

4 *Allégation* is a category in the typology of intertextual devices proposed by Gisèle Mathieu-Castellani. I apply it here as re-interpreted by Michał Głowiński, who defines *allégation* as "all textual references which do not engage with the element of dialogism, ones in which a quotation or an allusion does not become a factor in polyvocality but, on the contrary, re-assert and consolidate univocity.' Michał Głowiński, *Intertekstualność, groteska, parabola. Szkice ogólne i interpretacje* (Kraków: Universitas, 2000), 23. In Głowiński's distinction between an intertextual reference and *allégation*, the former allows authors to produce new meanings and are part of the semantic structure of new works (as illustrated, for example, by references to Shakespeare's dramas in Juan Gil-Albert's *Valentín*, which I discussed in the previous chapter), while the latter denotes non-dialogic references, 'excluded from the operations of critical reflection': 'They occur when the evoked text is treated as authoritative and binding, *a priori* right and valuable. As a consequence, the citing text is subordinated to the cited text. The former is supposed to derive its own authority from the authority of the latter. […] Similarities between *allégation* and intertextuality are only external, and the two differ in all other respects.' Michał Głowiński, 'O intertekstualności,' *Pamiętnik Literacki*, 1986, 4, 90–1.

5 Chris Perriam, *Desire and Dissent: An Introduction to Luis Antonio de Villena* (Oxford and Washington: Berg, 1995), 9–11.

6 Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemología del armario*, trans. Teresa Bladé Costa (Barcelona: Ediciones de la Tempestad, 1998), 71–3. *Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1990), 53–4.

Byron, Rimbaud and Whitman with a view to both sustaining the literary tradition and making its homosexual crux self-reveal. In this way, he offers readers his own interpretation of the homosexual self that emerges from this project. Persistent returns to the past – expeditions in which the sources of homosexual culture are foregrounded – nurture his reflection on alterity as an element of a continually resurging counter-culture. If the Martínezian scribe unreflectingly rewrote the motifs in place, the dandy premeditatedly *stylises himself* as such a scribe and makes this his signature feature. Briefly, the difference resides in the dichotomy of inadvertent-vs.-deliberate and authentic-vs.-fake. Villena dons a certain mask and harnesses so-called high-culture in the service of counter-culture, whereby homoeroticism accrues both an aesthetic and an ethical dimension in his writings.[7] By way of introduction and in order to better grasp the uniqueness of Villena's work, let us have a closer look at the historical and literary context in which he debuted.

Intrinsic to Villena's texts, the aestheticisation of homoerotic experience is part of a broader phenomenon which Spanish critics have termed 'culturalism.' In the 1970s, a new group of poets made themselves known in Spain and came to be called the *novísimos*, a moniker borrowed from the title of an anthology edited by the well-known critic Josep Maria Castellet – *Nueve novísimos poetas españoles*. First published in April 1970, the volume contained verse by nine young poets (therein Manuel Vázquez Montalbán, Ana María Moix, Pere Gimferrer and Vicente Molina Foix) and received considerable critical attention as a harbinger of generational change in Spanish letters. Luis Antonio de Villena, who debuted the following year, is counted among this group even though his poems were not included in the acclaimed collection. The *novísimos* were a generation born shortly after the end of the Spanish Civil War. Spared the trauma of this fratricidal conflict and post-war poverty, they broke with so-called social poetry represented by such figures as Blas de Otero and Gabriel Celaya. The older generation applied themselves to writing engaged poetry 'for the common people.' In seeking to get their message across to a readership unfamiliar with and unaccustomed to poetry, the social poets imitated spoken language,[8] avoided references to high culture and eschewed formal refinement. They regarded literature as a tool of social change and their own work as a mission to raise the consciousness of the dictatorship-subjugated masses. This attitude to literary art was peremptorily repudiated by younger poets, who dismissed social poetry as aesthetically barren. Montalbán even went as far as to deplore its 'aesthetic nightmare,' a phrase he borrowed from Antonio Machado.[9]

7 Perriam, *Desire*, 9–11.

8 Santiago Daydí-Tolson, 'Aspectos orales de la poesía social española de posguerra,' *Hispanic Review*, 1985, 54, no. 4, 450–1.

9 'pesadilla estética.' Qtd. in Josep Maria Castellet, *Nueve novísimos poetas españoles* (Barcelona: Península, 2011), 21.

The *novísimos* viewed poetry as primarily a product of culture in which conveying an aesthetic experience was more important than transmitting a message. Consequently, they ranked literariness as a supreme poetic value. In this way, they broke with the traditionally conceived interpretation of a literary work and defined a text not as a form that shrouds a meaning, waiting to be deciphered, but as a form that is in and of itself a play on meanings and a mosaic pieced together from other elements of culture.[10] Notably, the *novísimos* were the first generation of writers to blur the boundary between high and low culture, deeming this distinction anachronistic. Unlike the practitioners of social poetry, they grew up in the times of the hegemony of mass culture, avidly read glossy magazines, comic books and crime fiction, listened to pop music and watched Hollywood productions. They were enthusiastically dazzled by the popular culture offered by the mass media, which they perceived as a refuge from official culture dominated by the supporters of dictatorship and from the 'aesthetic nightmare' of anti-regime writings.[11] As their camp sensibility germinated, their inclination to a certain snobbery sprouted to find its outlet in a love for kitsch, an interest in the exotic and a reliance on high culture, which was absent in social poetry.

In his anthology, Castellet drew a line between two groups: *Los seniors* and *La coqueluche*. The former included poets who debuted in the late 1960s and most acutely felt the 'aesthetic nightmare' to be confronted and dismantled. The latter comprised slightly younger poets, in whom the impact of mass culture was more readily discernible. Hence, Castellet gave them the – fondly intended – name of a childhood disease, which foregrounded the irritating quality of their popular culture-infested poetry, verses as irksome as whooping cough (Spanish: *coqueluche*).[12] The characteristics of the new generation listed by Castellet encompassed the abandonment of traditional poetic forms, experimentation with the collage technique and automatic writing, the inclusion of exotic elements and ostentatious artificiality.[13] This implies that their poetry shared a range of features with the early 20th-century avant-garde, a movement to which the *novísimos* in fact eagerly referred.

Villena was somewhat different. The culturalist turn launched by the *novísimos* generation takes a very specific shape in his work. When

10 *Ibid*., 33.

11 I talk of 'being dazzled' because, as underlined by Castellet, mass culture in Spain seized the audience's imagination relatively suddenly, as opposed to the gradual pace of the equivalent development in democratic countries (*Ibid*., 24). This abruptness was caused by Spain abandoning the politics of autarky and opening up to international collaboration in the early 1960s. The transition to a tourism-based economy compelled, among others, the liberalisation of the mass media and fuelled a fascination with Western popular culture, access to which had been very limited before.

12 *Ibid*., 28.

13 *Ibid*., 41–4.

referring to culturalism, I primarily draw on the definition proposed by Candelas Colodrón, in which the term means 'the systematic incorporation of other cultural products (music, art, cinema and literature) as objects of literary creation.'[14] Villena was part of this shift insofar as he wrote in opposition to social poetry, yet he found his object of literary creation in homosexual culture, rather than in popular music or Hollywood films. Homosexual culture formed his fundamental point of reference, and his snobbery, a trademark of the *novísimos*, manifested in references to the tradition of dandyism, both in his literary work and in his non-literary pursuits.[15] Some attention is also due to yet another feature common to the entire generation, specifically to gaudy artificiality and the inclusion of the exotic, as identified by Castellet, and therein 'Oriental themes, enchantment with unknown cities, toponyms and proper names attracting attention with their phonetic properties, depictions of garments, disguises and feasts, classical myths or medieval fables, etc.'[16] Because Venice paradigmatically embodied the exotic for the *novísimos*, the group were sometimes referred to as the 'Venetians.' For them, Venice represented a phantasmatic space identified with Europeanness and culture as such in contrast to the homespun realities of Spain.[17] As observed by Enrique Álvarez, while the same location serves a similar function in Villena, it also conveniently gave room for homoerotic connotations. Emphatically, Venice, as well as the Mediterranean in its entirety, was traditionally associated with European homosexuals' escapades in search of fleeting romances.[18] Villena's poetry expanded the phantasmatic topography where homoeroticism was possible onto Byzantium, the Cordova Caliphate and ancient Alexandria.[19] Colodrón states that Villena abided by the *novísimos* aesthetics longest of all his peers.[20] By general critical consensus, Villena's later volumes gradually departed from the culturalism of the 'Venetians' to embrace a more personal and direct expression,

14 'incorporación sistemática de otros productos culturales (música, arte, cine, literatura) como objetos de creación literaria.' Qtd. in Enrique Álvarez, *Dentro/fuera. El espacio homosexual masculino en la poesía española del siglo XX* (Madrid: Biblioteca Nueva, 2010), 173.

15 Villena consistently constructs his image as a dandy in public life. He wears sophisticated garments in his mass-media showings and during literary meetings and puts on elegant scarfs, outmoded signet rings and other accessories which captivate the audience's attention as effectively as his deliberately exaggerated eloquence.

16 'Son temas orientales, exaltaciones de ciudades desconocidas, nombres de lugar o de persona que atraen ante todo por su valor fonético, descripciones de vestidos, disfraces o fiestas, mitos clásicos o fábulas medievales, etc.' Castellet, *Nueve*, 43.

17 Álvarez, *Dentro*, 181–2.

18 Álvarez cites Robert Aldrich to explain that this association had had wide currency long before Thomas Mann's famous novella was published. As early as the 17th century, accounts of travellers mentioned male prostitution flourishing in Venice. *Ibid.*, 182.

19 *Ibid.*, 183.

20 *Ibid.*, 176.

in this way evolving into a 'poetry of experience.' However, Álvarez disagrees with this appraisal and insists that these two facets, rather than being mutually exclusive, coalesce to produce Villena's unique universe. Culturalism persists in Villena's work and helps the poet convey (homosexual) experience in a poetic form,[21] at the same time prompting his allegiance to 'an ethics based on being […] at the margins of established society,' as Chris Perriam adds.[22]

I cite this polemic because a similar phenomenon unfolds in Villena's prose works addressed in this chapter. His novels, novellas and short stories pervasively aestheticise homoerotic experience. This device, combined with a consistently and deliberately outdated idiom that runs counter to current literary tastes, makes readers feel as if they were dealing with texts written in a completely different epoch. This is what lies at the core of his 'dandy's gesture,' performed against the mainstream. At the same time, Villena's fiction is similar to his poetry in that his aspirations go beyond mere stylisation. As noted by Perriam, his major goal is rather to give expression to a certain stance on and in life, which Villena elucidates in more direct terms in his two well-known essays, where he dwells on his two key concepts of dandyism and counter-culture.

In 1982, Villena and the Spanish philosopher and author Fernando Savater published *Heterodoxias y contracultura* [*Heterodoxies and Counter-Culture*], with Savater's contribution focusing on the former and Villena's discussing the latter notion. While counter-culture was colloquially associated with the hippie movement or, in more general terms, with the youth revolts of the 1960s. Villena argues that it is a far broader notion and an atemporal phenomenon, which is encountered across epochs. In his view, counter-culture stands for a continuum of comportment and attitudes to life which essentially contest the existing order and seek absolute freedom. This spectrum spans developments as remote from and ostensibly unrelated to each other as vagrancy and the art of medieval goliards (whom he calls 'the beatniks of the Middle Ages'[23]), the rebellion of the Romantics, Arthur Rimbaud, the revolutions of Surrealism and pop-art, the rise of rock music and the Western fascination with Zen Buddhism. Villena also discusses the role that drugs, Oriental travels, philosophy and above all literature have played in the history of counter-culture. He revisits the past to outline certain parallels with his contemporaneous *movida*, though he never references the movement directly. It is this retrospective look to demonstrate the recurrence of similar attitudes in different eras that is most captivating in the essay. The same idea informs Villena's fiction, in which he time and

21 *Ibid*., 174–5.

22 Perriam, *Desire*, 55.

23 Fernando Savater and Luis Antonio de Villena, 'Goliardos: "Beats" en la Edad Media,' in Fernando Savater and Luis Antonio de Villena, *Heterodoxias y contracultura* (Barcelona: Montesinos, 1982), 98.

again returns to the history of queers in order to sketch a certain continuum and inscribe it into the tradition of dandyism, conceived as the most individualised manifestation of the counter-cultural mindset. Counter-culture as such is appreciated by Villena not as a barbaric and destructive practice, which is how rebellions of the young tend to be viewed by older generations, but as a 'culture in opposition to' or a 'culture against' the mainstream.[24] This is one reason behind the profusion of references to historical artistic movements and philosophical schools as examples – if not *exempla* – in his writing. The term 'against culture'[25] in the title of this chapter ties in with Villena's conceptualisation of *strictly cultural* practices which remain in opposition to heteronormative culture.

Another publication which can usefully be consulted in this context is Villena's 1983 collection of essays *Corsarios de guante amarillo* [*Corsairs of the Yellow Glove*], in which he applies himself to debunking certain clichés that have clustered around the dandy figure. In an introduction to the 2003 revised and extended edition of the volume, he recalls that when he took interest in dandyism, dandy was commonly envisioned as a gentleman from the upper echelons of society, a gallant preoccupied with fashion and socialising.[26] He relates a talk he gave in 1973, which was attended by posh ladies, who had come to the event in the belief that the history of fashion and elegance of yore would be discussed. He quickly set them right by rendering dandyism as an attitude to life that opposes the norms and values of the bourgeoisie, that is, the class his genteel audience represented. This anecdote illustrates the degree to which dandyism was a forgotten and misunderstood phenomenon in the Spain of the 1970s.

In his 'Introducción al dandismo' ['Introduction to Dandyism'], Villena goes back to the roots to identify Romanticism as the moment in the history of culture that brought forth dandyism and then discusses its subsequent iterations associated with the French Symbolists and more generally with the European decadents of the late 19th century. Essentially, like in *Heterodoxias y contracultura*, he posits a link between the past, that is, the decadence of the previous century, and a range of developments temporally closer to him, such as Salvador Dalí's posture in life and art, the androgyny of glam rock artists and the decadence personified by some *movida* figures.[27] He situates other personages and phenomena on a continuous trajectory of dandyism, going much further back than

24 '*Cultura en oposición*,' '*cultura a la contra*.' *Ibid.*, 90 (italics original).

25 The first – Polish – version of this book was titled *Wbrew naturze i kulturze. O odmienności w hiszpańskiej prozie homoerotycznej na przełomie XX i XXI wieku*, that is, *Against Nature and Culture: Queerness in Spanish Homoerotic Prose at the Turn of the Twentieth Century*.

26 Luis Antonio de Villena, *Corsarios de guante amarillo* (Madrid: Valdemar, 2003), 9.

27 While Villena again does not directly mention the *movida*, his allusions and asides add up to an image of the 1980s as a new *fin de siècle*, which would later be elaborated

Romanticism. His catalogue of dandies *avant la lettre* features, for example, 18th-century Spanish gallants, the Roman emperor Philip the Arab, Petronius – called the judge of elegance – and Alcibiades, who cut off his dog's tail only to furnish Athenians with yet another pretext to gossip about him (or that is at least how Plutarch has it): 'Alcibiades is a dandy because people desire and abhor him at the same time. His life is a certain posture, an individual style and ultimately a victory. He is provocative, repulsive and seductive. He prefers to amaze rather than to please.'[28] Villena portrays dandyism as an expression of protest against reality, that is to say, as a part of counter-culture. However, while counter-culture may be conceived as a collective development, dandyism is always individual. For this reason, it only begins to thrive in Romanticism, in association with characters such as William Beckford and Lord Byron, to whom Villena devotes separate essays, similarly to the other protagonists of his book: Oscar Wilde, Antonio de Hoyos y Vinent[29] and Luis Cernuda.

A dandy is not only an anti-establishment individualist with a Romantic pedigree. He is also a sophisticated aesthete who treasures the classical canons of beauty. Such is the most typical character in Villena's fiction. Villena's dandies are as a rule older homosexuals who enjoy a privileged social standing and fleet their time carelessly searching for young males of outstanding classical beauty, unruly characters and/or a mysteriousness which harbours melancholia and not infrequently a fascination with evil. As already mentioned, Villena's prose texts do not boast any refined structure. Their plots are usually linear and composed of short episodes which introduce one by one a panorama of characters whom the protagonist or the narrator – the author's alter ego – meets.[30] With this pattern firmly in place, their relationships are presented as short-lasting and based on a short-lived erotic enchantment. The protagonists never establish more durable relations since they reject bourgeoisie values such

into a full-fledged portrayal in his two novels about the *movida* era: *Madrid ha muerto* [*Madrid Is Dead*] of 1999 and *Malditos* [*The Cursed*] of 2010.

28 'Alcibíades es un dandy porque la gente le desea y le aborrece a un tiempo. Su vida es una actitud, un estilo – individual – y una victoria. Epata, repele y seduce. Le interesa más deslumbrar que gustar.' *Ibid.*, 14.

29 Antonio de Hoyos y Vinent (1885–1940) was a writer whom literary critics regarded as an epigone of modernism and associated with popular literature. However, Alberto Mira considers him instrumental in the development of Spanish homoerotic fiction due to the pioneering character of his writings. Hoyos y Vinent was among the first to openly express homosexual sentiments and experiences at a time when homosexuality was only presented in literature through a homophobic lens. Villena contributed to the re-discovery of Hoyos y Vinent, even as he admitted that the literary quality of his works was meagre. Hoyos y Vinent was portrayed by Villena in *Divino* [*The Divine*], a novel from 1994, as one of the most picturesque dandies of pre-war Spain. Alberto Mira, *De Sodoma a Chueca: Una historia cultural de la homosexualidad en España en el siglo XX* (Barcelona and Madrid: Egales, 2004), 128–35.

30 This structure is exemplified, for instance, by the novels *Chicos* [*Boys*] (1989) and *Fácil* [*Easy*] (1996).

as monogamy or emotional stability founded on the myth of romantic love. The narrator of a novella entitled *El bello tenebroso* [*The Beautiful Sinister One*] comments:

> Plato repeated […] that love was an intermediary state between possessing and not-possessing. They also, as I've already intimated, possessed and did not possess. […] Alluring gestures were ubiquitous, but where were they supposed to lead? Where did they head? […] Love? No. It's only a term from another epoch, an entry from the dictionary of another philosopher.[31]

Villena's protagonists first and foremost defer to the 'law of desire' and establish ethical rules alternative to the norms upheld by the general public. Homosexuality itself is never presented as a stable, invariable identity. Instead, homosexuality is first of all bound up with the pursuit of erotic desires, and these are fluid and ungraspable. Hence, many of Villena's protagonists repudiate any identity labels and engage in sexual relations with both men and women, regarding physical love as one of several expressions of freedom and social transgression.

Villena is particularly interested in the elusive mechanisms of desire, which arises as spontaneously as it vanishes:

> 'To burn. And for what? A foolish question,' he thought. One does not ask questions about things ablaze. One says that they are on fire. That they are consumed by fire … They are burning. Until they eventually burn down to ashes.[32]

Such considerations are accompanied by refined, highly poetic descriptions of the beauty inherent in the male body – of an ephebe at the threshold of adulthood. Aware that there are various homoerotic traditions, Villena often couples the homophile and *malditista* modes. The former draws on the culture of ancient Greece, and the latter is powered by the 19th-century conceptualisation of homosexuality as sin and vice, which is adopted by queers as their own identity mark as part of rebellion against bourgeois culture. These features are most comprehensively showcased in *El bello tenebroso* (2004). The relatively short work tells the story of two lovers: Luis Venceslada, an art historian, and Álvaro Isasmendi, son of an affluent bourgeois family that, as becomes their social class, cultivates an interest in painting. A typical Villena dandy, Venceslada is an

31 'Platón decía […] que el amor es un estadio intermedio entre poseer y no poseer. Y ellos, como he dicho, poseían y no poseían. […] La seducción flotaba por todos lados, pero ¿qué rumbo llevaba? ¿Adónde iba? […] ¿Amor? No. Sólo como un término de otro siglo y de otro filósofo.' Luis Antonio de Villena, *El bello tenebroso* (Madrid: La Esfera de los Libros, 2004), 78.

32 'Quemarse. ¿Y para qué? Estúpida pregunta – pensó, pues no se pregunta por las cosas que arden. Son ardientes, se dice. Y se realizan … Arden. Hasta que ya no están.' *Ibid.*, 95.

elderly, elegant gentleman and an aesthete who counsels the Isasmendis. Álvaro's parents view him as an urbane, if somewhat eccentric, man. They wonder whether the rumour about him having two Moroccan servants in his keep is true. They invite him over to dinner, on which occasion Luis meets their son Álvaro, an eighteen-year-old of extraordinary magnetism and uncommon beauty. The adolescent is riveted with his parent's acquaintance and commences a slightly perverse game of seduction, which he enjoys as an outlet for his youthful rebellion.

It does not take more than a couple of pages for readers to realise that this is a *démodé* piece of writing. The novella starts with a slow-paced, soulful description of Álvaro as he is contemplating the sunrise and ruminating on the vacuity of the lives of his friends and family. The teenager despises the thoughtless replication of ready-made life patterns and wonders whether alternative scenarios are possible:

> Álvaro did not know what he wanted, or perhaps he knew it all too well. The problem was that […] his desires clashed with the reality of the world. […] Do the bourgeoisie know the limitations of the bourgeoisie; are they aware of them?[33]

Reproductions of classic works of international painting form an integral component of the story as they precede each part and offer a commentary on the tales they narrate. As a writer of the *novísimos* generation, which effected a culturalist turn in poetry, Villena strews his prose with opulent references to high culture and glosses *El bello tenebroso* with pictorial vignettes of David Teniers' *The Archduke Leopold Wilhelm in His Gallery* (on introducing the character of Venceslada), Giovanni Lanfranco's *Gladiators at a Banquet* and Caravaggio's *David and Goliath* (when describing the erotic tension and a psychomachia unfolding between the two males).

The relationship which emerges between the lovers in a sense reproduces a typical homophile model. Older and more experienced, Luis becomes Álvaro's teacher and guide, introducing him into the world whose existence the teenager senses and yearns for. Aided by the professor, he discovers that it is possible to cast off trite recipes for life and live as a human liberated of conventions. Their relationship dissolves when the eromenos becomes mature, having enacted his erotic fantasies and vented off his need for rebellion. For his part, Venceslada imitates Greek erasteses in obtaining an opportunity to come in touch with perfect beauty, embodied in Álvaro:

> He adored those long, slender and smooth thighs […], he adored, too, those firm calves, covered in soft hair […], complete with tender

33 'Álvaro no sabía lo que quería o lo sabía excesivamente bien. El problema radicaba […] en que sus deseos se daban de bruces con el mundo. […] ¿La burguesía conoce – es consciente – de las limitaciones de la burguesía?' *Ibid*., 15.

> and big feet … Were *David's* feet not like this, were his big hands not like this? He adored him. He adored him without a doubt.[34]

Other young men that populate Villena's works are depicted in a similar, somewhat grandiloquent style, with dandies considering them to be almost as perfect as classical artworks – sources of sublime aesthetic sensations. Luis Venceslada, an expert on and a connoisseur of the male nude, tells Álvaro's father that he is going to spend holidays in Greece, researching for an essay on connections between ancient Greek sculpture and modern photography. In fact, he spends the summer in Madrid in the company of his new lover, to whom he proposes a photoshoot during which he eternises the beauty he worships and succumbs to passion. These passages also explicitly aestheticise homoerotic experience, a procedure so endemic to Villena's poetry:

> Another [picture] only showed Álvaro's face with a vague contour of his chest, suggesting nudity. But it was all about his face. His huge black eyes enframed in dense lashes, wide open. Almost like a madman's eyes. His neck straight up to look thin and supple. And his lips voluptuous, fruity, with a shimmer of mint liqueur left by the tongue … […] The silver earrings were glistening like the moon over Arcadia.[35]

Within contemporary standards for prose writings, this depiction could indeed be dismissed as pathetic drivel. But attentive readers will not fail to discern a tiny detail that testifies to Villena's *deliberation* in producing a kitsch-redolent writing. Professor Venceslada mentions his fascination with Bruce Weber's and Pierre and Gilles's photography.[36] The latter deserve special attention as they intentionally resort to kitsch in their camp art. Their images are pointedly over-aestheticised, explicitly artificial and ornamentally sugar-coated. The glistening earrings, the fruity lips with a shimmer of mint liqueur weave their way into the description because Villena strives to translate the poetics of contemporary gay visual art into the language of literature. The effect he achieves removes his

34 'Adoraba aquellos muslos largos y refinados, lisos […], adoraba también las piernas duras, cubiertas de suave vello […], que se cumplían en aquellos pies delicados y grandes … ¿No eran así los pies del *David*, sus manos grandes? Adoraba. Lo adoraba inequívocamente.' *Ibid*., 49 (italics original).

35 'Otra era sólo el rostro de Álvaro con un leve inicio del pecho, sugeridamente desnudo. Pero ante todo el rostro. Los grandes ojos negros rodeados de pestañas tupidas, muy abiertas. Casi los ojos de un loco. El cuello estirado, para parecer fino y duro. Y los labios carnales, frutales, por los que la lengua había restregado pipermín … […] Y brillaban los pendientes de plata, como luna en la Arcadia.' *Ibid*., 67.

36 *Ibid*., 78. That this seemingly inconsequential detail is crucial for grasping the gist of Villena's fiction is borne out by the fact that allusions to Pierre and Gilles can also be found in his other texts, for example, in *La nave de los muchachos griegos* [*A Ship with Greek Boys*]. This particular hint is thus neither random nor exceptional.

work from the current standards of literary production, and this perfectly dovetails with Villena's project of *démodé* literature. This is the 'dandy's gesture' to which I referred at the beginning of this chapter. This manner of writing certainly expresses the species of snobbery distinctive to the entire generation of the *novísimos*, from which Villena hails.

In the afterword to his novella, Villena explains why he chose to give it this particular, rather than any other title: '*Un beau ténébreux* is a French phrase which, since Romanticism […] has denoted […] a youth of vivid looks which speak to melancholia, passion and fatalism.'[37] He adds that the expression has not been meaningfully assimilated in Spanish and is usually translated as 'melancholy beauty,'[38] which fails to convey the connotative richness of the original wording.[39] All in all, 'beauty' may equally refer to a woman's looks while the French *un beau* unambiguously refers to male beauty. Given this, Villena decided to avail himself of a simple loan translation from French. The adjective *tenebroso* (dark, sinister, nebulous) is supposed to reflect the romantic aura shrouding the eponymous protagonist and his propensity for decadent spleen. This detail is essential because it renders the protagonist's features, which are testimony to Villena's fusing the homophile and *malditista* traditions. As an eromenos, Álvaro is not an innocent ephebe initiated into the mysteries of adult life by an erastes, which was the ideal arrangement eulogised in ancient Greece. Luis Venceslada's lover is fully conscious of his beauty and takes initiative in the game of seduction, which makes Luis anxious. On the one hand, the teenager's looks correspond to the Hellenic ideal of beauty, while on the other he lures the erastes with his dark fatalism and predilection for the perverse. Both men spend the summer in Madrid, making various recesses of the urban space the scene of their secret trysts. These settings bring to mind Kavafis's poetry, which opened

37 '*Un beau ténébreux* es la expresión francesa que, a partir del Romanticismo […] ha designado […] al hombre joven de clara belleza, aunque melancólica, apasionada y fatalista' *Ibid*., 117. The popularity of the phrase in Romanticism and its associations with melancholy were certainly boosted by Gérard de Nerval's famous sonnet 'El Desdichado,' whose first stanza reads: 'Je suis le ténébreux, – le veuf, – l'inconsolé, / Le prince d'Aquitaine à la tour abolie: / Ma seule *étoile* est morte, / – et mon luth constellé / Porte le *Solei noir* de la *Mélancolie*.' Gérard de Nerval, 'El Desdichado,' in Gérard de Nerval, *Les Filles du feu*, *nouvelles*. *Les Chimères* (Paris: D. Giraud, 1854), 329, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Gallica, https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b8623244w/f359.item (accessed 15 August 2021) (italics original). Importantly, both melancholy and *teadium vitae* are recurrent themes of Villena's poetry.

38 'una belleza melancólica.' Villena, *Bello*, 117.

39 As a matter of fact, the phrase has a much older provenance than suggested by Villena. It goes back to the famous chivalric romance *Amadís of Gaul*, whose eponymous protagonist is rejected by his beloved Oriana and embarks on a period of reclusive living, adopting the tell-tale alias of Beltenebrós ('el bello tenebroso'). The French expression 'un beau ténébreux,' which Villena cites, is actually derived from the original Spanish coinage depicting a mysterious knight. In this light, the very title of the novella is interpretable as another instance of intercepting elements of (evidently heterosexual) literary tradition and recontextualising them in queer literature.

this chapter. As in the stanzas of the Greek modernist, the lovers relish the brief moments of erotic fulfilment, eluding the gaze of the bourgeoisie. The difference is that where Kavafis's lines emanated ancient Epicureanism incorporated into the texture of the modern city, Villena's narrative oozes the hedonism associated with *movida*-era Madrid. Álvaro and Luis do not simply gratify their sexual urge. They also enact their boldest erotic fantasies, whereby they do not shun alcohol and hard drugs. This hedonism in part results from Villena's reliance on *malditista* motifs and the rebirth of decadent attitudes towards the end of the 20th century, marking a new *fin de siècle*. Villena consciously weaves a web of references to entrenched traditions and coalesces their characteristic motifs into a unique collage in order to narrate erotic experience in our times by means of a language and aesthetics which seem not to fit them anymore. By doing this, he offers his readers an interpretation of homoeroticism as an element of anti-bourgeoisie rebellion in a period when homosexuality had already lost some of its status of radical alterity. The homosexual self that self-reveals in Villena has hardly anything to do with gay emancipation. Instead, it has everything to do with a snobbish, pseudo-aristocratic gesture of a postmodern dandy-and-aesthete rolled into one.

4.2. Recycled Histories: On the Queer Continuum

Discussing the culturalist turn achieved by the *novísimos* generation, I mentioned that Villena drew in his poetry on broadly conceived homosexual culture as his framework of reference and literary material. The same source furnishes him with the stuff of his fiction writing. In the mid-1990s, Villena published two works which suitably exemplify this. One of them is a 1997 drama-like novella *El charlatán crepuscular* [*The Fading Prattler*], and the other is a fictionalised biography of Lord Byron, titled *El burdel de Lord Byron* [*Lord Byron's Brothel*], which won Villena the Azorín literary award in 1995. *El charlatán crepuscular* imagines Oscar Wilde's last meeting with his former lover, Alfred Douglas. The narrator, whose passages resemble extended stage directions, presents Wilde as an émigré in Paris two years before his death. Beset by poverty and health complaints, every day, Wilde goes to a cafe where his last conversation with Douglas takes place. Their dialogue devolves into a bitter exchange of mutual grievances and accusations, which helps convey the complexity of their erstwhile relationship. One reason behind writing this text was certainly Villena's aspiration to give Wilde more resonance and popularity, which ties in with Expósito's metaphor of the scribe. Villena, who translated Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest* and authored essays on Wilde, explains in the afterword that in writing the novella he was guided by the idea of 'giving voice to Oscar.'[40] As an

40 'dar voz a Oscar.' Luis Antonio de Villena, *El charlatán crepuscular. Oscar y Bosie* (Barcelona: Planeta, 1997), 170.

expert on Wilde's life and work, Villena did so by stylising the text into a drama in which the eponymous 'prattler'[41] voices numerous judgments on beauty, homoeroticism, desire and the hypocrisy of the bourgeoisie, who deny the individual the right to freedom. Thereby, Villena equips his protagonist with the signature features of his other characters. Wilde is not simply a commonly vindicated victim of glaring injustice; he is above all a dandy who stands by his value system till the bitter end, whatever price he is forced to pay for this integrity.

Towards the end of the narrative, the character of a French soldier named Gael enters the stage and makes embittered Oscar Wilde forget about his wretchedness for a while. The gnawing sense of emptiness, which the conversation with Alfred Douglas only exacerbated, is contrasted with bedazzlement at the sight of the young soldier's extraordinary beauty. Wilde states: 'The strangest thing in Beauty is that it never stops surprising us. Even in Hell …'[42] Like Villena's other dandies, Wilde sees the youth as an incarnation of Eros: 'Lo and behold, Love is here again! How could I possibly fail to see that?'[43] and attempts to engage him in flirtation. In a conversation with Gael, the poet defends his worldview for the last time and – against the hateful general opinion – ascribes the highest value to the adoration of male beauty and to striving for fulfilment in love, even if it eventually proves unattainable. He describes his frustrated relationship with Alfred:

> Gael, we, whether dancers or not, were looking for love, one that society is ashamed of. […] And when we climbed heights in search of the ideal, we only found an empty throne. But when we searched for it in the basements – where old satyrs perhaps dwell – we were despised. Our society has no use for ideals and hates basements; that is why it's unable to apprehend Beauty.[44]

The way he explains to Gael that there is nothing squalid about an older man's gaze at a younger one's body sounds equally bitter:

> It's not true, my love. This is so pure a gaze that nobody understands it anymore. It's the world that is filthy. […] And if you say – I feel you

41 The phrase is used by Douglas in an attempt to discredit Wilde's work as inconsequential prattling: 'You were a teller of pointless stories. Exactly what you are now: a fading prattler' ('Eras un contador de cuentos sin sentido. Igual que ahora: un charlatán crepuscular'). *Ibid*., 80.

42 'Lo extraño de la Belleza es que nunca deja de sorprendernos. Ni en el Infierno …' *Ibid*., 108.

43 '¡He aquí, nuevamente, el Amor! ¿Cómo podría no reconocerlo?' *Ibid*., 109.

44 'Nosotros, Gael, bailarines o no, hemos buscado el amor, ese del que la sociedad tiene vergüenza. […] Y cuando subimos los peldaños del ideal, encontramos sólo un trono vacío. Si por el contrario buscamos el sótano – donde viven, a lo mejor, los antiguos sátiros –, encontramos desprecio. Nuestra sociedad desdeña el ideal y aborrece los sótanos, por ello le es imposible concebir la Belleza.' *Ibid*., 135.

> do – that these glances undress one by looking, you're not mistaken. But this nudity is pure as well. For there is nothing purer than a bare love for youth. The gods knew that well. A naked youth sweeps the entire world off its feet. He lends meaning to an unhappy song.[45]

El charlatán crepuscular is such 'an unhappy song,' a tribute paid to Oscar Wild by his translator. Yet the story about the last meeting of the famous lovers should be examined as part of a larger series of works which add up to a certain whole. In my remarks on Villena's essays, I stressed that his interests are focused on the past, and that he is committed to the systematic writing of his own history of queers. The characters he constructs in his works share an array of features, including nonconformity, dandyism, a fascination with the body of an ephebe and the pursuit of freedom at all costs. Besides Oscar Wild, Villena's *Corsarios de guante amarillo* also describes the life story of Lord Byron, his favourite Romantic, whom he likewise casts as the protagonist of one of his numerous novels, *El burdel de Lord Byron*.

In *El burdel de Lord Byron*, Villena continues his mission from *El charlatán crepuscular* and gives voice to his hero, this time by interspersing the text with fictitious letters purportedly penned by Byron. The novel opens with memories of Jonathan Decambra, a retired Scotland Yard inspector. He recalls the times when, ordered to produce a report on London's brothels, he met in one of them an already old woman, Margaret Brown, who had known Lord Byron in her teenage years. The woman, who goes by the nickname Lily, talks with the inspector and tells him about the long years of friendship and correspondence with the famous poet. Decambra uses information divulged by Lily to spin a tale of the Romantic's fascinating life while recounting details of his investigations years after he carried them out.

The fictionalised biography of Lord Byron brings into relief features that attest to his rebellious attitude and dandyism. Villena's characteristic style renders Byron's complicated relationships with women, including his incestuous relationship with his sister, as well as his many love affairs with younger men. The narrative recounts various stages of his life, marked by scandals and romantic journeys. Lord Byron as pictured in this novel can be regarded as the prototype for Villena's other protagonists. His identity is thoroughly ambivalent, and his non-normative sexual inclinations spring from narcissism, as suggested by Lily's appraisal:[46]

45 'No es verdad, querido. Es una mirada tan limpia que ya nadie la entiende. El mundo está sucio. […] Y si dices – lo presiento – que esas miradas desnudan, no te equivocas. Pero esa desnudez es limpia también. Porque nada hay más limpio que el desnudo amor a la juventud. Los dioses lo supieron. Un joven desnudo arrebata el mundo. Pone sentido a una canción desdichada.' *Ibid.*, 127–8.

46 Lily met Byron in 1807, when she was fourteen. She talks with Jonathan some decades later, towards the end of her life, that is, on the eve of Freud's theories. Her opinions

'Byron found self-love in boys – a self-image he cultivated – and also a perfect realm, a world celebrating masculinity, one that probably neither you nor I can understand, my dear friend.'[47] Margaret Brown explains the poet's relationship with his sister in a similar vein: 'If you ask me, it was all about narcissistic desire; what Byron saw in Augusta was his own mirror reflection, his feminine portrait in a person whose standing among the aristocracy was superior to his.'[48] And she adds:

> For Lord Byron, Augusta's love was yet another line of the mark of Cain, something that embellished his status of an accursed one, his exceptionality in this vulgar world. […] Have I mentioned it yet? If there was something distinctive about Byron, it was the theatrical. A drive to turn life into a grand spectacle.[49]

As in Oscar Wilde and other dandies, Villena himself included, life blends with art to produce an amalgam, were sexual otherness serves as one of many components of self-fashioning and a gesture of repudiation of mediocrity and dominant values. The same self-fashioning act is also comprised of a fascination with evil in defiance of the moral order in place. Lily recalls Byron asking one of his lovers to dress up as a fallen angel and recite a poem Byron had composed. The verses denounced the world as a hell and foretold a new act of creation, one engineered by the powers of evil. John Hobhouse, who witnessed the occasion and was 'attracted to the aesthetics of evil, but not to evil as such,'[50] wrote down in his diary: 'Byron lured us all into a theological lunacy: A young boy caricatured the Good. Typically British, isn't it? […] We, the Brits, do not believe in evil. We can perfectly make do with our own norms.'[51]

With an abundance of such references, *El burdel de Lord Byron* equates homosexuality, dandyism and the aesthetics of evil, which brings the novel in league with the 'accursed homosexuality' trend. Yet Villena also braids motifs typical of homophile literature into the texture of his

herald the psychoanalytically popularised explanation of homosexuality as triggered by narcissism.

47 'En los muchachos, Byron amaba a sí mismo – a cierta imagen que tenía de sí mismo – y también un reino ideal, el mundo de la celebración masculina que, sin duda, ni usted ni yo entendemos, querido amigo.' Luis Antonio de Villena, *El burdel de Lord Byron. Una novela lírica* (Barcelona: Planeta, 1995), 32–3.

48 'Mi opinión es que se produjo una atracción narcisística, Byron se vio a sí mismo calcado, retratado femeninamente en Augusta, que gozaba de una posición social más aristocrática que la suya.' *Ibid*., 62.

49 'Para el Lord amar a Augusta era una raya más; en el signo de Caín, algo que condecoraba su malditismo, su excepcionalidad en este mundo vulgar. […] ¿Se lo he dicho ya? Si Byron fue algo era teatro. Una voluntad de vivir en representación total.' *Ibid*., 63–4.

50 'estaba seducido por la estética del mal, no por el mal mismo.' *Ibid*., 166.

51 'Byron nos sometió a una locura teológica: Un jovencito caricaturizaba la Bondad. Es típicamente británico, ¿no? […] Los británicos no creemos en el mal. Tenemos más que suficiente con las normas.' *Ibid*., 167.

work. Exotic elements proliferate, which on the one hand are necessitated by the very figure of the protagonist and his epoch and on the other typify Villena's entire body of writings. Associations with the homophile model are evoked by passages which depict Byron's relations with his male lovers. John Edleston is portrayed as a typical eromenos, whom Byron as an erastes introduces into adult life by taking him to a brothel to be taught the arcana of *ars amandi* by Lily. Margaret explains to the inspector that 'for Byron sex was gendered feminine, while bonding and love belonged to males.'[52] Yet love was not purely Platonic. Against the distinction made by Lily, Byron's love of boys also involved a pronounced physical component. The episode at the brothel was nothing other than a stage in a 'Greek' education, in which a beloved ephebe was primed for adulthood. In compliance with a well-known pattern, Byron's interest in Edleston faded when the youngster matured and his youthful charms wilted in the eyes of the erastes. Far more explicit allusions to ancient same-sex male relations appear at the end of the novel, when Byron journeys to Greece to support the independence fighters there. In a letter to Lily dating to January 1824, Byron describes Lukas, his last lover, whom he met in Kefalonia, by evoking Theban warriors and their legendary valour rooted in strong homoerotic bonds:

> Just like the Greeks, Lukas was never ashamed when I gestured to him (we can barely communicate) to sleep with me. I let him possess my body because he did not seem to be interested in anything else. With him at my side, I felt the courage of warriors. I firmly believe that the lovers of Theban troops did the same thing in order to fight their enemy with an even greater fierceness.[53]

In Villena, homosexuality is connected with both the Romantically anchored aesthetics of evil and Europe's ancient culture, in which homoerotic and homosocial relationships coexist without the tensions which emerged along with the 'invention of the homosexual' in the latter part of the 19th century. Antiquity is a frequent framework of reference in Villena's work as one of the irretrievably bygone realms which deserve to have the memory of them reclaimed and reinvigorated. The same nostalgia for the past permeates the mythologisation of dandy figures – Oscar Wilde and Lord Byron – which is clearly visible in both discussed texts from the 1990s. Evocative allusions to ancient

52 'para Byron el sexo era femenino, la camaradería y el amor pertenecían a los hombres.' *Ibid*., 28.

53 'Lukas, como los griegos, no sintió nunca rubor cuando le indiqué (apenas podemos entendernos) que durmiera conmigo. Dejé que entrara en mí, porque no parecía interesarle otra cosa. Y sentí, junto a él, el coraje de los guerreros. Estoy seguro que los amantes del batallón tebano hacían lo mismo para luchar con más ardor contra su enemigo.' *Ibid*., 218.

conceptualisations of homosexuality in texts which resume the tradition of *malditista* homoerotic literature serve to highlight the contrast between the 19th-century bourgeoisie's attitudes to sexual otherness – the stigmatisation of both Byron[54] and Wilde – and the idealised world of Greek homosexuality. Thereby, Villena underscores the urgency of homosexuals developing an alternative ethics in opposition to burgher values. Since dandies provide a viable source of inspiration for this project, Villena repeatedly applies himself to rewriting their histories and contriving a continuum that accommodates a gallery of nonconformists from various timeframes.

That both *El charlatán crepuscular* and *El burdel de Lord Byron* are parts of a broader literary project can easily be seen by comparing the two texts with Villena's 2003 novel *La nave de los muchachos griegos* [*A Ship with Greek Boys*], a book meant as a special homage to homosexual aesthetes from the more or less distant past. Its main protagonist, Petronius, is a Villena dandy *avant la lettre* whose life story is interlaced with snapshots of other queers who espoused a similar stance on life. With the action taking place in ancient Rome, the structure of the narrative to some extent echoes that underlying *Este latente mundo*, but unlike in José Luis de Juan's work, it is interrupted by short episodes which are not related to each other in any organised manner. Instead of constructing a parallel plot set in contemporary times, Villena sprinkles his story with references to William Beckford, Oscar Wilde, Edward Carpenter and William Burroughs. While structurally disconnected, they all share a fascination with classical beauty, a penchant for the ephebe's ideal body and the choice to remain on the margins of society.

The narrator intimates this continuum in the introduction, titled 'Imágenes en el tiempo' ('Images remote in time'). This piece of writing conforms to the conventions of an essay of the kind that could imaginably have been penned by Luis Venceslada, an art scholar in *El bello tenebroso*. The eponymous images are two works separated by 110 years. One of them is a 1883 photograph by Thomas Eakins which served as a model for his painting *The Swimming Hole*. The other piece is *Le Garçon attaché* by Pierre and Gilles, dating back to 1993. The older image is more classical and redolent of Walt Whitman's poetry. The camera eternalises a carefree moment shared by a group of ephebes at a lake; some of them are deciding whether to jump into the water, while others flex their bodies in the semblance of Greek sculptures. The narrator compares Eakins's classicist references with Pierre and Gilles's piece which depicts a boy named Charly, whose body is similarly classically built, but whose

54 *El burdel de Lord Byron* implies that the poet's frequent travelling was fuelled equally by his Romantic restlessness and by his desire to flee the social odium that surrounded him in England. When abroad, he was also snubbed by his compatriots. See *Ibid.*, 151–2.

Arabian features give him an exotic, slightly mysterious air. The boy's salacious, sensuous posture and the opulence of ornamental roses bring to mind the Baroque rather than classical antiquity. Yet in both cases, the photographer's eye strives to preserve the image of adolescent gracefulness which induces desire and admiration in the onlooker. The juxtaposition of the two images provides an interpretive key for reading the novel's episodes and piecing them together into a whole despite their ostensible incompatibility and temporal distance. Times and circumstances may change, but new aesthetes continue to reappear and seek as much classic naturalness as exotic mysteriousness in young ephebes, as the essayist of a narrator implies.

To return to the main protagonist on whom Villena primarily focuses, Petronius is located within this continuum of dandies as dissenters and aesthetes. In the novel, he grapples with his otherness, starting from early adolescence, but unlike Wilde or Byron, his struggles are a matter of his social background rather than of his homosexual proclivities. The son of a parvenue (and a former slave to boot), Petronius feels pressured to fashion his image as an eloquent and debonair Athens-born Roman citizen. This is how he presents himself to impress his interlocutors. The urge to distance himself from his discreditable past and a pervasive feeling of otherness compel him to consistently construct his own legend as an eccentric art connoisseur and an intellectual. Nero becomes fascinated with his 'intelligence, refinement, cleverness and a special disdain for the plebeian (which flares up every now and then in the nobly born as well), […] his rings, his singular posture, his aphorisms …'[55] The image of Petronius outlined early in the novel does not depart too much from his familiar representation in popular culture.[56] However, Nero's counsellor, as painted by Villena, is above all a homosexual dandy who gathers around him boys with the looks of Charly in *Le Garçon attaché*. The consul adopts 17-year-old Osís, 'tall, dark, smooth-skinned, with big feet and hands, and with natural, delicate circles around his green eyes […], so highly valued by connoisseurs …'[57] Petronius's relationship with his adoptive son sends waves of rumour rippling across Rome, and Nero himself ineptly attempts to imitate the 'new fad.' The emperor holds a banquet during which he parades an adolescent called Sporo, whose looks are supposed to eclipse the beauty of Petronius's lover. In this context a vulgarised reference to Greece as a phantasmatic reservoir

55 'la inteligencia, la distinción elegante, el ingenio, el peculiar desdén hacia todo lo plebeyo (que bien puede incluir lo aristocrático sanguíneo), […] las sortijas, la singularidad de la pose, los aforismos …' Luis Antonio de Villena, *La nave de los muchachos griegos. Vita Petronii* (Madrid: Alfaguara, 2003), 24–5.

56 I mean the image disseminated mainly by the Hollywood production of *Quo Vadis* from 1951.

57 'alto, de suave piel oscura, pies y manos grandes y ojos verdes rodeados de ojeras naturales y finas […] que tanto aprecian los expertos …' *Ibid.*, 82.

of classic ephebes appears, when Nero says to Petronius: 'We must go to Greece together. You know what for? We must go to Greece together to get ourselves new *sons* …'[58] The judge of elegance responds with a surprised disgust at this remark.

As a dandy, Petronius embraces the posture of indirect nonconformity. While he has perfectly mastered the art of allusion and persiflage, his individual protest against the existing order is primarily expressed in his flamboyant lifestyle, which turns into a caricature in Nero's imitations. The fundamental difference between Petronius and Nero lies in that the former's self-fashioning is an original venture. It does not shine with reflected light but is powered by a profound self-awareness of being different and by the urge to endorse this identity and make it a mark of identity in true dandy style. What are mere paraphernalia for Nero is the very core of the self for Petronius, though it may be expressed through external trappings:

> He wore coloured tunics – a rarity in Rome […] – and even went to much trouble to obtain a Chinese kimono embroidered in huge peonies; he himself believed that these were purely mythical, fantastic flowers. He commissioned a gorgeous ring with an exquisite bas-relief that realistically depicted the famous abduction of Ganymede. The jewel, which he wore on his ring finger, extended over practically his entire hand. […] He was keen on using coloured glasses (an idea appropriated by Nero), rounded and encased in gold.[59]

That Petronius's dandyism is about something more than a peculiar wardrobe style becomes obvious in the last episodes of the novel, when he falls out of the emperor's favour and commits suicide as a pre-emptive measure against the disgrace of a death sentence. The scene is in perfect accord with Margaret Brown's depiction of Lord Byron, and one is tempted to paraphrase it as saying that if there was something distinctive about Petronius, it was the theatrical, a drive to turn life into a grand spectacle:

> I want to put up a stage performance. To mock death (and life, obviously), to pay tribute to art and beauty, which are the only solace

58 'Tenemos que ir juntos a Grecia. ¿Sabes para qué? Debemos ir juntos a Grecia a buscar nuevos *hijos* …' *Ibid.*, 89 (italics original).

59 'Usaba túnicas multicolores – rarísima cosa en Roma […] – y hasta logró un kimono chino, con grandes peonías bordadas, aunque él creía que se trataba de flores fabulosas, puramente míticas. Se hizo fabricar un magnífico anillo con una medalla en bajorrelieve, representando con singular realismo y beldad el rapto famoso y amante de Ganimedes. Y el anillo – usado en el dedo corazón – le cubría prácticamente la mano toda. […] Gustaba usar (idea suya de la que se apropió Nerón) vidrios de colores, redondeados y circundados de oro.' *Ibid.*, 102–3.

> […], the only support for us and, if I'm permitted to put it like this, […] to paint a picture. To leave a remnant of myself behind … [60]

Till the very end, Petronius abides by his cherished principles, and even on the verge of death he takes pains to stylise his image as a refined aesthete as well as the eventual moral victor. The judge of elegance is aware of his superiority despite the odium that has been visited on him. He arranges for Osís to flee and avoid Nero's revenge and composes a letter to the emperor, the public reading of which will ultimately seal Petronius's posthumous triumph. A banquet he stages to take his own life indeed morphs into a peculiar performance. The dying protagonist carefully builds up suspense as he retires to the baths every now and then to let blood drop by drop. Whenever he departs, the banqueters are left to wonder whether he will ever return to continue philosophical disputations, with his wrists bandaged up. Petronius spends the last moments of his life in the company of his two beloved slaves, whom he names Corydon and Alexis for the night in honour of Virgil.

Villena's fictionalised biographies of Oscar Wilde, Lord Byron and Petronius share several qualities, including the aestheticisation of homosexual experience, an oppositional attitude to the existing social order, the sophistication and eccentricity of their protagonists, the merger of life and art into a unified whole, the tragic quality and the seeming failure of the heroes.[61] I believe that the three stories should all be read as literary illustrations of the ideas Villena put forward in *Corsarios de guante amarillo*. The essay drew a certain queer continuum of dandies, as defined by Villena. These are 'recycled histories' in the sense of revisiting the past in order to spotlight the features of historical figures which speak to the continuity of non-heteronormatively counter-cultural attitudes. Villena reclaims them in and for a context which is today termed 'queer.' The queer posture is anti-bourgeois, anti-regime, emphatically individualist, accursed, marginal, shamelessly eroticised and eccentric, the way it is in Wilde, Byron and Gaius Petronius.

4.3. Chronicles of a Death Foretold: The *Movida Madrileña* as a New *Fin de Siècle*

Villena's tendency to spot (if not forge) parallels between the past and the present comes to the fore not only in *Corsarios de guante amarillo*,

60 'Quiero hacer un pequeño teatro. Reírme de la muerte (y de la vida, por supuesto), homenajear al arte y a la belleza, que son el único consuelo […] en que nos apoyamos y, si puedo decirlo así […], pintar un cuadro. Dejar una mínima imagen de mí …' *Ibid.*, 238.

61 Lord Byron's death in the novel can also be interpreted in these terms. He dies in Greece, where he hoped to take part in a liberatory insurrection. Instead of romantic death in warfare, he dies in the agony of disease (probably a venereal one) far removed from the hub of political developments.

where he juxtaposes the Romantics and the Surrealists, and Lord Byron and Salvador Dalí or Luis Cernuda and combes antiquity for manifestations of dandyism. He writes in a like manner about the history of counter-culture in an essay from 1982. In the period I examine, that is, in the 1990s and 2000s, Villena published two novels whose action is set in the period of the flourishing and withering of what has come to be known as the *movida madrileña*. My metaphor of a dying flower here is not gratuitous. Villena depicts the *movida madrileña* as a new iteration of decadence, as suggested by the tell-tale titles of his novels *Madrid ha muerto* [*Madrid Is Dead*] and *Malditos* [*The Cursed*]. Both books are fictionalised chronicles of the *movida* era in which historical figures rub shoulders with invented characters in a similar fashion to the texts discussed above.

To make clearer what the *movida madrileña* meant to Villena, we can usefully refer to his *Máscaras y formas del fin de siglo* [*The Masks and Forms of the* Fin de Siècle], where he again interprets cultural developments during his time through the prism of the history of culture. First of all, he frames notions such as Symbolism, modernism and the *fin de siècle* as being synonymous and denoting not so much particular artistic movements as rather the broadly conceived spirit of the epoch with an intrinsic predilection for aestheticism and decadence.[62] These attitudes were fuelled by the sense that the world as we knew it was coming to an end. The decadent over-aestheticises and theatricalises a reality that is waning into non-being, while realising that it is his swan song. At the same time, he exhibits a certain fascination with modernity. When announcing the decline of the present, familiar civilisation, he wants to be remembered as a prophet of the advent of a new order.[63] This is the posture that Villena discerned in the *movida* members' chase of the ultra-modern coupled with their decadent propensity for living in the moment, an inclination that often proved self-destructive, as his novels bear out. He believed that his generation was the spiritual heir of 19th-century decadents:

> We, who are experiencing another *fin de siècle* today and now, can see the various harbingers of decline: that which we call *civilisation* has in a large measure sunk into an even deeper degradation than was the case back then. Besides (in the face of nuclear or environmental disaster), we feel that we are heading toward a *total end* […]. This sense of the *end* may […] bring us even closer to all the things associated with the *fin de siècle*. We feel decadent because ours is an end-stage, we revel in nostalgia for idealism – for aspiring to the perfect world whose unattainability we sense – far away from the new materialism, which is becoming increasing inhumane as time goes by.

62 Luis Antonio de Villena, *Máscaras y formas del fin de siglo* (Madrid: Ediciones del Dragón, 1988), 13–14.

63 *Ibid*., 14–16.

> We seek salvation in eroticism (and in its deviant forms), even if this leads us astray into mud and causes misery; we look for the mystical and the legendary, chasing beauty as we apparently seek to create new beauty, building on its old canons.[64]

Symptomatically, Villena is entirely silent on the political and historical conjuncture of his day. He is more interested in the *Zeitgeist* that hovers over the two epochs divided by a chiasm of one hundred years, and yet so intimately conjoined in his view. I believe that this lengthy passage should be borne in mind when interpreting Villena's novel about the *movida*.

According to the culture scholar Teresa Vilarós, the *movida madrileña* was part of broader developments in the Spain of the *transición* period. In her study *El mono del desencanto. Una crítica cultural de la transición española (1973–1993)* [*Dope Sickness and Disillusionment: A Cultural Critique of the* Transición Española *(1973–1993)*], Vilarós relies on the metaphor of the withdrawal syndrome to explore the cultural processes commenced by the death of General Franco. She argues that during the time of the Francoist dictatorship, that is, since the end of the Spanish Civil War, generations of intellectuals lived by and on a fantasy – a vision of a leftist, Marxist utopia. The hope of making this vision a reality in some indefinite future affected these generations like a drug, helping them get by in the hateful reality. The dictator's death brought the dream of this utopia to a sudden end and triggered an array of nervous responses resembling 'dope sickness' (*mono*). A considerable part of Spanish society, who had been subject to the toxic influence of the *caudillo* and was bitterly disillusioned by the political agreement struck by the right and the left, which dispelled the addictive phantasm, went into jitters and suffered a massive sense of emptiness typically afflicting dope-sick drug addicts. When the left-wing politicians adopted more centrist and pragmatic policies, relinquishing the revolutionary idea of a thorough, Marxist reform of society, intellectuals had to redefine their role and abandon their old habits of thought. This loss of 'grand narratives' was accompanied by a veritable eruption of 'small narratives,' which disowned disappointing politics and found expression in diffuse bottom-up artistic, social and subcultural movements. Vilarós interprets these glimmering,

64 'Nosotros – hoy, ahora – viviendo otro *fin de siglo* notamos varias premoniciones de caducidad: lo que llamamos *civilización* está, en buena medida, más degradado que entonces, y además (sea por catástrofe nuclear o ecológica) nos sentimos cerca de un *fin total* […]. Quizá esa sensación de *fin* […] nos hace semejarnos aún más a todo lo que el *fin de siglo* supuso. Nos sentimos decadentes, por finales; amamos la nostalgia por idealismo – por buscar un mundo perfecto, que sentimos imposible – lejos de otro materialismo, cada vez más antihumano. Vemos el erotismo (y sus desviaciones) como una salvación, pese a que conlleve también barro y miseria; buscamos lo místico y lo legendario – persiguiendo la belleza – parecemos querer crear con la beldad antigua otra belleza nueva.' *Ibid.*, 8–9 (italics original).

ephemeral, albeit extremely intense, pursuits in the *transición española* period as a unique response to the 'withdrawal syndrome.'[65] Within the framework she proposes, the *movida madrileña* as part of more comprehensive developments acquires a quality of decadence, as it is linked to a sense of irrevocable loss and an attempt to work it through in and via art. In this respect, her interpretation overlaps with Villena's, for whom the 'new *fin de siècle*' also meant the realisation that an epoch was coming to an end, engendering a new iteration of decadence. However, Vilarós makes the political situation the major axis of her reasoning, while Villena, who was a direct witness and sympathiser of the *movida*, brackets politics off and thus sides with the position characteristic of the members of the movement themselves.[66]

Paul Julian Smith, a well-known queer Spanish studies scholar, proposes discussing Villena's *Madrid ha muerto* in terms which abandon the traditional perception of the *movida* as a response to unhealed wounds or an effect of unworked-through mourning. Instead, he chooses to examine 'the less fashionable themes of life, liberty and the pursuit of pleasure, if not happiness,'[67] which are prominent in the writings of *movida* authors. Instead of searching for the causes of the cultural phenomenon in political processes, he draws on British research on urban development and the impact of urban spaces on socio-cultural transformations in contemporary metropolises. This is the lens he applies to explain the ephemeral quality of the social and artistic events described by Villena. Smith emphasises that the passages of the novel which speak to its nostalgic and melancholy mindset are not necessarily attributable to the processes identified by Vilarós. In his discussion of the narrator, who tells the story of the *movida* from the perspective of the 1990s, he concludes:

> The careworn Rafa thus exhibits the cessation of interest in the external world and inhibition of the ego which Freud described long ago.

65 Teresa M. Vilarós, *El mono del desencanto. Una crítica cultural de la transición española (1973–1993)* (Madrid: Siglo XXI de España, 1998), 23–5.

66 This does not suggest that the *movida* was apolitical. Admittedly, their ostentatious renunciation of official politics and consistent silence on it have tended to be misinterpreted by critics of the movement, such as José Carlos Mainer, as evidence of their apolitical stance: 'Because the older generation of leftist intellectuals cannot accept gender and sexuality as political issues, they claim that the program is apolitical.' Gema Pérez-Sánchez, *Queer Transitions in Contemporary Spanish Culture: From Franco to* la Movida (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2008), 108. Gema Pérez-Sánchez discusses Mendicutti's novel *Una mala noche la tiene cualquiera* [*Anyone May Have a Bad Night*] as an example disproving the alleged apolitical attitude of the *movida* and follows Vilarós in claiming that members of the movement sought to redefine the political and to redraw the line between the political and the non-political. See *ibid.*, 107–8.

67 Paul Julian Smith, *Spanish Visual Culture: Cinema, Television, Internet* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006), 53.

> However, the lost object is not Francisco Franco, the source of the *mono* for many cultural critics, but rather the movida itself, a time unambiguously described as one of life, liberty and pleasure.[68]

Smith also focuses on the subtitle of the novel: *Esplendor y caos de una ciudad feliz de los ochenta* [*Splendour and Chaos in a Happy City of the Eighties*], whose positive vigour is contrasted with the ominous *Madrid ha muerto* [*Madrid Is Dead*]. The narrator recalls the days of felicity, bathed in unfettered creativity, sexual freedom, the blistering pace of social life and the atmosphere of an ongoing urban fiesta. This is actually the image of the *movida* that emerges from the titles of the chapters, whose form and style allude to those in *Guzmán de Alfarache*, as Smith aptly notices. He also points to other features of *Madrid ha muerto* which attest to Villena's deliberate employment of the conventions of the Spanish picaresque novel. Specifically, the narrator, Rafa Antúnez, writes down his memories at the request of Pedro Almodóvar, just like Lazarillo wrote down his when asked to do so by a prelate in *La vida de Lazarillo de Tormes* (*The Life of Lazarillo de Tormes*). Besides, the narrator is not really reliable, as he tends to contradict himself, his memory fails him, and he is prone to confabulation. Finally, the work consists of several episodes with the narrator participating in all of them.[69]

In his analysis, Smith not only steers clear of the issues foregrounded by Vilarós but also passes over Villena's other works, both essays and fiction, which results in amplifying exclusively the features of the novel which are a testimony of the carnivalesque vitality of the *movida*. Smith insists that the movement had nothing to do with 'thoughtless hedonism' and, unlike foreign subcultures, such as British punk, did not leave behind a trail of victims (of drug addiction or AIDS, for example).[70] The portrayal of the *movida* drawn by Smith can be informatively complemented by Villena's insights in his essay on decadence: 'Today, like yesterday – and in many respects for similar reasons – death and beauty come in league with each other. A passion for life and a passion for death walk side by side with each other and shake hands. In brief, the *fin de siècle* is our experience more than ever.'[71] For Villena, living in the moment and the carnivalesque atmosphere of the decline of the epoch are the generation's swan song and as such a portent of death. In other words, the keen celebration of life and susceptibility to self-destructive behaviour are two sides of the same coin whose name is *fin de siècle*.

68 *Ibid*., 68.
69 *Ibid*., 68–70.
70 *Ibid*., 73.
71 'Hoy como ayer – por motivos muchas veces coincidentes – muerte y belleza se alían. Pasión de vivir y pasión de morir, se anudan y dan la mano. En una palabra: el *fin de siglo* – más que nunca nos pertenece.' Villena, 'Máscaras,' 9 (italics original).

Let us have a closer look at these two aspects of *Madrid ha muerto* against the backdrop of Villena's other writings in order to emphasise once again that his fiction forms part of a continuum of queer history. The 'dandy's gesture' of employing narrative structures borrowed from the past serves Villena to present to readers his own interpretation of the developments of his day and of the characteristic 'self' of queers. In doing this, he joins the interpretive community of the mode with which he feels the closest affinity, that is, the *malditista* tradition.

As already mentioned, most of Villena's protagonists do not identify themselves with homosexuality as a coherent and permanent identity. Non-normative sexual behaviour, including homosexual acts, are more of an expression of a dandy rebellion against bourgeois values. This was the case with Villena's Lord Byron and Álvaro Isasmendi in *El bello tenebroso*, who emphasised that he did not feel homosexual or gay.[72] A similar position is adopted by a throng of characters in *Madrid ha muerto*. In terms of Anglo-American theories, their anti-identitarian understanding of sexuality falls under the category of 'queer.' However, Villena's entire work suggests that he is inspired less by American queer theory and definitely more by the traditions of dandyism and 'accursed homosexuality.' To put it differently, he recontextualises 19th-century notions to conjure up an image of the *movida* members as postmodern dandies.[73] What they are preoccupied with most is the rejection of all labels and their dedication to 'shocking the bourgeoisie.' Their ideal is bisexuality, as it entails indeterminacy and channels an unconstrained fulfilment of sexual desire. Both the characters and the narrator are at pains to avoid being unambiguously classified as hetero- or homosexual and fashion their image as individuals who defy narrow definitions:

> Was Tilo gay? I don't think so. Like the others, he was something much better than that: a truly modern boy. Without prejudice or definition. Only Linnaeus catalogued species. Why keep doing this? Especially that now […] everything has a label of its own … The tendency is to turn life into one botanical garden with a handful of tree species. Or with many trees, but repeatable.[74]

72 Villena, *Bello*, 28.

73 Villena's writings and Almodóvar's films emphatically show that the local context should be taken into consideration to prevent an automatic application of notions developed in Anglo-American queer theory, as pointed out by some Spanish scholars (see Chapter 1). This does not entail dismissing the entire conceptual apparatus of queer research. Rather, the point is to attend to certain nuances which are lost when local factors are not taken into account.

74 'Tilo era gay? Imagino que no. Como otros, era mucho más: un chico verdaderamente moderno. Sin prejuicios y sin definiciones. Sólo Línneo catalogó a las especies. ¿A qué seguir? Y eso que ahora […] todo se ha vuelto etiquetas … La vida quiere convertirse en un jardín botánico con pocas clases de árboles. O con muchos árboles, repetidísimos.'

The novel teems with such remarks. In another eloquent passage, the point is that:

> If anybody asked Dei […] whether he was a fairy, he would burst out laughing or scoff at them in another way. What the hell did it matter? He probably didn't want to define himself as a fairy or gay (though he may well have been one) because – like many boys in those days – he thought that unlatched boundaries between the sexes should not be closed to anything since what they actually opened up to was a desire to make the most of life, and that the *third sex*, or whatever it was called (who cared?) was, paradoxically, for those who were still enslaved, though they themselves talked about liberation, but from a different perspective.[75]

This is Villena's account of the postmodern approach to sexual identity espoused by the *movida*-affiliated youth, an attitude not grounded in scholarly reflection, unlike Anglo-American queer movements, but powered by an *intuitive*, bottom-up dismissal of all categories associated with the obsolete, bourgeois system of values and worldview. The *movida*'s detachment from the political struggle for gay and lesbian liberation resulted from their spontaneous discarding of all the labels which Spanish society had applied up to that point. The passages above aptly convey the disdainful approach to identity-related categories ('or whatever it was called') and, thus, the spurning of the former 'rules of the game.' Given this, asking anybody about their sexual identity was perceived as compromising because it evinced embroilment in the outdated lexicon of the bourgeoisie, incompatible as it was with the *movida* spirit. This also concerned other aspects of sexuality and mores. Pregnant Lía 'flashed around her paunch as if it were a dazzling Olympic medal'[76] with the intention, one may suppose, of 'shocking the bourgeoisie,' for whom pregnancy out of wedlock was a reason for shame rather than for pride.

Villena's novel is dominated by a positive, vigorous and liberatory image of a community in which sexual non-normativity was a natural behaviour and even a snobbish and fashionable gesture among

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Luis Antonio de Villena, *Madrid ha muerto. Esplendor y caos en una ciudad feliz de los ochenta* (Barcelona: Planeta, 1999), 110.

75 'Si a Dei le hubiesen preguntado […] si era marica, se hubiera echado a reír o fabricado algún nuevo gesto displicente. ¡Qué coño importaba eso! No querría decirse marica ni gay (aunque a lo mejor esencialmente lo fuera) porque pensaba – como muchos chicos entonces – que las entreabiertas fronteras de los sexos no debieran cerrarse a nada, pues se abrían por sed de vida, y que en el *tercer sexo* o como le llamaran a aquello, qué más daba, sólo se quedaban – paradójicamente – quienes habían sido reprimidos – aunque ellos hablaran de liberación – desde otra óptica.' *Ibid*., 198 (italics original).

76 'lucía su tripón como una espectacular medalla olímpica.' *Ibid*., 62.

postmodern dandies. Nevertheless, 'the other side of the coin,' is not to be disregarded, as vocally reminded by the main title *Madrid ha muerto*. The words were allegedly uttered by the fashion designer Manuel Piña to capture the atmosphere of Madrid during the decline of the *movida*. The decadent character of the *movida* was manifest not only in an unstoppable passion for life but also in a preoccupation with the dark and the fatalist. Ardora, a character who defines herself as a lesbian vampire, stylises herself into a new 'madame Blavatsky' and busies herself with occultism.[77] The aesthetics of evil is also cherished by Eduardo Haro Ibars, the most famous poet of the *movida*, who features as the main protagonist in Villena's novel *Malditos*. Eduardo translates Lovecraft's novels, is a Lou Reed fan and loves Jean Genet's prose. He experiments with hard drugs and has dealings with a dangerous cutthroat nicknamed Jazmín (Jasmin), who brings to mind typical characters of the *enfant terrible* of French letters. The *movida*'s heyday coincides with the appearance of a new drug – heroin, 'enmeshed in a dark legend […] which framed it as a tough song of night warriors, of terrible gods of the stars as grim as the barbarian gods of ice.'[78] The narrator stresses that while cocaine ruled the day at that time, some of the rebellious young yielded to the allures of heroin, that dark 'goddess' of rock idols, such as Jim Morrison and Lou Reed.

Contrary to Smith, who focused on the positive image of the *movida* in *Madrid ha muerto*, Jorge González del Pozo applies himself to scrutinising the aspects of Villena's novel which speak to the decadence of the movement. In his '*Madrid ha muerto* de Luis Antonio de Villena: la cronología de la cocaína en la urbe española de la democracia,' González del Pozo follows Vilarós's suggestion and states that cocaine is actually the only consistently present and genuine protagonist of the text and the axis around which other, merely episodic characters circle. In his view, the drug is shown as an increasingly adulterated substance and consequently losing its power over the course of time. In this way, it serves as a metaphor for the fading *movida*, a movement that is also losing its momentum, and 'reveals its decadent facet'[79] along with society's exacerbating disappointment with the political transformation. The *movida* members themselves, on whom the years of night-time partying and excesses inevitably take their toll, re-forge their *desencanto* into

77 *Ibid*., 58.

78 'Existía una leyenda terrible […] que hacía ya de la heroína un canto duro de guerreros nocturnos, de dioses terribles y galácticos, similares en su oscuridad a salvajes dioses de hielo.' *Ibid*., 123.

79 'mostrando su cara decadente.' Jorge González del Pozo, '*Madrid ha muerto* de Luis Antonio de Villena: la cronología de la cocaína en la urbe española de la democracia,' *Bulletin of Hispanic Studies*, 2010, 87, no. 5, 579, https://doi.org/10.3828/bhs.2010.18 (accessed 15 August 2021).

conformity and ultimately adjust to the new, stabilised realities of the 1990s.[80]

González del Pozo rightly places his argument in the context of Villena's essay on the 'masks and forms of the *fin de siècle*,'[81] but he fails to proceed further along these lines, attending exclusively to the *movida* members who transfigure into the burghers they used to despise so deeply. Villena, however, is also interested in those who fit the image of decadents of his beloved late 19th century. In 2010, he published another novel whose action takes place during Spain's transition to democracy. *Malditos*, yet another fictionalised biography in Villena's resumé, is an instalment of what I termed a queer continuum. As already mentioned, the book casts as its protagonist Eduardo Haro Ibars, a contemporary 'cursed poet' who appears under the alias of Emilio Jordán. I believe it is only by juxtaposing the two novels that a fuller understanding of the *movida* as Villena's new *fin de siècle* can be achieved.

Malditos, too, is a 'chronicle of a death foretold,' that is, a tale about the waning of an idealised epoch. Similarly to *Madrid ha muerto*, it is narrated by the author's alter ego (named Luis de Lastra) and consists of multiple short episodes, this time however without hints at the Spanish picaresque. The linear structure, an attribute of almost all of Villena's fiction, facilitates characterising a panorama of characters surrounding the protagonist. Symptomatically, the title is phrased in the plural number, which makes it all the more clear that while spinning a fictional biography of one *movida*-affiliated artist, it is meant to draw a group portrait of the entire generation. This is actually announced by the narrator himself, who admits: 'My intention was to commemorate a single cursed one, but they were all so cursed, every single one of them. Cursed, each in his own way. Discordant.'[82] And then he adds: 'it may be a kind of collective biography.'[83] The generation are described in the manner reminiscent of passages in *Madrid ha muerto*:

> Nobody who had any self-esteem looked for applause, sought honours or aspired to marriage. Love was free, and everything was supposed to abide by this rule. The most important thing was to live, to make absolutely the most of life and of every moment. To live as if this were always or almost always your last day. To live as if tomorrow did not matter. Nothing practical. Nothing smacking of traders or burghers. In a sense, these people harboured a subconscious

80 *Ibid*., 571–83.

81 *Ibid*., 577.

82 'Pensé recordar a un maldito, pero todos ellos lo fueron, todos. Malditos, de un modo u otro. Desacordes.' Luis Antonio de Villena, *Malditos* (Barcelona: Bruguera, 2010), 12.

83 'quizá sea una suerte de biografía colectiva.' *Ibid*., 13.

> conviction that if the world did not change, if it failed to become a place of universal felicity, to die would be the best (the most decent) way out.[84]

The difference from the earlier novel lies in that *Malditos* brings to the fore a 'passion for death' rather than a 'passion for love,' which Villena thematised in his essay on the two facets of the same phenomenon which goes by the name of the end of the century.[85] The gloomy element of the *movida* is personified in Emilio Jordán, a decadent *par excellence*, who is likened to the mythical Icarus. Craving freedom beyond anything else, he faces death, like Dedalus's son. Emilio

> claimed that he loved life […] because it flowed like a grand river straight into the mouth of death. For him, death was the stamp of perfection, but it also made life far more exciting. […] All-embracing Death also entailed romantic sublimity and the idea of transgressing boundaries, a need that was conspicuous in him.[86]

Echoes of existential philosophy reverberate here with equal power as those of Romantic philosophy. Emilio is not only a Romantic rebel in the vein of Byron but also a decadent of the new *fin de siècle*, fully aware of nothingness. Similarly to several characters in *Madrid ha muerto*, he is a bisexual who evades the sneered categories. He spent some of his teenage years in Tangier, where his grandparents emigrated, driven by their Republican convictions. It was in North Africa, a phantasmatic space for hosts of European homosexuals, that he went through his sexual initiation with his Moroccan peers. This detail was later incorporated into a legend that arose around him in the times of the *movida*, since he was adulated as the one who already in adolescence had lived through experiences boasted by famous homosexual writers, such as Tennessee Williams, Paul Bowles and his idol Jean Genet.[87] Emilio Jordán was under the spell of the latter's novels, and he avidly read Rimbaud's poetry. He repeatedly references these

84 'Nadie que se apreciara aspiraba a honores, distinciones o matrimonios. El amor era libre, y todo debía regirse por esa regla. Lo importante era vivir, apurar al máximo los instantes y la vida. Vivir como si siempre o casi siempre fuera el último día. Vivir sin que el mañana importara. Nada práctico. Nada similar a una vida mercantil o burguesa. De algún modo en aquellos subconscientes funcionaba la idea de que, si el mundo no cambiaba y se convertía en un lugar feliz, lo mejor (lo único decente) era morir.' *Ibid*., 196.

85 Villena, *Máscaras*, 9.

86 'decía amar la vida […] porque conduce como un gran río a la muerte. La Muerte era para él un timbre de excelencia, pero la muerte volvía mucho más apasionada la vida. […] La Muerte omnímoda era también lo sublime romántico, la idea de la superación del límite como una necesidad que se traslucía en él.' *Ibid*., 134.

87 The narrator even suggests that Mohamed Choukri's novel *For Bread Alone*, translated by Bowles, mentions Emilio Jordán.

writers in his conversations with Luis, when trying to elucidate his stance on art and life to his interlocutor.

The narrator perceives Jordán as a kindred soul, and the two connect to each other as early as on their first meeting. Luis de Lastra relates: 'He dressed in black, like a Satanist rock frontman, while I wore jeans, a blue velvet waisted jacket and a huge silk tie with an *art nouveau* print […]. Both of us odd, we formed a pair of opposites, perhaps mutually complementary ones.'[88] The narrator talks of complementarity because Jordán makes him view contemporary rock subcultures as a new instalment of late 19th-century dandyism.[89] The mutual understanding they enjoy only begins to crumble when his accursed friend slides into alcohol and drug addiction. Emilio begins to experiment with heroin when he meets the sombre and beautiful Juan Ángel, whom he calls a 'fallen angel.' The very epitome of the aesthetics of evil, the obsessively self-destructive Juan Ángel suggests to his lover that they commit suicide together. But Emilio, in whom 'a passion for death' mingles with 'a passion for life,' is not yet ready to take this step and retreats at the last moment. A few years later, he himself mutates into a death-spreading 'fallen angel' and – already a heroin addict – gives his lover a scare by proposing exactly the same. He eventually dies of AIDS, a disease he has contracted, crucially, as a result of his addiction and not of his sexual habits.

Villena portrays in Emilio Jordán the members of the *transición española* generation whose lives represent the other – dark – facet of the end of the century. The erotically robust carnival of the affirmation of vitality that pervades *Madrid ha muerto* is contrasted with 'the other side of the coin,' and the juxtaposition of the two novels produces an image of the *movida* as nothing more than a swan song in which 'death and beauty come in league with each other.'[90] In this composite of Villena's two *fins de siècle*, homoeroticism is rendered in a typically modernist poetics, where Eros merges with Thanatos. If Villena's novels

88 'Él iba de negro, como un rockero satanista, y yo llevaba pantalones vaqueros, una chaqueta entallada de terciopelo azul, una gran corbata de seda con arabescos *art nouveau* de llamativos colores […]. Raros ambos, formábamos una pareja de opuestos quizá complementarios.' *Ibid*., 45–6.

89 Emilio Jordán pens an enthusiastic review of one of Luis de Lastra's first essays on the *fin de siècle*, in which he praises Lastra for his uncanny intuition in resuming end-of-the-century aesthetics in our own times. It is interesting to compare this literary trace with a passage from Villena's introduction to his essay on dandyism: 'Astonishingly, my vindication of Romantic and *fin-de-siècle* dandies […] initially failed to recognise how much of a dandy there was in […] numerous rock singers and a considerable part of the counter-cultural world around them … It was Eduardo Haro Ibars […] who made me aware of this parallel' ('Es extraño que mi vindicación del dandy romántico y finisecular […] no se percatara – al inicio – cuánto del dandy tenían […] muchos cantantes del rock y buena parte del mundo contracultural que les rodeaba … Fue Eduardo Haro Ibars […] quien me hizo ver esta conexión'). Villena, *Corsarios*, 10.

90 'muerte y belleza se alían.' Villena, *Máscaras*, 9.

(in particular *Malditos*) are analysed in disjunction from each other, they give the impression of the author rewriting the inherited motifs of homoerotic literature with the imitative knack of the Martínezian copyist. He does not seem to perform 'Mazuf's gesture' of unleashing dialogicity, and he does not engage in intertextual play the way Juan Gil-Albert, Eduardo Mendicutti and Juan Goytisolo do. However, Villena's rewriting of the tradition of homoerotic literature is not a naïve venture. He embarks on this venture armed with a deliberately crafted strategy which I have called 'a dandy's gesture.' This strategy sees him devise his image as an erudite author in an era when culture, therein homosexual culture, is becoming increasingly trifling. Villena characteristic mode of writing, with its recurrent stories of queers phrased in an outmoded style and its depictions of the present through notions from former epochs, is an integral part of his position as an opponent of the mainstream culture. He stylises himself into a homosexual dandy hailing from the *novísimos* generation with a commitment to culturalism, which he practices, paradoxically, by writing against culture.

4.4. Bones of Contention: Addressing Homonormativity in *Huesos de Sodoma*

The chapter which I called 'Against Culture' deserves an appendix. The point is that in 2004, that is, during the period I examine in this volume, Villena wrote a short novel which clearly stands apart from his other fiction. *Huesos de Sodoma* [*The Bones of Sodom*] was produced on the eve of passage of the Spanish law authorising same-sex marriages. I propose examining this work as a literary avenue for Villena's commentary on the developments triggered by the successful emancipatory politics of gay and lesbian movements. Before doing this, however, let us return to Emilio Jordán for a moment. The protagonist of *Malditos*, who is clearly influenced by Jean Genet, publishes an article titled 'Vuelvo al ghetto' ['Returning to the Ghetto'], in which he describes the subversive potential of homosexuality associated with the underworld and anti-bourgeois rebellion. In an interesting comment on the eponymous ghetto, the narrator says that back when Madrid's Chueca was not yet a typical gay area, the word was used as a synonym of a gay bar, but without any political connotations. Emilio's article was the first attempt at inscribing these spaces in a new political context as a 'Genetian territory of provocation.'[91] The ghetto was supposed to evoke associations with 'the pride of the stigmatised' rather than with 'gay pride' (*orgullo gay*).[92] Emilio 'never craved a blessing from justice or from bourgeois pundits; if anything, he wanted their contempt in order

91 'como territorio genetiano de provocaciones.' Villena, *Malditos*, 236.
92 'orgullo del repudiado.' *Ibid.*

to pin it to his glittery lamé shirt like some huge, blasphemous medal.'[93] The narrator, who speaks from the context of the early 2000s, adds that 'nothing would make Emilito laugh as hard as a legislation-sanctioned gay marriage.'[94]

Huesos de Sodoma revolves around gay and lesbian emancipatory politics, which results in imposing 'the only right' interpretation of homosexuality. Villena, who revisits the past of queers with such consistency and marshals them into a dandy continuum and the counter-cultural tradition, sketches an anti-utopian vision of the future in which individuality, diversity of positions and critical reflection on one's own alterity incrementally disappear, ousted by increasing uniformity, the banalisation of homosexual experience and the tyranny of political correctness. By doing this, Villena addresses issues which have been frequently discussed by queer studies scholars in recent years. The ironic and richly allusive novel reverberates with contemporary debates on homonormativity, the institutionalisation of research on sexuality, the professionalisation of LGBT activism and the commercialisation of homosexual culture in the era of the neoliberal global economy.[95]

The action of Villena's uncharacteristic work spans the 1990s to the 2040s, commencing in 1991, when a Swedish archaeological team seeking to undermine the biblical story of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah travels to the Dead Sea to carry out new studies. The researchers, to whom the narrator time and again ironically refers as 'gays, of course,'[96] discover human bones and pieces of weaponry instead of traces of sulphur. These findings make them conclude that the two biblical cities were annihilated not by God's hand but as a result of a calamitous armed conflict. The publication of the archaeologists' research report would have gone entirely unnoticed by gays 'busy with cosmetics and partying,'[97] had it not been for the fact that one scholar sneaked a bundle of the eponymous 'bones of Sodom' back to Stockholm. A few years later, he gifted one of them to his lover and sold the remaining ones to an antiquarian, who initiated a new fad for expensive 'Sodom gadgets' in the gay and lesbian community to profit from the business. This fuels the public's interest in the Swedish archaeologists' research, and new expeditions contribute to new, surprising discoveries concerning the biblical cities.

93 'jamás quiso la bendición de la justicia o de los jerarcas burgueses, quiso mejor su desprecio para colgarlo de su blusa lamé brillante como una medalla infinita y blasfema.' *Ibid*.

94 'nada le hubiera hecho tanto reír a Emilito como el matrimonio homosexual amparado por la ley.' *Ibid*.

95 See Diane Richardson, 'Desiring Sameness? The Rise of a Neoliberal Politics of Normalisation,' *Antipode*, 2005, 37, no. 3, 515–35, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.0066-4812.2005.00509.x (accessed 15 August 2021).

96 'gays, por supuesto.' Luis Antonio de Villena, *Huesos de Sodoma* (Madrid: Odisea Editorial, 2004), 24, 26.

97 'entre cosmético y fiesta.' *Ibid*., 26.

The author of the fictitious prologue, Max Drake – a British queer Spanish studies scholar based in Sydney[98] – explains that *Huesos de Sodoma* is nothing else but a literary joke for Luis Antonio de Villena. As a literary scholar, he adds that the book is in fact 'a novel with an explicit thesis and besides almost a utopian novel or – speaking more precisely – an example of fiction that anticipates the future …'[99] He also stresses that the work engages with the current situation of sexual minorities in Western culture. He references his conversation with Villena, in which they both declared themselves to be supporters of the emancipation and 'regularisation' of homosexuality in society, at the same time expressing reservations about excessive political correctness, increasing ignorance among LGBT activists and, above all, the prevailing 'nationalist' tendencies which push 'universalist' attitudes to the margin.[100] This vocabulary immediately brings to mind the dichotomies of essentialism/constructivism and gay/queer, which are widely disputed among scholars studying sexual minorities. As mentioned in Chapter 1, this Anglo-American debate was initially perceived in the Iberian Peninsula as incompatible with the Spanish context in the late 1980s. It gained more currency after 2000, when queer studies stirred increasing interest among Spanish researchers. It is no coincidence that *Huesos de Sodoma* was written in exactly this period.

Villena, whose works convey his own interpretation of sexual otherness as a species of dandyism, in which the homophile is usually bound up with the accursed,[101] the anti-bourgeois and the counter-cultural, enacts a playful semantic shift. In the novel, 'nationalism,' that is, an essentialist position associated with gay and lesbian movements, is referred to as queer,[102] whereas 'universalism,' that is, the constructionist stance specific to queer movements, is paired with Villena's preferred notion of 'homosexuality,' which paradoxically means diversity here. Having read the work sent to him, Max Drake figures out the message of Villena's new tendentious novel: 'Is it possible that his thesis is that queer nationalism will destroy the fecund multiplicity of homosexuals? […] Will the gay

98 This is an obvious allusion to the well-known literary scholars who deal with queer criticism: the Britons Paul Julian Smith and Brad Epps and the Spaniard Alfredo Martínez Expósito, who works at a university in Australia.

99 'una novela de tesis abierta y además casi una novela utópica, o acaso fuera mejor decir una novela de ficción anticipativa …' *Ibid*., 14.

100 *Ibid*., 12.

101 In the last chapter, I discuss Álvaro Pombo's *Contra natura*, attending to his assessment of the resumption of the former conceptualisation of homosexuality in the 21st century as absurd. Pombo's work includes allusions to the plot of Villena's novel and sarcastically appraises the homophile tradition.

102 The narrator establishes a correlation between 'nationalism' and queer by directly referring to a well-known organisation called Queer Nation. Besides, the novel's version of 'nationalism' alludes to the North American Black Power movement, which builds on nationalist ideas in its struggle for the rights of African Americans in the US.

kill the homosexual? Or will the gay in the end beget, so to speak, a new world?'[103]

The play on meanings and the terminological *quid pro quo* encode an ironic commentary on the ignorance that he sees as being rampant among the Spanish minority community, therein LGBT activists. What makes this jibe all the more eloquent is that it is made in Villena's only novel published by Odisea Editorial. The publisher specialises in trivial literature, in gay and lesbian Harlequin-like fiction and caters to a readership whose expectations of homoerotic fiction are limited to light entertainment and depictions of love-making. Tapping into this publishing context, Villena contrives a sophisticated, enciphered allusion to gays and lesbians being 'busy with cosmetics and partying,'[104] using the term queer as a new, fashionable synonym for 'gay,' and being oblivious or indifferent to the wealth of scholarly and political investment that the two notions bear.

What would 'a new world' speculated by Max Drake in the prologue look like? This *brave new world* would be an enactment of a certain utopia of society comprised exclusively of gays and lesbians living separately and cooperating with each other only for procreation. This political project originates in archaeological discoveries. In the novel, the archaeological team excavate not only human remains in the area of the Dead Sea; they also dig out what is called a Naucratis stone, a slab which, like the Rosetta stone, contains Egyptian hieroglyphics, Greek inscriptions and a text engraved in a third, yet unknown language. The researchers soon announce that a specimen of the ancient writing of the 'Sodomites' has been found because the inscriptions on the stone mention a king of Sodom named Birshá. It is established that a handful of fugitives from Sodom found asylum in, among other places, Naucratis, a Greek colony in the Nile delta, and were gradually Hellenised. These sensational findings cause the global gay and lesbian community to split along ideological lines. While some view the news as an interesting trivium, others begin to fancy themselves heirs to the ancient 'Sodomites' and use their ancient 'origin' as the foundation of a new identity, which they trumpet under the motto of 'Sodom pride.' The latter response prevails, and a huge majority embraces a new fad for all things Sodom, sporting long hair, sandals and stone ornaments on leather straps. Absurd interpretations of the findings fuel ever more strident political claims by the 'descendants' of those victimised by the biblical misrepresentation of history. The plot of the novel finishes in 2039, when the leader of a worldwide organisation of these 'descendants' speaks at a UN assembly demanding the proclamation of a

103 'La tesis era que el nacionalismo *queer* arruinaría la fértil pluralidad homosexual? […] ¿El marica matará al homosexual? ¿O el marica […] terminará creando, procreando en cierto modo, un mundo nuevo?' *Ibid.*

104 'entre cosmético y fiesta.' *Ibid.*, 26.

new state by the name of Nea Sodoma as compensation for this historical mistreatment and invokes the precedence of Israel.

Sparkling with irony and opulently allusive, the playful and lighthearted novel is written in a style which diverges considerably from Villena's other fiction works. Its major claim to attention lies in its criticism of the banalisation of homosexual culture – a contemporary development also addressed by Álvaro Pombo in *Contra natura* – and its shrewd commentary on the academic dispute on non-normative sexual identities. It is a literary protest against what has come to be called homonormativity. Before exploring this issue, let me return to Diana Richardson's study in which she examines the impact of neoliberal politics on the discourse of sexual minorities.

Richardson explains that neoliberalism is not only an economic theory, but also a socio-political framework. In economic terms, it consists in the state's withdrawal from its former responsibilities and functions, which are handed over to the private service sector as a source of revenue. These processes are accompanied by an emphasis on the 'individual freedom' of people, who are expected to be independent and manage their lives without any major intervention from the state: 'In this context, the role of government is to provide advice and assistance to enable self-governing subjects to become normal/responsible citizens, who voluntarily comply with the interests and needs of the state.'[105] In Richardson's view, the politics of 'responsible citizenships' has made considerable inroads into contemporary gay and lesbian discourse, which relies heavily on the language and concepts of neoliberalism.[106] Richardson contrasts post-war homophile movements and the emancipatory politics of gay and lesbian movements in the 1970s, which fought against pathologising homosexuality in medical discourse, with the politics of sexual minorities at the turn of the millennium, that is, during the ascendancy of Western neoliberalism. She shows that same-sex civil unions and homosexual marriages are enmeshed in the politics of 'responsible citizenship.' The neoliberal order accepts them because gays and lesbians who opt for a 'normal' and 'responsible' relationship model, which copies the autonomous, self-sufficient heterosexual marriage model and is thus safe from the system's point of view, voluntarily succumb to the policies of the state. They become full-fledged 'consumer citizens' and contribute to the coveted growth of GDP. Richardson points out the consequences of the adoption of the neoliberal language by emancipatory movements, including the professionalisation of activism, the institutionalisation of queer studies and the development of a market for commodities and services targeting the LGBT community. In the context of an expanding globalisation, these processes increasingly

105 Richardson, 'Desiring,' 516.
106 *Ibid.*

normativise and universalise the sole – neoliberal – model of being gay or lesbian, bracketing off all identities which depart from this model, that is, queer identities.[107]

In Villena's novel, the made-up critic Max Drake recalls his meeting with the author of *Huesos de Sodoma*:

> We talked about the gay community – about the realities of gay life in the Western world and about its future. Logically, we all supported the liberation and normalisation of gays and lesbians, a fight that must be carried on, but we were worried by the spread of *political correctness* within the gay community itself, which – obviously – should be diversified and plural.[108]

Liberation and normalisation are connected with the early demands of emancipatory movements. The vision of political correctness which makes these interlocutors so anxious is bound up with the neoliberal politics of normalisation discussed by Richardson, that is, a type of normalisation that globally ousts diversity, which both characters take for granted. As an engaged author, an expert on homosexual culture and a perceptive observer of the history of queers, Villena notices the processes depicted by Richardson and recounts them in his novel of purpose. Hence, he satirises unreflecting consumerism soaring among the LGBT community and is also ironic about the two other factors, that is, the institutionalisation of LGBT/queer studies and the professionalisation of activism.

Examples of his approach include the aftermath of the discovery of the Naucratis stone. First, a swarm of researchers (archaeologists, anthropologists and literary scholars) – 'gays, of course'[109] – hold an international conference with *Sodom lives!*[110] as a motto in Amsterdam. Then, articles describing ancient 'Sodomites' and their customs proliferate, with linguistic papers attempting to reconstruct the lost 'Sodom tongue.' Expectedly, it does not take long until an 'Institute of Sodomitic Studies' is founded at the Collège de France.[111] As the political movement of the Sodom 'heirs' expands and becomes more robust, linguists strive to create a neo-Sodom language based on the grammar of the ancient one. In this way, they

107 *Ibid*., 515–23.

108 'Hablamos del mundo gay – de la realidad de los gays en el mundo occidental – y de su futuro. Todos apoyábamos – lógicamente – la liberación y normalización de gays y lesbianas, la lucha que todavía hay que sostener, pero nos preocupaba el asomo de *lo políticamente correcto* dentro de la propia comunidad gay, que de suyo, debía ser muy plural y muy diversa.' Villena, *Huesos*, 12 (italics original).

109 'gays, por supuesto.' *Ibid*., 24, 26.

110 *Ibid*., 49.

111 'Instituto de Estudios Sodomíticos.' *Ibid*., 91.

endeavour to support the political idea of a 'sexual Israel.'[112] This surge of academic activity, expectedly, occasions some cases of scholarly malpractice committed for ideological reasons.[113]

Similar tones reverberate in the account of the professionalisation of activism and activist careers. An excellent case in point is Julio Acedo, a former secondary school teacher who draws faulty conclusions from these discoveries and resolves to devote his entire life to the 'Sodom cause.' He takes a new name – Birshá, in honour of the ancient king – becomes chairman of an association called 'Gay Fatherland' and rebrands it as the 'Sodom Fatherland.'[114] He gradually takes over the leadership of analogical international organisations and eventually founds a political party with the glorious-sounding name 'Party for the Pluralist Republic of Sodom and Gomorrah.'[115] His fiery populist speeches inflame the enthusiasm of uncritical masses from big-city gay and lesbian ghettoes, and the few who try to talk reason are shoved to the margin. One such disregarded voice of reason is heard in a speech by the intellectual Andrés Quijano Asunción, who advocates complete integration with the heterosexual part of society and appeals to entirely abolish any labelling for the sake of inclusively understood sexual freedom:

> Sodom was […] a bisexual society. […] In the historical Sodom, men engaged in – more or less ritualised relationships – with younger males, for whom they were guides and lovers … […] Besides this, men got married and had children, which these facts do not exclude. […] I believe that […] bisexuality, mingling, liberty and sexual diversity form a great legacy on which we may build […], learning from the historical Sodom … Liberty and sexual diversity! Bisexuality for all […]! Nea Sodoma is just another example of manipulating History.[116]

112 'un Israel sexual.' *Ibid.*, 128.

113 In her discussion of the institutionalisation of LGBT/queer studies, Richardson points to a growing gap between academic theory and activist practice (Richardson, 'Desiring,' 531). In Villena's novel, this institutionalisation promotes misrepresentations of history for the sake of an absurd political agenda. Science becomes a tool harnessed by populists.

114 'Patria Gay,' 'Patria Sodoma.' *Ibid.*, 87.

115 'Partido para la República Plural de Sodoma y Gomorra.' *Ibid.*, 157.

116 'Sodoma fue […] una sociedad bisexual. […] En la Sodoma histórica los hombres tenían relaciones, más o menos ritualizadas, con otros hombres más jóvenes, de quienes se volvían guías y amantes … […] Los hombres – además, y sin exclusión por la causa antedicha – se casaban y tenían hijos. […] Creo […] que bisexualidad, mezcla, libertad y pluralidad sexual es la gran herencia que podemos extraer […] de la Sodoma histórica … ¡Libertad y pluralidad sexual! ¡Bisexualidad para todos […]! Nea Sodoma es la manipulación de la Historia, otra vez.' *Ibid.*, 142–4.

Andrés Quijano is the *porte-parole* of Villena,[117] who intersperses many of his works with ancient Greek motifs typical of the homophile model and several of his protagonists who are bisexual, champion absolute sexual freedom and are wary of any identity labels. Andrés Quijano criticises 'homonationalism'[118] as touted by Julio Acedo, which seeks to impose on everybody a sole, artificially fabricated identity and one model of society where same-sex relationships are authorised by the state as the only acceptable ones and nuptial ceremonies are stylised into a 'Sodom' ritual invented by ideologues in defiance of historical truth. Towards the end of the novel, Quijano states:

> What I had – and still have – on my mind is another world for gays, one where the word *abnormality* would be gone. Where we would all live with all, without ghettoes, without exclusions; where all alterity would eventually be perceived as normal because being different is what is normal. At every bar, a man could approach another man – or boy – for love, tenderness or sex. And that would never be strange, no matter whether the approached one answered: Yes, no, or it depends.[119]

117 Tellingly, Andrés has the same surname as Alonso Quijano, who is more popularly known as Don Quixote. This element suggests that *Huesos de Sodoma* is a highly ironic work and should be read as a kind of a Cervantes-inspired mystification game. Besides, intriguingly, in a manner redolent of Cervantes, who capitalised on the popularity of chivalric romances to trick his readers with a multilayered book that turned the clichés of the genre upside down, Villena manipulated the expectations of his readership by choosing the publisher associated with mass-produced, hackneyed 'gay Harlequin romances' to release a critically-minded book that was anything but 'just another gay novel.'

118 What the novel phrases as 'homonationalism' is an equivalent of 'homonormativity.' The term most frequently refers to the normativisation of gay and lesbian identity discussed by Richardson or, as Susan Stryker puts it, to the marginalisation of transsexuality within LGBT movements (see Susan Stryker, 'Transgender History, Homonormativity, and Disciplinarity,' *Radical History Review*, 2008, 100, 144–57, https://doi.org/10.1215/01636545-2007-026 [accessed 15 August 2021]). 'Homonationationalism' is also part of the queer studies vocabulary. The term was introduced by Jasbir Puar in *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times* (2007) to convey the entanglements of gay and lesbian emancipatory discourse in the politics of Western countries, particularly of the US, in the context of the 'war on terror.' Puar relies on this notion to examine the gay- and lesbian-friendly images of Western countries and Israel which are instrumental in constructing them as opposite to 'uncivilised' (i.e. homophobic) and 'barbaric' Arabic culture. Puar insists that the increasing acceptance of homosexuality in the West is accompanied by a parallel exacerbating stigmatisation of queers of Asian origin as potential terrorists. See Jasbir Puar, 'Rethinking Homonationalism,' *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 2013, 45, no. 2, 336–9, https://doi.org/10.1017/S002074381300007X (accessed 15 August 2021).

119 'Yo pensé – y pienso – otro mundo para los gays, una vida donde desapareciera la palabra *anormalidad*. Donde todos viviéramos con todos, sin guetos, sin exclusiones, donde toda diferencia, en fin, fuese vista como normal, ya que – precisamente – lo normal es ser diferente. En cualquier bar un hombre podría pedirle a otro hombre – o a un muchacho – amor o afecto o sexualidad, y ello no sería jamás raro fuera cual fuese la respuesta del interpelado: Sí, no o depende.' Villena, *Huesos*, 187–8 (italics original).

These words could be uttered by Villena's Lord Byron, Oscar Wilde, Gaius Petronius, Emilio Jordán, Álvaro Isasmendi, Luis Venceslada and all the *movida*-associated characters in *Madrid ha muerto*. As a protester against the imposed order, a defender of individuality, a champion of sexual freedom and a free thinker going against the tide, despising the mediocre and loathing vulgar ignorance, Andrés Quijano perfectly fits into Villena's continuum of dandies. *Huesos de Sodoma* is a testimony to Villena writing not only against the mainstream culture but also against the encroachment of triviality on LGBT culture and the normativity of sexual minority discourse. Though he most likely feels more kinship with queer reflection, his anti-identitarian notion of sexual otherness is not an offshoot of American post-structuralist theories but the fruit of the history of the counter-culture and dandyism. Villena's work emphatically demonstrates why queer criticism must take local contexts into account when making assessments and judgments. In this particular case, the unique period of the *transición española* forms such a context.

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5 Against Nature

Homosexuality and Postmodernity in Álvaro Pombo

5.1. Under Suspicion: Pombo as a Scribe

Like Luis Antonio de Villena and Eduardo Mendicutti, Álvaro Pombo is a writer whose work has consistently revolved around gay themes since his debut in the 1970s. At the same time, he has posed the greatest puzzle to literary critics because, in problematising homosexual identity, Pombo defies any classifications and opts for thinking outside the box. His one-of-a-kind, highly individualised 'contribution to the discussion' is most fully seen in *Contra natura* [*Against Nature*], a novel from 2005 that offers a philosophical exploration of homosexuality in the postmodern world. In this chapter, I discuss Pombo's fiction and its critical reception against the metaphors of an artisan copyist proposed by Alfredo Martínez Expósito and of a rebellious artist scribe who deliberately draws on multiple conceptualisations of homosexuality with a view to dismantling entrenched schemes and crafting his own, innovative interpretation of the homosexual self. In my view, Pombo is the author of Spanish homoerotic literature who most vividly represents the difference between the fiction of the 1970s and 80s and the novels produced at the turn of the millennium. In order to highlight this difference, let us revisit Martínez Expósito's insights in *Los escribas furiosos* (1998).

Martínez Expósito is one of the few researchers to attend to the issue of homosexuality in Pombo's works. While Pombo is among the most eminent contemporary Spanish writers and enjoys ample critical acclaim, mainstream critics who eagerly discuss various facets of his writings, tend to mention the homosexuality of his protagonists parenthetically, without delving into it as one of Pombo's central thematic concerns.[1] At the same time, queer studies scholars are relatively reluctant to address Pombo's fiction or categorise it as an expression of homophobic

1 See Irene Andres-Suárez and Ana Casas (ed.), *Cuadernos de narrativa. Álvaro Pombo. Grand Séminaire de Neuchâtel. Coloquio Internacional* (Madrid: Arco/Libros, 2007); Jordi Gracia (ed.), *Historia y crítica de la literatura española. Los nuevos nombres: 1975–2000. Primer suplemento* (Barcelona: Crítica, 2000), 298–309.

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sentiments.[2] Commendable exceptions are to be found in the studies of Martínez Expósito, David Vilaseca and Frederick John-Maria Fajardo, whose *Homotextuality in the Writing of Álvaro Pombo: A Phenomenological Perspective on Existential Dissonance and Authentic Being* is, to my knowledge, the only comprehensive monograph dedicated to this subject. I will return to this later in this chapter.

Martínez Expósito coined the metaphor of a scribe to define the authors of homoerotic literature who wrote in the wake of the collapse of General Franco's dictatorship until more or less the mid-1990s. In his scrutiny of recurring motifs and conceptualisations of homosexuality in their texts, he foregrounds the tragic ending as the most frequent resolution of the plot; the blending of homosexual, religious and national themes; and portrayals of the protagonists as suffering from various diseases, leading double lives and engaging in relationships with asymmetrical power relations, which breed frustration, cause suffering and usually fail to survive. His gallery of typical scribes includes Lluís Fernàndez, Jesús Alviz, Alberto Cardín, Ramón Cotarelo, Antonio Roig and Juan Soto Puente. Álvaro Pombo and Eduardo Mendicutti also made it onto the list of Martínezian copyists, though with a Martínez-added asterisk: the metaphor is not fully applicable to them as they neither write 'in a frenzy'[3] nor produce aesthetically inferior works.

Despite these reservations, the inclusion of Pombo in the group of frenzied scribes was mainly caused by the considerable overlap between his texts and the regularities identified by Martínez. Firstly, Pombo's novels often deal with homosexuality in the context of religion. Secondly, his protagonists do not establish happy partnership-based relations; flickers of such unions only appear in the post-2000 novels *El cielo raso* [*The Ceiling Like the Sky*] (2001) and *Contra natura* (2005). Instead of partnerships, Pombo dwells on relations in which one party dominates the other, the weaker are abused, and manipulations are rampant. Thirdly, in his books, homoerotic fascination geminates between males of unequal standing, for example, an older and a younger one or an uncle and a

2 Frederick Fajardo points out that Alberto Mira surprisingly passes over Pombo's fiction in his seminal *De Sodoma a Chueca. Una historia cultural de la homosexualidad en España en el siglo XX*. Mira's monumental study discusses the texts of both writers of homoerotic literature and other authors that feature homoerotic motifs. Fajardo cites queer studies researchers who explicitly point out the homophobic tone of Pombo's writings, especially his novel *Los delitos insignificantes* [*Insignificant Crimes*] (1986). Frederick Fajardo, *Homotextuality in the Writing of Álvaro Pombo: A Phenomenological Perspective on Existential Dissonance and Authentic Being* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia, 2009), 23–4, 29–30, 84, https://doi.org/10.14288/1.0067163 (accessed 3 February 2014).

3 Alfredo Martínez Expósito, *Los escribas furiosos. Configuraciones homoeróticas en la narrativa española* (New Orleans: University Press of the South, 1998), 15.

nephew.[4] Fourthly, his plots often culminate in a tragic death; for example, Gonzalito's nephew breaks his neck, falling into an empty pool in *El metro de platino iridiado* [*The Platinum-Iridium Metre*] (1990), the writer Ortega commits suicide by jumping off his balcony in *Los delitos insignificantes* [*Insignificant Crimes*], and Javier Salazar takes his own life in the same way in *Contra natura*.

Like Villena, Pombo debuted as a poet by publishing a collection of verse titled *Protocolos* [*Protocols*] in 1973. However, unlike Villena, he has garnered the most of critical appreciation for his fiction. A volume of twelve short stories titled *Relatos sobre la falta de sustancia* [*Stories about the Lack of Substance*], released in 1977, commenced a sequence of works which critics soon dubbed 'the lack-of-substance-series.' Their protagonists are usually mature males of (a sometimes merely suggested) homosexual orientation, who are withdrawn and unable to face up to the world, yield to mundane daily routines and fail to find meaning in their lives. In one of these works ('El cambio,' English: 'Change'), don Gerardo, a chaplain at a female convent, experiences the eponymous transformation as a result of an encounter with two young travellers. The clergyman's homilies become increasingly ardent and astonish the worried nuns. In this way, the protagonist expresses strong emotions he cannot vent in any other manner. Whether don Gerardo's metamorphosis is purely spiritual remains unresolved till the very end. Martínez Expósito comments on this text as epitomising the pairing of the religious and the homosexual and discusses 'El cambio' side by side with Antonio Roig's texts.[5] In doing this, the researcher is preoccupied with the guilt that haunts homosexual believers and their attempts at reconciling sexual otherness and faith in God, a dilemma embodied in the character of don Gerardo.[6]

Martínez devotes much more attention to other features which Pombo's works share with the production of the scribes. He examines *El metro de platino iridiado* to look into the tendency to resolve plots in tragic ways.

4 These relationships are studied in detail by Fajardo in terms of the *puer-senex* relations (as different from the ancient eromenos-erastes bond) and 'avuncular love.' Fajardo, *Homotextuality*, 90, 144.

5 Antonio Roig Roselló is an ex-Carmelite monk who was expelled from the order when his novel *Todos los parques no son un paraíso* [*No Park is a Paradise*] was published in 1977. Describing Roig's homosexual experiences in London, the autobiographically inspired book is discussed by Robert Richmond Ellis as an unsuccessful attempt at challenging homophobic discourse. Ellis insists that Roig falls into a trap of discourse imposed on homosexuals 'from outside' and ultimately himself reproduces the most negative stereotypes in his novel. See Robert Richmond Ellis, *The Hispanic Homograph: Gay Self-Representation in Contemporary Spanish Autobiography* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1997), 27–39.

6 Alfredo Martínez Expósito, *Escrituras torcidas. Ensayos de crítica 'queer'* (Barcelona: Laertes, 2004), 134.

It is in this context that he scrutinises Gonzalito, who, having spent a few years in London trying to come to terms with his homosexuality, moves in with his sister in La Moraleja, where he is often visited by his affectatious acquaintance Alfonso Vélez. As the action progresses, Gonzalo becomes increasingly enchanted with his teenage nephew Pelé, to the point where his fascination comes to border on an unwholesome obsession. Gonzalito is hounded by imaginations of Pelé having succumbed to Alfonso's seduction and in a fit of jealousy provokes a fight when he spots Pelé strolling with Alfonso. In a tussle at an empty swimming pool, Gonzalito gives his nephew a push, and the boy crashes to the bottom, breaking his neck. Martínez Expósito discusses the episode in the context of the homosexual protagonist's guilt, which is as much of a trademark of the writings he studies as are such tragic endings are: 'Gonzalito knows that he killed the boy. From this moment on, Gonzalito calms down, and his anguish subsides, for he has finally found a real guilt that lets him feel truly guilty.'[7] The researcher's suggestion is that the homosexual protagonists of homoerotic fiction are tormented by a perplexing, indeterminate guilty feeling. As a result, Gonzalito finds peace at the very moment when this nebulous sense of culpability is securely tied to a tangible cause.

Gonzalo also exemplifies another typical feature of the scribes' works. According to Martínez, the homosexual condition is customarily rendered through the metaphor of disease. He quotes passages in *El metro de platino iridiado* where Gonzalito is pictured as afflicted with an indefinite, symbolic malady, especially after his return from London.[8] Symptomatically, both the feeling of guilt and the aura of morbidity ensue from an unclear, mysterious cause in the writings of the copyists. Martínez attributes this fact to the strong influence of medical discourse which frames homosexuals as sick individuals: 'A sick or ailing homosexual time and again recurs in the literature of the 1970s and 1980s. The medical metaphor is so powerful that even the frenzied scribes themselves are initially unable to shake off its spell.'[9]

However, Martínez Expósito himself insists that Pombo does not write 'in a frenzy,' which sets him apart from the other copyists. The researcher revisits Pombo's fiction in his later study, *Escrituras torcidas* [*Twisted Writings*] of 2004, where he devotes far more attention to the problematic author. He analyses *Relatos sobre la falta de sustancia* in detail to conclude that the manner in which Pombo portrays his homosexual protagonists

7 'Gonzalito sabe que él ha matado al chico. Y a partir de ahí Gonzalito se tranquiliza, ceden las angustias: por fin ha encontrado una culpa verdadera de la que sentirse verdaderamente culpable.' *Ibid.*, 150.

8 *Ibid.*, 152.

9 'El homosexual enfermo o enfermizo aparece constantemente en la literatura de los años setenta y ochenta. El poder de la metáfora médica es tal que ni siquiera los propios escribas furiosos logran, en un primer momento, sustraerse a ella.' *Ibid.*, 97.

marks an important breakthrough against all appearances to the contrary. While the characters are admittedly bedevilled by guilty feelings, fail to establish rewarding relationships, live lives fraught with frustration and anxiety and have misery visited upon them, 'it is not all that simple':[10]

> There may be every reason to believe that we are faced not with a gay author who is proud of his sexuality, but with a fiction writer who strictly abides by tradition and has completely internalised institutionalised homophobia, in the sense of taking on as his own the fear of the homosexual intrinsic to the heterosexist patriarchal order.[11]

Martínez alludes here to the all too superficial readings of Pombo's fiction, in particular of his *Los delitos insignificantes*, which was denounced by readers and some critics as utterly homophobic.[12] In contrast to such uninformed interpretations, Martínez argues that 'Pombo is not simply a homosexual writer consumed by his own homophobia'[13]; neither is he a 'naïve writer.'[14] This is borne out by Pombo's rendering of homosexuality as 'a pure fact that is not subject either to any narratorial interpretation or to any moral judgment.'[15] In other words, the homosexual characters are scrutinised in ways in which an entomologist examines insects.[16] Besides, these characters 'experience their subjective and individual vicissitudes as part of a narrative that fundamentally unfolds in their own consciousnesses.'[17] This observation begs a modest commentary. Pombo is considered to be affiliated with the conventions of the realistic

10 'las cosas no son tan sencillas.' Martínez Expósito, *Escrituras*, 119.

11 'Todo parece indicar que estamos, no ante un escritor gay orgulloso de su sexualidad, sino ante un narrador estrictamente tradicional, que ha internalizado la homofobia institucionalizada perfectamente, es decir, que ha asumido como propio el miedo al homosexual del patriarcado heterosexista.' *Ibid*., 118–19.

12 See Juan Vincente Aliaga and José Miguel Cortés, *Identidad y diferencia. Sobre la cultura gay en España* (Barcelona: Egales, 1997), 78–9; Dieter Ingenschay, 'Álvaro Pombo, *El héroe de las mansardas de Mansard*. Sobre el problemático hallazgo de la propia identidad y la grácil disolución de la realidad,' in *Abriendo caminos. La literatura española desde 1975*, ed. Dieter Ingenschay and Hans-Jörg Neuschäfer (Barcelona: Lumen, 1994), 67–8.

13 'Pombo no es simplemente un escritor homosexual obsesionado con su propia homofobia.' Martínez Expósito, *Escrituras*, 119.

14 'un escritor ingenuo.' *Ibid*., 122.

15 'como dato puro, no sujeto a interpretación por parte del narrador, ni a juicio moral alguno.' *Ibid*., 119.

16 Martínez's comparison is rather insufficient as a counter-argument to the accusations of negative stereotypes being replicated in Pombo's fiction. However, the researcher exhibits a considerable degree of intuition. His conclusions are corroborated by Fajardo's study, which marshals far more persuasive arguments rooted in the philosophical layer of Pombo's work.

17 'viven sus propias peripecias subjetivas, individuales, en una acción que transcurre fundamentalmente en sus conciencias.' *Ibid*.

psychological novel, in which appearances are constantly contrasted with reality.[18] When talking about the protagonists' inner lives, Martínez in all probability means their solipsistic inclinations and their inability to stand up to the world, which results from a 'lack of substance,' a leitmotif found in a number of Pombo's works. In this context, the pejoratively coloured presentation of homosexual characters is not an outcome of the author's homophobia but ensues from the dynamics of the psychological processes which are meticulously analysed in his texts. In this way, Pombo exposes the mechanisms behind the vicious circles of strangeness that individuals themselves spawn and are then unable to surmount. To put it differently, Pombo investigates the workings of self-fulfilling prophecies which spring up in the protagonists' minds and come to determine their lives, evoking a sense of fatalism.

Martínez also reviews guilt, homophobia and the disease metaphor in Pombo's novels to further nuance his earlier conclusions, similarly to his re-appraisal of *Relatos sobre la falta de sustancia*. He restates that Pombo is anything but a naïve author who, having interiorised homophobia, inadvertently rehearses this attitude in the way he portrays homosexuals, which is what happened to Roig. Martínez delves into Pombo's direct experiences of the operations of homophobic discourse during his adolescence under the Franco regime, when the Catholic Church was allied with the state apparatus. Pombo's protagonists are constructed as typical members of their generation, whose maturation, like the author's, coincided with a particular historical moment, one marked by a right-wing dictatorial government and an atmosphere saturated with the most oppressive version of Catholicism: 'Pombo sketches homosexuality as self-conscious and guilt-ridden, the way it typically was experienced by the generations that suffered the repression of their sexuality – the repression of any form of homosexual expression – by Francoism and society at large.'[19]

This sense of culpability caused by this historical conjuncture, a feeling which typified whole generations, is mostly conveyed though two devices in Pombo's novels. One of them involves plentiful references to religion (churches, the clergy, etc.), philosophical reflections on God and the protagonists' inner struggles to reconcile sexual otherness with faith. Through bringing together religious themes and homosexuality, Pombo, as Martínez asserts, reveals the impact of the Church's discourse on the fatalism in which the protagonists are enmeshed. The other device consists in the protagonists being circumscribed by enclosed, stifling spaces (as a rule, of bourgeois homes), which project an inside-outside

18 Santos Alonso, *La novela española en el fin de siglo 1975–2001* (Madrid: Marenostrum, 2003), 85–6.

19 'Pombo representa la homosexualidad acomplejada y culpable de las varias generaciones que sufrieron la represión sexual del franquismo y, además, la represión social de cualquier forma de expresión homosexual.' Martínez Expósito, *Escrituras*, 152.

(*dentro–fuera*) opposition. These sealed spaces symbolise the homosexual 'closet' into which society forces homosexuals, bidding them to conceal their 'shameful' identity as if *they were to blame* for it.[20] The repressive treatment of all manifestations of homosexual identity by Francoist society is another source of the feelings of guilt suffered by the protagonists of Pombo's novels. Martínez defends Pombo's writings against accusations of homophobia, concluding: 'Perhaps these two dimensions of guilt in Pombo, ubiquitous back then and readily explaining so many personal and anonymous tragedies, were not fully comprehended by those who blamed him for spreading the association of homosexuality with pestilence.'[21]

Martínez then re-assesses the metaphor of disease and argues that if a sense of culpability is a central motif in Pombo, the correlated imagery of sickness and death should not come as a surprise. Illness, however, is not an attribute of homosexuality as such but an idiosyncrasy of the homosexual: 'This shift cannot possibly be overestimated: if a homosexual as an individual – rather than homosexuality as a category – becomes a site from which discourse is constructed, the individual himself is responsible for his own social construction.'[22] Nevertheless, this claim is anything but uncontroversial. Is it supposed to mean that the individual is fully accountable for the common homophobic associations of homosexuality and disease? Or does responsibility rather rest with this widespread public opinion, which is shaped by medical discourse with its pathologisation of homosexuality? The problem is that 'it is not all that simple' in Pombo. He positions the individual as complicit and is committed to sounding the psychology of weak characters who tend to give up, avoid challenges and are remarkably impressionable. In the context of Martínez's analysis, such characters all too easily let their minds be colonised by the discourse of homophobia.

20 In Chapter 1, I discussed Martínez Expósito's reservations about the metaphor of the closet in the Spanish context. At this point, the researcher draws on it without any specific explanation. He does not comment on his earlier objections, probably because he takes it for granted that Pombo's writing is influenced by Anglo-American culture. Pombo debuted in Spain after a stint of 11 years in London, and Spanish critics initially had serious difficulty accommodating not only his sexual otherness but also his intellectual incompatibility with Spain's cultural life of the time. Martínez mentions that the volume *Relatos sobre la falta de sustancia* was even labelled as 'a lyrical-philosophical peculiarity' ('una rareza lírico-filosófica'). Critics only paid due attention to Pombo after he was awarded the prestigious Herralde de Novela prize in 1983. *Ibid*., 154.

21 'Quizá estas dos dimensiones de la culpa pombiana, tan comunes en su tiempo y que tantas tragedias personales y anónimas podrían contribuir a explicar, no fueron enteramente comprendidas por quienes le acusaron de vender una homosexualidad pestilente.' *Ibid*., 152.

22 'Esta transposición es enormemente significativa: si el homosexual como individuo, y no la homosexualidad como categoría, es el lugar donde se construye el discurso, también es el individuo el responsable de su construcción social.' *Ibid*., 165.

The researcher's extensive argumentation in *Escrituras torcidas* can be encapsulated in a rather simple-sounding observation that, in his writings, Pombo does not unreflectingly reproduce or copy negative stereotypes that have clustered around homosexuality, but dissects his protagonists in the manner of an 'entomologist' and shows that their lives have been determined and marked by fatalism as a result of succumbing to these negative representations. In even simpler terms, Pombo has not internalised homophobia; rather, his characters have, while he merely spells out this mechanism in an untypical fashion which is susceptible to misunderstandings. Martínez's essays, which are distributed over three chapters and make up one fourth of the book, are invaluable as the first ever attempt at assessing Pombo's work from a queer-critical perspective. The researcher reconsiders his insights from *Los escribas furiosos*, and while he reprints some passages of his 1998 analyses unchanged, this time he draws Pombo not as a common scribe but as an author whose work emblematises the eponymous 'twisted writing' (*escrituras torcidas*) – writing that is in fact twisted in such a way as to come across at first sight as a replication of the homophobic imaginary. This superficial impression is nevertheless belied by the fact that, instead of simply *thematising* homosexuality in his novels, Pombo *problematises* the identity of queers. Martínez suggests that there is more to Pombo's homoerotic literary project than has met the eye so far. I talk of 'suggesting' at this point because the researcher sometimes fails to advance convincing arguments in support of his claims. Nonetheless, he displays a considerable intuition, as corroborated by Fajardo's later studies and Martínez's own subsequent re-assessments of the issue.[23]

5.2. Pombo as an Existential Philosopher and a Phenomenologist

What I believe is vaguely implied in Martínez's *Escrituras torcidas* is more robustly reasserted in Fajardo's *Homotextuality in the Writing of Álvaro Pombo: A Phenomenological Perspective on Existential Dissonance and Authentic Being* (2009). The erudite monograph comprehensively discusses the problematisation of homoeroticism in Pombo's work and in many ways, it conclusively caps the debate on this issue. Fajardo

23 In 2016, when the original Polish version of this book was published (Łukasz Smuga, *Wbrew naturze i kulturze. O odmienności w hiszpańskiej prozie homoerotycznej na przełomie XX i XXI wieku* [Kraków: Universitas, 2016]), Martínez Expósito himself revisited Pombo's fiction to propose an intersectionality-informed re-reading of *Los delitos insignificantes* and *Contra natura*. Alfredo Martínez Expósito, 'Interseccionalidad y homosexualidad en *Los delitos insignificantes* y *Contra natura*, de Álvaro Pombo,' *Archivum*, 2016, LXVI, 137–64, https://doi.org/10.17811/arc.66.2016.137-164 (accessed 15 August 2021). I will refer to this salient paper later in my argument.

approaches the theme within the framework of existentialism, phenomenology and queer theory. Importantly, the dissertation was produced after the publication of Pombo's *Contra natura*, a novel that provides the lens though which, I believe, his earlier homoerotic writings should be read. Martínez's investigations in *Escrituras torcidas* might have been weightier and more persuasive had they not been conducted shortly before the appearance of *Contra natura*. Crucially, the novel, which I would describe as a philosophical treatise on homosexuality in the postmodern world, sheds new light on Pombo's entire homoerotic body of work.

Pombo himself studded the epilogue of *Contra natura* with hints as to how the book should be read: 'I principally envisaged this novel as a plea against superficiality.'[24] He acknowledges that such a moralising depiction of a literary work – an aesthetic project as it were – may sound strange. After all, 'a novel is a novel and not an essay.'[25] However, literary fiction is based on the examination of details and as such it is somewhat akin to casuistry.[26] Javier Salazar and Paco Allende, the two main protagonists, represent two different ways of experiencing homosexuality, only one of them being desirable and right in Pombo's view. Both are part of Pombo's generation and grew up in the same historical conditions as he did. Perhaps realising the difficulties that his earlier novels occasioned to the reading public and critics, Pombo deemed it useful to outline this historical context:

> I and people of my generation, born around 1939, did not have the experience of the Civil War […]. Yet we were deeply imprinted by national Catholicism in its two varieties: subjective (educational) and objective (socio-political). Ours were a difficult childhood and a difficult adolescence. Our upbringing was rigorous, and we were pressured to grow up quickly and become *mature people*. We were also raised, or at least the most restless of my generation were, in the spirit of existential poetry and philosophy. *Authenticity* was one of the ideas that ruled the day back then. In opposition to inauthentic existence […], we lived cherishing the ethics of personal responsibility and commitment. […] It was only when I was thirty-one that I read […] Herbert Marcuse and his fascinating book *Eros and Civilization*, which contained his interpretation of the two principles (*the pleasure principle* and *the reality principle*) described by Freud. […] For this reason, I thought of my own homosexual inclinations in these terms rather than in terms of entertainment or looking for a partner or partners. I am not saying that it was the best or the wisest

24 'Desde un principio quise que esta novela fuese un alegato contra la superficialidad.' Álvaro Pombo, *Contra natura* (Barcelona: Anagrama, 2005), 557.

25 'una novela es una novela y no un ensayo.' *Ibid.*, 560.

26 *Ibid.*, 560–1.

> thing to do, or that it was the only available option, I am only saying that in my case authenticity and reality were always perceived in opposition to aesthetic unreality (pleasure, happiness) and superficiality. This means that I experienced […] homosexuality as a difficult and confusing matter which – given my sense of commitment and authenticity – I was obliged to make mine at any cost.[27]

This lengthy quotation is essential for grasping Pombo's attitude to homosexuality, to the homophobic, Francoist version of Catholicism and to the process of homosexual culture becoming increasingly trifling in the age of postmodernity. As already mentioned, *Contra natura*, complete with the author's important comments, invites re-considering Pombo's entire body of work from a different perspective. This re-assessment was undertaken by Fajardo, whose dissertation uncoincidentally appeared exactly four years after the publication of *Contra natura* and put an end to a certain stalemate in the reception of Pombo among queer critics.

Fajardo follows Pombo's suggestions and interprets his works through the lens of the philosophy the author himself embraced. In doing this, Fajardo relies on a range of axial notions, including authenticity, homosexual intentionality, existential dissonance and heterologocentrism, whereby he combines deconstructive queer thinking with existential philosophy and phenomenology. Homosexual intentionality, which is derived from Edmund Husserl's terminology, denotes in Fajardo a conscious and active attitude of the mind to homosexuality – a capacity to confer an individual shape and meaning onto homosexuality. Existential dissonance depicts the sense of individual alienation, a state into which the homosexual subject is manoeuvred as a result of a confrontation with the world where this subject is defined as unnatural, deviant and incompatible with the normative society. In Pombo's fiction, Fajardo claims,

27 'Gentes de mi generación nacidos alrededor del año 39 del pasado siglo no tuvimos la experiencia de la Guerra Civil […]. Tuvimos, en cambio, la profunda experiencia del nacional-catolicismo en su doble vertiente subjetiva (pedagógica) y objetiva (sociopolítica). Vivimos una niñez y una juventud severas. Fuimos educados con severidad, con cierta urgencia por crecer y convertirnos en *personas mayores*, y fuimos educados también, al menos el sector más inquieto de mi generación, en el existencialismo poético y filosófico. Una de las ideas de entonces fue la de *autenticidad*. Frente a la existencia inauténtica […], nosotros vivimos la ética de la responsabilidad personal, del compromiso. […] Yo tenía ya treinta y un años cuando leí al autor […] Herbert Marcuse, y su fascinante *Eros y civilización*, con su interpretación de los dos principios (*el principio del placer y el principio de la realidad*) en la formulación de Freud. […] De ahí que viera mis propias inclinaciones homosexuales en estos términos y no en términos de entretenimiento o de búsqueda de pareja o parejas. No digo que esto fuera lo mejor o lo más inteligente o la única posibilidad: sólo digo que, en mi caso, autenticidad y realidad se presentaron siempre enfrentadas a irrealidad estética (gozo, felicidad) y superficialidad. Esto significa que yo viví […] la homosexualidad como un difícil y enredoso asunto que, en virtud de mi sentido del compromiso y de la autenticidad, yo estaba obligado a hacer mío a toda costa.' *Ibid.*, 557–8 (italics original).

existential dissonance is translated into solipsism and nihilism, attitudes characteristic of a better part of his characters. Associated with Derrida's notion of logocentricity, heterologocentrism means an 'epistemological discursivity (religious, social, political, and cultural) related to ideas, writings, and systems of thought about homosexuals that is fixed and sustained by some authority or centre external to them.'[28] Fajardo adds that heterologocentric discourse perceives homosexuality as a degenerate perversion and a distortion of an 'authentic' – that is to say, heteronormative – existence, in which he builds on the notion of heteronormativity as the institutionalisation of sexuality and social conventions, such as marriage, family, etc., as well as the representation of heterosexual relations as 'universal.'

Fajardo's conclusions basically overlap with Martínez's in *Escrituras torcidas*, but the former researcher works with a more elaborate set on concepts and exhibits a more effective grasp of methodology in his explorations. These traits are particularly evident in the first chapters of his dissertation devoted to the 'lack-of-substance series,' that is, the earliest and most contentious phase in Pombo's writing. This new perspective helps Fajardo highlight what remains understated in Martínez, specifically that Pombo is not an artisan scribe (a point Martínez himself sought to make clear in his 2004 study) but an artist scribe who systematically develops his own idiom to discuss homosexuality otherwise. Fajardo's work shows that, since his debut, Pombo has inscribed a coherent philosophical project into his homoerotic fiction, a venture which has gone largely unnoticed by queer critics.

Fajardo recalls the critical dispute around *Relatos sobre la falta de sustancia* and *Los delitos insignificantes* to demonstrate that both the characters in Pombo's debut stories and Gonzalo Ortega, a frustrated writer in his novel of 1986, are patent examples of homosexual subjects who fail to cope with their existential dissonance and are incapable of consciously, that is, intentionally, working through their own attitudes to homosexuality. Consequently, they shut themselves off in their own solipsistic worlds, where they suffocate and become vulnerable to manipulation. Fajardo methodically analyses the relationship in which Gonzalo Ortega engages with his lover César Quirós. An item in the 'lack-of-substance series,' the novel opens with a description of the writer's meeting with a young man at a centrally located Madrid café. Quirós, an unemployed 24-year-old, is in a relationship with Cristina. César's fiancée is pursuing a promising professional career, which only enhances the frustration and complexes of Quirós, who has neither a job nor any idea what to do with his life. Pressured by Cristina and his mother to finally settle down in life, César looks for support from Ortega. On discovering that Ortega is gay and enchanted with him, the young man begins to seduce and financially take advantage

28 Fajardo, *Homotextuality*, viii.

of the writer. In the climax of the novel, the two men have sex, which prompts Ortega, who is not used to intimacy, to slowly withdraw from the relationship. He is unable to imagine sharing a life with Quirós and refuses any further physical intercourse. Humiliated César, who is assailed by his fiancée's demands and at the same time feels rejected by his lover, resorts to violence and blackmail. He threatens to reveal Ortega's homosexuality to his colleagues at the office unless the writer gives up all his savings to him. Eventually, César endeavours to buttress his male ego by violence: he rapes Ortega and leaves, taking his money away, after which Ortega commits suicide by jumping off his balcony. Fajardo discusses the characters of Quirós and Ortega in terms of inauthentic existence and the lack of homosexual intentionality. He argues that the existential dissonance which besets Ortega prevents him from believing that two males can form a happy union without imitating the heterorelational model. By heterorelationality, Fajardo means the copying of gender roles typical of traditional male-female relationships, where the male is active and dominating, while the female is passive and dominated.[29] This is why Ortega withdraws from the relationship with Quirós directly after their first intercourse, an occasion on which César appears as a typical 'alpha male,'[30] seeking to dominate Ortega both sexually and mentally. This moment dispels any prospect of homorelationality, that is, a relationship based on equality and genuine partnership. Quirós desires domination because he himself lives an inauthentic life, emptied of commitment and meaning. His sense of inferiority bred by comparisons with Cristina detrimentally affect his relationship with Ortega. The writer realises that there is no way out of this vicious circle. He yields to César's blackmail to buy his freedom back. However, his incapacity to handle the pervasive feeling of existential dissonance pushes him to suicide. His death is 'a direct consequence of the subject's failure to engage his life authentically, and to confront the abjection imposed on him by his environment.'[31] Fajardo's analysis highlights the ways in which Pombo's fiction pictures the mechanisms which cause individuals to feel utterly alienated, stir confusion in them and make them lose their subjectivity, whereby the researcher wonders:

> Is this existential dissonance that comes to dominate the life of the chief protagonist simply another form of internalized homophobia on Pombo's part, as many gay critics contend, or more precisely a

29 *Ibid*., 107–8, 122–5.
30 *Ibid*., 94.
31 *Ibid*., 80.

> subversive ironic means of repudiating this heterologocentric paradigm […]?[32]

Fajardo's conclusions concerning the allegedly homophobic tenor of Pombo's writings overlap with Martínez Expósito's insights in *Escrituras torcidas*. The crucial difference is that, in Fajardo's study, Pombo is not an 'entomologist' who watches the complicated lives of 'insects' under a magnifying glass; rather, he is an existential philosopher and a phenomenologist engaged in an intellectually vibrant inquiry.

Is his species of existential philosophy unduly pessimistic? His works from the 'lack-of-substance series' depict homosexuals who are incapable of coping with existential dissonance, embroiled in inauthentic lives and consequently marked by fatalism. Martínez Expósito emphasised that these tragic protagonists are never morally judged by the narrator in any way.[33] Ethical and moral issues only appear in Pombo's writings in the following decade. In this respect, *El metro de platino iridiado*, a novel of 1990, marks a turning point, since its protagonists are able to make their lives meaningful and authentic, despite and against circumstances that exasperate them.[34] This is primarily true about María, who is vividly referenced in the title as the 'platinum-iridium prototype of the metre,' which is a metaphor for an ethical comportment that serves as a model for others to emulate. The action of the novel takes place in La Moraleja (literally: a moral), a town in the vicinity of Madrid, famous for its luxury villas and celebrity residents. For the first time in Pombo's career, the text features magnanimous, kind and altruistic characters who are a counterbalance to inauthentic and solipsistic figures. The latter are most vividly personified in María's brother, Gonzalito, who unintentionally kills his nephew. While Gonzalito shares a range of features distinctive to the protagonists of the 'lack-of-substance series,' Fajardo observes that this novel far more explicitly gestures at heterologocentric homophobia as the cause of the alienation of the homosexual subject and his inability to break out of the vicious circle of fatalism.[35] Fajardo also discusses other aspects of the novel, such as the recurrent motif of 'avuncular love,' that is, an uncle's love for his nephew, homosexual narcissism and the more emphatic censure of hedonism, with the latter being pivotal to my argument in the context of the critical debate on the homophobic reverberations of Pombo's fiction.

Fajardo underscores that Pombo's narratives are dialectically constructed, meaning that they always feature processes in which the

32 *Ibid*., 79–80.
33 Martínez Expósito, *Escrituras*, 119.
34 Fajardo, *Homotextuality*, 126–7.
35 *Ibid*., 127.

protagonists confront the antagonist, engage in multiple, complicated relations with several other characters and, as a result of these interactions, develop identities and personalities as the plots unfold.[36] In this way, Pombo masterfully portrays his protagonists as enmeshed in dense webs of interdependences with others. In *El metro de platino iridiado*, Gonzalito's homosexuality is shown in his relations not only with his nephews but also with his brother-in-law. María's husband, Martín, is a frustrated writer and one of Pombo's 'alpha males' (to use Fajardo's expression) who cheats on his wife and treats women like objects. Similarly to César Quirós, Martín suffers from complexes caused by his underachievement as an academic and writer which undercut his capacity to establish mature relations based on partnership and mutual respect. This drives him to assert his domination in other spheres and makes him unable to offer María and his son pure and disinterested affection.[37] For the same reasons, Martín despises his homosexual brother-in-law, whom he views as another vulnerable victim over whom to prevail:

> Martín begins to loathe Gonzalito to an astonishing degree. As the extent of Martín's homophobia becomes more evident to him, Gonzalito internalizes Martín's homophobia as a reflection of his own insignificance, and engages in a protracted struggle with Martín that dominates […] the rest of the novel.[38]

As an element of this struggle, Gonzalito tries to stir up Pelé against his father. This important factor is also foregrounded in Martínez Expósito's discussion of the relation between Martín and Gonzalito. However, if Martínez Expósito only suggests that Martín fuels the internalisation of homophobia by Gonzalito himself,[39] Fajardo claims that this represents an essential change in the way Pombo sketches the existential situation of the homosexual. Specifically, Fajardo concludes that, unlike in the 'lack-of-substance series,' readers can not only glean insights into the protagonist's solipsistic mind here but also observe the influence of certain characters on other ones and inspect their motivations from the perspective of phenomenological intentionality.[40]

In the case of Gonzalito, it becomes obvious that the sense of existential dissonance he experiences is deeply determined by his fraught, homophobia-stamped relation with Martín. However, Gonzalito is unable to shuffle off inauthenticity and heads toward a tragic ending. In this respect, the portrayal of the homosexual does not differ much from its likes in the 'lack-of-substance' series. It is not until *El cielo raso* from

36 *Ibid*., 18.
37 *Ibid*., 131.
38 *Ibid*., 134.
39 Martínez Expósito, *Escrituras*, 171–2.
40 Fajardo, *Homotextuality*, 161.

2001 that this pattern is dismantled by introducing a homosexual protagonist who stands a chance of breaking the vicious circle of fatalism. If *El metro de platino iridiado* is Pombo's first novel to contemplate the issue of ethical and moral conduct (with María as an example thereof), *El cielo raso* is his first novel to place a homosexual protagonist (Gabriel Arintero) in this context. Interestingly, Fajardo devotes scarce attention to *El cielo raso* in his study even though it is, in my view, a telling prelude to *Contra natura*, where Pombo pits a cynical and amoral homosexual (Javier Salazar) against an altruistic and ethically committed one (Paco Allende). Allende is depicted as a new – homosexual – 'prototype of the metre,' giving Pombo's philosophico-literary project a slightly more optimistic ring. This however, does not entirely remove the issue of homophobia from Pombo's writing. For that, the homosexual 'prototype of the metre' is too closely associated with homonormativity, an attitude that excludes non-monogamous relationships and condemns sexual liberation, which Andrés Quijano envisaged with fondness and fervour in *Huesos de Sodoma*. The abandonment of fatalism as a narrative resolution for the sake of a version of homonormativity will be occasionally paired in Pombo with 'liberal homophobia,' resulting from his quarrel with postmodernity. This, however, does not preclude 'Mazuf's gesture,' which imbues *Contra natura* with a subversive potential, as I argue in the last section of this chapter.

5.3. The Predicament of Postmodernity: Pombo as Mazuf

The novels *El metro de platino iridiado* and *El cielo raso* are divided by a gap no smaller than an entire decade, during which Pombo almost completely relinquished gay themes. He returns to them in crafting the character of Gabriel Arintero, who may be regarded as an antecedent of Paco Allende in *Contra natura*. The novel begins with an evocation of Arintero's memories: 'The first thing Gabriel Arintero remembers is an intense feeling of pleasure while kissing his coeval cousin.'[41] As this is a childhood memory, stemming from times of innocence, the joy of discovering eroticism is unalloyed by remorse or any other negative thoughts. Nevertheless, those appear (as shame, sin and guilt) one year later, when the boy goes to school and develops his consciousness. The narrator mentions that, despite everything, these emotions of shame, sin and guilt were never as strong and as intense as his first euphoric and pure sensation of them. Equally intense was only his irresistible urge to rebel against these three new feelings. Unlike all of Pombo's prior homosexual protagonists, the young Arintero strives to face up to his existential dissonance. In Fajardo's terminology, his homosexual intentionality begins to bud in him in early

41 'Lo primero que Gabriel Arintero recuerda es un sentimiento de intenso placer al besarse con un primo de su edad.' Álvaro Pombo, *El cielo raso* (Barcelona: Anagrama, 2001), 9.

adolescence. What comes as the easiest feat is conquering shame, which Gabriel associates with flagrant social injustice. The boy discovers this when telling his father about a schoolmate of his being called 'a faggot' by other students. His father advises Gabriel to stay away from the boy lest he be called insulting names too. Gabriel begins to understand how the mechanism of shaming and stigmatisation works: 'It seemed to Gabriel that the very fact that it was irrevocable, that a mere suspicion was enough for his father to tell him, no further questions asked, to stop hanging out with that boy, was disgraceful and unfair.'[42] The realisation that he himself may always be shamed and stigmatised, even without any clear reason for this, makes him vow in his mind to take revenge on all the perpetrators of such deeds against people who feel and think the way he does.

> Still, what shame did not fully accomplish, was accomplished by the notion of sin when Gabriel Arintero was growing up. […] Sin was an altogether different matter: Gabriel Arintero's newly invented self had to stand up not to other people, but to God.[43]

Educated at a Catholic school, which in the realities of the Franco regime put emphasis on purity, discipline and catechism, the young protagonist comes to think of his first erotic experiences in terms of sin: 'Aged eleven or twelve, Gabriel Arintero could not possibly defend himself against the concept of deadly sin, bound up with the idea of God.'[44] His child-like imagination begins to associate private body parts – his own and his cousin Manolín's – with the biblical serpent, which brought original sin upon the world. Later, when still a teenager, he focuses on the New Testament's message of love, which helps him continue to consider himself a Christian. While the New Testament helps him eventually reconcile his homosexual inclinations with faith, he is disaffected with 'the more and more official, more and more Spanish Christianity, which less and less deserved respect and interest.'[45]

This way of portraying homosexual characters is untypical of Pombo. Earlier he pictured them as already determined by their existential dissonance. Here, he offers a comprehensive scrutiny of the intellectual process of the individual's confrontation with the discourse of homophobia,

42 'Le pareció a Gabriel que el que no hubiese apelación, el que a su padre le bastara con la simple sospecha para que, sin preguntar más, le recomendara que no frecuentara al chico aquel, era una infamia y una injusticia.' *Ibid*., 14.

43 'Lo que no pudo nunca del todo la vergüenza, lo pudo, sin embargo, durante la adolescencia de Gabriel Arintero […] la noción de pecado. […] El pecado era, en cambio, otro asunto: ahí lo que se oponía al yo recién inventado de Gabriel Arintero no eran todos los demás, sino Dios.' *Ibid*., 15.

44 'Gabriel Arintero no tenía, a los once o doce años, manera de defenderse del concepto de pecado mortal que se asociaba a la idea de Dios.' *Ibid*.

45 'un cristianismo cada vez más oficial, más español y cada vez menos y menos digno de respeto o interés.' *Ibid*., 19.

which surfaces across various planes of life. Readers can see how the young Arintero copes with the ordinary, everyday stigmatisation of queers and with the discourse on sexuality preached by the official state Catholicism. The effect is surprising. Because, unlike Gonzalito in *El metro de platino iridiado*, Gabriel Arintero does not interiorise homophobia, he can instead be viewed in terms of homosexual intentionality. Essentially, he seeks succour in the New Testament.

I recount the beginning of *El cielo raso* in such detail because, as the action progresses, Gabriel Arintero becomes ever more similar to Pombo's other recognisable homosexuals. When his cousin Carolina begins to court Gabriel, he rejects her advances and reveals to her why they can never be a couple: 'He was not only homosexual, he also wanted to be. Wanting to be homosexual was the essence of his identity.'[46] This desire soon forces him to emigrate, as he learns first-hand what problems lie in stock for homosexuals in Franco's Spain. One night, when quietly sitting on a bench on Plaza de España, he is approached by a policeman: '"I know you," said the policeman. "You're a homosexual. I've seen you here before." Without getting up from the bench, Arintero replied: "Yes, I'm a homosexual." And he added: "I never come here."'[47] Arintero is detained, taken to the police station for questioning and then dismissed from his job as a teacher. He decides to go to London basically overnight.

This is Pombo's first depiction of the harassments perpetrated by Franco's dictatorship, distinctively reflecting the mechanisms of stigmatisation driven by common homophobia and the impact of a Catholic education on the lives of non-heterosexual people. This marks a significant departure from the 'lack-of-substance series,' where he exclusively rendered the consequences of the protagonists' failure to cope with this difficult reality, without spelling out the external causes behind it. Even though Arintero does not internalise homophobia, he comes to resemble the protagonists of *Relatos sobre la falta de sustancia*. Paradoxically, this happens in London, where sexual minorities begin to self-organise and where finding sexual partners is far easier and less risky than in Spain. The change takes place exactly because cosmopolitan London as a site where emancipatory movements thrive and sexual freedom is vociferously demanded is viewed by Arintero as the very incarnation of superficiality and inauthenticity. Arintero does not come across people capable of genuine, *authentic* commitment in London. In other words, in coming in touch with London, he comes in touch with Bauman's liquid modernity.[48] While a confrontation with the world saturated with

46 'No sólo era homosexual, sino que quería serlo. Querer ser homosexual era el centro de sí mismo.' *Ibid.*, 36.

47 '"A ti te conozco – declaró el policía –. Tú eres homosexual. Te he visto antes por aquí." Arintero dijo, sin levantarse: "Sí, soy homosexual." Y añadió: "Nunca vengo por aquí."' *Ibid.*, 37.

48 Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Modernity* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000).

institutionalised homophobia did not propel existential dissonance in him, a clash with postmodern irrelevance does. I believe this is the reason why Pombo for the first time depicts so explicitly, sometimes patently even, the operations of the discourse of homophobia. The point is that he needs to conjure up a meaningful contrast between the Madrid stage and the London stage. The protagonist comes out a winner from his showdown with institutionalised homophobia since even though he loses his job and emigrates, his homosexual intentionality is only bolstered as a result. Yet the confrontation with the trifling, the superficial and the inconsequential leaves him maimed. As an effect, he succumbs to the routine of everyday life in London, feels his life has lost meaning and is stripped of his prior vigour. In this phase, Gabriel Arintero would fit the bill of the characters in *Relatos sobre la falta de sustancia*, as the passage below poignantly intimates:

> The sizzling flame of gas […] evaporated the glistening humidity off the walls and enclosed Gabriel Arintero in the poetics of a solitary personage, disconnected from the real world, forgotten by his family, without homeland, a stray man who day in, day out after dusk opened a tin of pilchards in tomato sauce, toasted two slices of bread and slowly ate his supper only to immediately go to bed and read until sleep got the better of him.[49]

As signalled before, the key factor lies in the fact that Arintero does not reject Christianity but finds strength in the New Testament's message of the love of one's neighbour. As opposed to the superficiality of random sexual contacts, this love is a synonym for authentic commitment in the novel. Weary of loneliness and the routine of empty existence, Gabriel discovers the night life of London's 'cruising grounds,' that is, urban spaces where homosexuals meet:

> Some days, the very thought of crawling back to his wintry, frozen-stiff attic to read in the dim light of his lamp and fall asleep to the hissing of the gas was depressing to him. He would then stop somewhere near a tube entrance or a park; it was called cruising. Gabriel Arintero discovered the poetics of cruising along with the compulsive and impermanent nature of encounters, which were pleasant at a given moment and reminded him of his relation with Manolín. He realised that he was himself judging all this and passing on it a

49 'El crujido de la llama de gas […] evaporaba la reluciente humedad de las paredes y enclaustraba a Gabriel Arintero en una poética de personaje solitario, desconectado del mundo real, olvidado por su familia, sin patria, un hombre errante que, atardecer tras atardecer, abría su lata de *pilchards in tomato sauce*, tostaba dos rebanadas de pan de molde y cenaba lentamente para tumbarse luego en el catre a leer hasta que le vencía el sueño.' *Ibid.*, 83.

> condemnatory sentence by the severe norms of his abandoned and deprecated Christian morality: all of this was barren; *it was no love*. Neither was it *homosexual identity*.[50]

The insistence that it was neither love nor homosexual identity is essential at this point. At the beginning of this chapter, I mentioned that Pombo's fiction exemplifies the difference between the writings of the artisan scribes of the 1970s and 80s and the works of artist scribes aspiring to develop and articulate their own position on homosexuality. The Martínezian scribes repeatedly rehearse certain fixed conventions and entrenched conceptualisations of homosexuality in literature without reflecting much on them. The latest homoerotic literature differs from their productions in that it more carefully attends to various cultural circumstances and displays more awareness of the coexistence of multiple discourses which the homosexual subject must confront. Admittedly, as Fajardo convincingly shows, Pombo has never written in a naïve fashion and has always been aware of cultural factors. Nevertheless, his 'lack-of-the-substance series' only narrated the effects of the protagonists' existential dissonance. In his recent works, he abandons his former 'entomologist' approach and meticulously investigates the causes, that is, the influences of various discourses on the homosexual subject. At the same time, Pombo projects his own version of homosexual identity – one that is committed, *intentional and authentic* in terms of the philosophy he espouses. This identity is set in opposition to an inauthentic and superficial identity, which is grounded merely on sexuality.[51] Pombo couples the latter with emancipatory discourse that fights for sexual liberty and is affiliated with postmodernity. Articulated in *El cielo raso*, this conscious 'contribution to the discussion' is what Pombo has in common with Luis Antonio de Villena. As shown in the previous chapter, Villena, too, consistently and deliberately constructs his own interpretation of queer identity. In Villena, a queer is a dandy who consciously opposes both the heteronormative values of the bourgeoisie and the homonormative leanings sparked by the emancipatory discourse of gays and lesbians. Frequent references to homosexual culture in its trifling, postmodern, global variety are another novelty of homoerotic literature at the turn of

50 'Algunos días, la idea de regresar a su buhardilla invernal, aterida, a leer a la luz del flexo hasta adormecerse con el silabeo del fuego de gas, le resultaba agobiante. Entonces se detenía a las afueras de las bocas del metro, por los alrededores de los parques, era el *cruising*. Descubrió Gabriel Arintero la poética del *cruising*, y descubrió a la vez la compulsividad y la discontinuidad de los encuentros, que eran placenteros cuando se producían y que evocaban la relación con Manolín. Se descubrió a sí mismo juzgando todo aquello y sentenciándolo en los severos términos de la abandonada y despreciada moral cristiana: aquello era estéril, *aquello no era amor*, aquello desde luego no era *identidad homosexual* tampoco.' *Ibid.*, 84 (italics mine).

51 Fajardo, *Homotextuality*, 81, 166.

the millennium. They appear in Juan Goytisolo's *A Cock-Eyed Comedy*, where New York's leather subcultures are ironically conveyed through a camp style; in Eduardo Mendicutti's *Yo no tengo la culpa*, where a similar irony suffuses the evocations of the fetishised musculature of the male body and the visual representations thereof in Tom of Finland's comic books; in Antonio de Villena's works, where Pierre and Gilles's photography is alluded to and big-city strobe-light-bathed gay ghettoes are exposed in *Huesos de Sodoma*. Pombo explicitly addresses the postmodern global devolution of homosexual culture into the trifling and the banal in *Contra natura*. Yet in doing this, he does not resort to 'post-Stonewall' camp, as he is himself a determined detractor of the camp tradition. His identification of camp as a manifestation of inauthenticity and insubstantiality prevents him from discerning its subversive potential, on which both Goytisolo and Mendicutti were able to capitalise in inventive, conceptually layered and aesthetically rewarding ways, as shown in Chapter 3.

While Pombo's critique of postmodern homosexuality does not fully blossom until *Contra natura*, *El cielo raso* already contains its seeds. As stated above, in London, Gabriel Arintero comes in touch with liquid modernity and repudiates it as a manifestation of superficiality. In his analysis of Arintero, Martínez Expósito states that Arintero's initial approval of his own homosexuality recounted in the first chapters is followed by the loss of this self-acceptance, which comes as a surprise to readers. The researcher attributes this shift to guilty feelings the protagonist develops as a result of his meeting with the police on Plaza de España.[52] My reading locates the cause of this sudden change in different factors. For his part, Fajardo – making good on his declaration in the introduction to his study – only sporadically references *El cielo raso* and does so exclusively in the context of 'Pombo's polemic with religious heterologocentric discourses.'[53] As a matter of fact, he observes that Pombo probes the 'condition of the "postmodern" homosexual,'[54] but in my view Fajardo's attention to Arintero is too scant for him to notice that Gabriel is in fact a prototype of Paco Allende in *Contra natura* and that *El cielo raso* heralds the advent of Pombo's key dichotomy of moral homosexuality vs. amoral homosexuality, on which the dialectical narrative of the following novel is constructed.[55]

Arintero only emerges as a moral homosexual, capable of overcoming his existential dissonance in the latter chapters of *El cielo raso*. Prompted by an impulse, he travels to Salvador, where he is exposed to liberation

52 Martínez Expósito, *Escrituras*, 191.
53 Fajardo, *Homotextuality*, 6.
54 *Ibid*., 201.
55 *Ibid*., 170–2.

theology with its foregrounding of social issues in Christianity. Before his departure from London, while 'cruising,' he meets a Spaniard with whom he is unable to establish a permanent relationship. Gabriel's somewhat affected, nameless peer, who easily engages in sexual contacts, confesses to him that he would like to form a relation with him, but Arintero realises that he is not ready for this. Similarly to Ortega in *Los delitos insignificantes*, he cannot imagine such a union and concludes that he is incapable of opening up to genuine love: 'This boy made him [Arintero] realise that his true dilemma did not lie in choosing between purity and amorous pleasure but in choosing between a heart closed to love and a heart receptive to it.'[56] The protagonist's ponderings are quite revealing because they aptly render the existential situation of a homosexual who grew up at a particular historical moment and in a particular sociopolitical conjuncture. In adolescence, Gabriel was exposed to a Catholic discourse that branded sexuality, and in particular homosexual acts, as impure; hence his musing pivot on the key word of 'purity.' The pleasure of love-making is, for him, something different from love and, as he has learned as an immigrant in London, something associated with short-lasting, superficial, insignificant contacts. When the possibility for a more stable relation with the newly met Spaniard offers itself, Arintero discovers that there is a third way of thinking about homosexuality, in addition to the religious dichotomy of purity vs. impurity and the two polar attitudes he was compelled to choose between in London: sexual continence and hedonism. Nevertheless, when his new friend proposes this to him, Arintero declines, and his refusal is caused by the lack of positive models for homosexuals to follow in building their relationships. The world he inhabits offers solely negative narratives of homosexuality. While in the passage below the lack of models is theoretically contemplated by Gabriel as an asset, *the real* is soon bound to reassert itself over *the imagined* and *the theoretical*:

> It occurred to Gabriel that this was exactly where homosexual amorous relations had an edge over the relationships of heterosexuals, in not having the pre-determined system of weights and measurements, calculations, congratulations, contracts, presents exchanged by families when the promise of marriage is announced. This crushing security of the cupboard makes it all the more difficult for the heterosexual newly-weds. Homosexuality catered to Arintero's incurable romanticism […]. At the same time, all this romanticism was becoming repulsive and loathsome when – in practice – it translated into the

56 'Aquel muchacho le había hecho ver [a Arintero] que su verdadero dilema no estaba entre la castidad y la complacencia amorosa, sino entre un corazón abierto al amor o cerrado al amor.' *Ibid.*, 88.

> adversities and inhibitions which Gabriel Arintero, like all the other homosexuals of his generation, internalised.[57]

The protagonist gives up on the relationship because, at this stage of his life, he is still unable to re-forge the potential inherent in homosexuality – a potential he does not discern – into an authentic homosexual intentionality. A breakthrough in this respect happens in Salvador, which is framed as a space of commitment clearly opposed to London, which functions primarily as a space of superficial hedonism. In Salvador, Gabriel meets Osvaldo, a devotee of liberation theology. In this setting, where a preoccupation with selfish hedonism is ousted by the value placed on altruism and solidarity with the oppressed, Arintero recalls the New Testament's message of love. This time, the relation stands a chance of surviving because the protagonist sees in Osvaldo a vibrant incarnation of moral conduct and authentic engagement. However, their union is brought to an end when Osvaldo is abducted in mysterious circumstances, and Gabriel is forced to return to Spain. The novel ends when, years later, Arintero, already elderly, grown sluggish and disheartened, receives news that Osvaldo is alive and will be coming to Madrid any moment now.[58]

El cielo raso signals that it is possible to successfully cope with existential dissonance and to look for new ways of experiencing homosexuality in a complicated, postmodern world. This possibility is explored in much more detail in *Contra natura*, Pombo's 2005 *opus magnum*, which is fully devoted to this issue. In the novel, Pombo again tackles the lack of cultural models for non-heterosexual individuals to follow, the superficiality of random sexual contacts, the reduction of homosexuality to an identity based solely on eroticism and frivolity, the ways of urban gay ghettoes and, most importantly, the imperative for queers to behave ethically and ground homoerotic relations on intentionality.

'Queers' is used purposefully at this point, as *Contra natura* leaves no doubt that Pombo is an author who spotlights a variety of coexisting and intersecting discourses of sexuality in which the non-heterosexual subject is ensnared. The novel makes it quite clear that he dismisses the notion

57 'Precisamente, pensaba Gabriel que en esto tenían ventaja los amores homosexuales sobre los heterosexuales, en no disponer de antemano de un definido sistema de pesos y medidas, de cálculos, parabienes, contratos, regalos interfamiliares al anuncio del compromiso matrimonial. Con su aplastante seguridad de aparador, los contrayentes del matrimonio heterosexual lo tenían bien crudo. La homosexualidad como proyecto satisfacía el romanticismo incurable de Arintero […]. Pero, por otra parte, todo eso tan romántico se volvía detestable y odioso al convertirse, en la práctica, en dificultades y reservas que Gabriel Arintero, como todos los homosexuales de esa generación, habían internalizado.' *Ibid*., 89–90.

58 The tale of Gabriel Arintero opens and closes *El cielo raso*. The main action of the novel takes place at the home of Leopoldo de la Cuesta, Gabriel's cynical cousin, who, like many of Pombo's characters, is killed at the end (by his adoptive son Esteban). I do not analyse this plotline here as it is irrelevant to my argument.

of homosexual identity being rooted in a transhistorical and immutable 'nature' shared by homosexuals. Instead, Pombo insists that there is no single model of homosexual identity. For this reason, elsewhere I have written about plural 'homosexualities,' rather than a singular 'homosexuality,' in Pombo and proposed reading the title of his novel *Contra natura* [*Against Nature*] as a poignant expression of the author's anti-essentialist understanding of homosexual identity.[59] In this sense, Pombo's reflections in *Contra natura* dovetail with the concepts found in Anglo-American queer studies. However, as observed by Fajardo, Pombo 'is often not considered to be a "queer" writer, or a writer of transgressive "queer-themed" literature.'[60] In my opinion, nonetheless, Pombo thoroughly deserves these monikers because he does not simply *thematise* homosexual identity but *problematises* it by calling attention to a range of cultural factors that underpin multiple conceptualisations of homosexuality in culture. As Lee Edelman, whom I have already quoted, insists:

> [A] recognition of the cultural inscription of the gay body as writing or text suggests that a necessary project for gay critics and for the expanding field of gay theory must be the study of historically variable rhetorics, the discursive strategies and tropological formations, in which sexuality is embedded and conceived; it suggests that the differing psychologies of figuration in different places and different times bear crucially on the textual articulations and cultural constructions of sexuality […].[61]

While this observation originally concerns literary criticism and the methodology of homoerotic literature research, it is helpful at this point since, in my view, Pombo the writer dons the mantle of a critic or, more broadly, theorist of sexuality in *Contra natura*. The novel is in this sense a literary 'study of historically variable rhetorics, the discursive strategies

59 Łukasz Smuga, 'Homosexualidades en *Contra natura* de Álvaro Pombo,' in *¿Dentro/fuera? Nuevas perspectivas sobre la identidad y la otredad en las literaturas hispánicas*, ed. Agnieszka Flisek and Katarzyna Moszczyńska (Varsovia: Museo de Historia del Movimiento Popular Polaco, 2011), 181–9. Regarding this issue, see also Martínez Expósito, 'Interseccionalidad,' 145.

60 Fajardo, *Homotextuality*, 22. As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, David Vilaseca is one of the few researchers to have recognised the radically queer quality of Pombo's writings. In his study of *Contra natura*, Vilaseca observes that 'some contemporary gay-identified critics have utterly missed what is most significant and innovative in Pombo's writing: a fierce questioning of identity and sexuality that engages with some of the most complex debates in contemporary philosophy and which, precisely in so far as it retains the power to upset both the traditionally homophobic moral mainstream as well as the "normalized" gay consensus of the modern Spanish state, secures Pombo's place […] amongst the most radical of European queer authors.' David Vilaseca, 'Queer Ethics and the Event of Love in Álvaro Pombo's *Contra natura* (2005),' *Revista Canadiense de Estudios Hispánicos*, 2010, 35, no. 1, 244–5.

61 Lee Edelman, *Homographesis: Essays in Gay Literary and Cultural Theory* (New York and London: Routledge, 1994), 20.

and tropological formations, in which sexuality is embedded and conceived.' Given this critical approach and the recognition of the various discourses displayed by Pombo, he may also be viewed as performing a 'Mazuf gesture' of his own, unique variety. Its uniqueness resides in that 'Mazuf's gesture' in Pombo does not involve the typically intertextual devices employed in other texts discussed in this volume – it does not consist in 'rewriting' the entrenched literary tradition from a queer perspective. Rather, it involves repositioning certain discourses and interlacing them with a view to disclosing that such and not some other conceptualisations of homosexual identity are just this – conceptualisations, that is, merely constructs. More than that, some characters in *Contra natura* are aware that these various conceptualisations are in circulation and even harness them to manipulate other characters. Before illustrating this, a brief overview of the novel's plot is in order.

There are four major characters in *Contra natura*. Two of them, Javier Salazar and Paco Allende, hail from Pombo's own generation. They both attended the same clergy-run school, grew up under Franco's dictatorship and had to grapple with problems similar to those of Gabriel Arintero in *El cielo raso*. Javier Salazar has deeply interiorised homophobia and is a typical Pombo protagonist who cannot cope with his existential dissonance. The writer Gonzalo Ortega in *Los delitos insignificantes* is his antecedent. Sharing Ortega's fate, Salazar is financially exploited by Juanjo Garnacho, Pombo's typical 'alpha male,' and kills himself by throwing himself off the balcony. For his part, Paco Allende resembles Gabriel Arintero. As a young man, he was in love with Javier Salazar, but their relation was impossible to continue due to Javier's detachment. Allende looked for lovers at cruising grounds and tried to bind himself permanently to one of them, but their relationship, based on the bourgeois conventions of heterosexual marriage, proved frustrating. Unlike Salazar, Allende avoids a tragic ending because he realises that, despite having no positive models to follow, he can establish a satisfying union with another man as long as their relationship is based on a genuine partnership and commitment, as opposed to either the bourgeois model of marriage or postmodern, liquid homosexual relations based merely on sexual pleasure.

The other two protagonists, Juanjo Garnacho and Ramón Durán, represent the younger generation. Juanjo is a PE teacher at Ramón's former high school. Before coming to Madrid and reuniting, they were lovers even though the former was a teacher and the latter a student. Married Juanjo dreams of becoming a football coach and goes to Madrid to take the necessary courses, but instead of pursuing his career, he hangs out with Ramón in bars in the gay neighbourhood of Chueca. The younger Ramón also seems taken in with the possibilities offered by big-city life. The renewed affair proves unsatisfying to Ramón, who feels that Juanjo is taking advantage of him and treating him like a thing, the way he treated his wife, whom he left in Málaga.

The stories of the four men intertwine and tangle as the action progresses. In the beginning, Javier Salazar, a reputed and affluent publisher, meets Ramón Durán in one of Madrid's parks. When he learns about the young man's affair with the former school coach, he also seeks to meet Juanjo Garnacho. He starts a cynical game and manipulates the young men's feelings in order to enact his erotic phantasies with them. Both Ramón Durán and Juanjo Garnacho move in with Javier and live in his luxurious apartment as kept men. At the same time, Paco Allende, Salazar's former friend from adolescence, reappears in his life. Their complicated relationships are outlined in numerous retrospections. In the main plot, which unfolds in 2005, Allende realises that Juanjo and Javier are a threat to Ramón and tries to exert an influence on him so as to help him shake off their toxic influence. Things turn around when Ramón leaves Madrid on receiving news of his mother's death. When he is away from the capital, Javier Salazar and Juanjo Garnacho focus on each other, and Paco Allende is able to offer real solace to Ramón Durán. Having realised the truth, Ramón attempts to bond more intimately with Paco, who nevertheless believes that he cannot let this happen given the delicate situation in which they find themselves. Allende does not want Ramón to feel that his gratitude is preyed upon for ulterior purposes. He resolves to continue kindly supporting him and gives up on his egoistic desires in the hope that, in future when the circumstances change, he and Durán will form a truly selfless partnership-based union. The trajectory of the relationship unfolding between Paco Allende and Ramón Durán stands in stark contrast to the parallel relationship between Javier Salazar and Juanjo Garnacho, which clearly develops in the same direction as the story of César Quirós and Gonzalo Ortega in *Los delitos insignificantes* and has an equally tragic ending.

As in his other novels, Pombo masterfully fashions the psychological portrayals of his four protagonists. The flashbacks which depict the youth of Javier Salazar and Paco Allende reveal the impact of a Catholic education on the interiorisation of homophobia by homosexual individuals. Similarly to *El cielo raso*, the novel portrays a Catholicism that is particularly oppressive as it is entangled in the agenda of General Franco's regime. Combined with a state discourse which pathologises homosexuality as a disease and a deviance jeopardising the public order, this education is shown to bring about tragic outcomes. In their school years, Paco Allende and Javier Salazar have a sensitive friend, Carlos Mansilla, who falls in love with Javier and confesses to him his feelings of affection. Javier, who himself has homosexual proclivities, responds violently:

> That it's nothing wrong? Let's start with that fact that it's a mortal sin, and above all, you're sick. You're disgusting. […] But Carlos Mansilla was embracing him, saying: […] Please, love me, hold me.

> He managed to kiss him on the lips; it was a sticky kiss, drenched in tears, a child's kiss. Salazar managed to break free […] he turned around and yelled: You'll pay for this dearly, faggot, you will![62]

Salazar indeed reports the episode to the headmaster, and Carlos Mansilla kills himself. This incident makes Allende and Salazar part ways for good. Paco also guesses that Javier had something in common with their friend's death. Years later, they go over this event in a conversation that marks the novel's climax. Confronted by Allende about what happened years back, Salazar replies:

> in this whole thing with Carlos, I'm very much to blame, but what's even more to blame is what they were telling us then, what was thought of such love. Remember that? – I remember it perfectly well. You behaved the way any scared boy would who had interiorised the common morality of those days.[63]

In this conversation, Javier not only admits to his guilt from the past but also braces himself to make another important confession, which deserves to be quoted here in full:

> In the course of years, especially now, with this expansion […] of gayhood, I've discovered a deep-seated homophobia in me. […] 'Cause you see … Perhaps you'd like to know, my old friend Allende, that in my consciousness, like in the consciousness of Jean Genet or Sartre, homosexuality, its theory and above all its practice are ontologically bound up with exclusion and with solitude, and with death, and with jails. Ontologically means *ab ovo*, that is, before all that legal, political or social acceptance, and after that as well. Nobody can salvage us from our essential link with exclusion, with decline and with death. […] So much so that when I was young, I felt compelled, already at school, to reject all this because I wanted to be, I resolved to be, somebody entirely different; I didn't want to be a loner or excluded; I wanted to be a man at the centre, integrated, unmistakably recognisable as a person of considerable influence in his community, and such a person is exactly what I've been.[64]

62 '¿Que no es nada malo? Es pecado mortal para empezar, pero sobre todo estás enfermo. Eres repugnante. […] Y Carlos Mansilla le abrazaba y le decía: […] Quiéreme, por favor, abrázame. Y llegó a besarle en los labios, un beso pegajoso, lacrimoso, de niño. Salazar logró zafarse […] se volvió y gritó: ¡Esto lo vas a pagar caro, maricón, muy caro!' Pombo, *Contra*, 202.

63 'en lo de Carlos, por mucha culpa que yo tenga, más culpa tiene lo que nos decían, lo que se pensaba de un amor así. ¿Te acuerdas de eso? – Lo recuerdo muy bien. Tú te comportaste como cualquier muchacho asustadizo que había internalizado la moralidad común de la época.' *Ibid.*, 526–7.

64 'Con los años, y especialmente ahora, con la eclosión esta […] de lo gay, he descubierto en mí mi homofobia profunda. […] Verás … Te interesará saber quizá, mi viejo

In my view, this is a crucial episode because Salazar's confession reveals that he is himself *aware of the cultural factors* behind homosexual identity and the problems they cause. Javier confesses that until he met the naïve Ramón and shortly later the mean Juanjo, he had lived the quiet life of a retired and respected publisher: 'With Juanjo, I felt for the first time in my life that the so thoroughly *self-contradictory* idea of Villena, the Luis Antonio de Villena, of liveable perversion was indeed possible.'[65] Let us recall that Alberto Mira explained that the 'accursed homosexuality' mode had arisen as a response to a discourse that pathologised homosexuality in terms of perversion and crime. As part of this response, some homosexuals intercepted this conceptualisation of homosexuality and turned it into a mark of their identity in a gesture of protest against bourgeois morality.[66] Javier knows how deep an imprint this pathologising discourse has made on his life ('what's even more to blame is what they were telling us then, what was thought of such love'; 'I felt compelled, already at school, to reject all this because I wanted to be, I resolved to be, somebody entirely different'), but he is equally aware of a contradiction at the core of the *malditista* discourse. If 'accursed homosexuality' is taken in earnest ontologically, rather than as a posture or a stylised persona,[67] 'nobody can salvage us from our essential link with exclusion, with decline and with death.' The circle of strangeness tightens, and *malditista* discourse mutates into a self-fulfilling prophecy. It is not a coincidence that Salazar finds the nerve to make his confession only shortly before he takes his own life.

Paco Allende also realises the discourse pathologising homosexuality – one that was overriding under Franco – has influenced the perceptions of otherness held by his generation ('You behaved the way any scared boy would who had interiorised the common morality of those days'). If there is anything in the *malditista* tradition that he can relate to, it is certainly the dismissal of bourgeois values. His former relationship with Joaquín

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Allende, que en mi conciencia, como en la de Jean Genet o en la de Sartre, la homosexualidad, su teoría y sobre todo su práctica, conecta ontológicamente con la marginación y con la soledad y con la muerte y con las cárceles. Ontológicamente significa *ab ovo*: significa antes y después de toda aceptación jurídica o política o social. Nadie nos librará de nuestra esencial conexión con la marginación, con el fracaso y con la muerte. […] Hasta tal punto que yo me vi obligado de muy joven, aún en el seminario, a rechazarlo en bloque todo ello, porque lo que quería ser y me había propuesto ser era justo lo contrario: no quise ser ni un solitario ni un marginado sino un hombre del centro, integrado, perfectamente identificable como personaje influyente de mi comunidad, y lo fui.' *Ibid*., 531–2.

65 'Con Juanjo, por primera vez en mi vida sentí que era posible ese concepto tan *contradictorio*, del Villena, el Luis Antonio de Villena: la perversión vivible.' *Ibid*., 532 (italics mine).

66 Alberto Mira, *De Sodoma a Chueca. Una historia cultural de la homosexualidad en España en el siglo XX* (Barcelona and Madrid: Egales, 2004), 24–5.

67 In Villena, 'accursed homosexuality' is primarily contemplated in conjunction with a dandy pose. The protagonists who do not approach it as a stylised act but treat it literally head toward a tragic ending, as exemplified by Emilio Jordán in *Malditos*.

fell apart exactly because the boy unconsciously re-enacted the model of heterosexual marriage – he simply did not know any other one. What stands out in the passage that corroborates these insights is the catalogue of names associated with Villena's 'queer continuum':

> Allende was aware that what repelled him in these patterns was not prosperity or good food (these, in fact, Allende enjoyed as much as anybody), but the voluntary immersion in bourgeois normalisation. Can homosexuality be compatible with this *vita beata*? What certainly cannot be compatible with it is the idea of homosexuality inspired by figures such as Gide, Wilde, Proust, Verlaine and Rimbaud, Luis Cernuda, Whitman, García Lorca, E.M. Forster or Gore Vidal, let alone Tennessee Williams, Truman Capote, Auden or Christopher Isherwood. This endless list of undomesticated homosexualities stretched back to Theognis of Megara, Socrates and Plato […].[68]

The list does not only look to the past. Allende also considers contemporary personages, such as Luis Antonio de Villena. Thereby, he observes that none of these queers enjoyed a really long-standing relationship. All of them engaged in more or less fleeting affairs. Allende fears that as his choice is between imitating the bourgeois marriage, which his experience with Joaquín has taught him is not his thing, and becoming involved in temporary, provisional, unstable and random relations, he will not be able to form a satisfying union with Durán. Allende faces a dilemma resembling that which Gabriel Arintero in *El cielo raso* confronted at the end of his London stage. He realises that there are no ready-made templates for homosexual couples without impermanence inscribed in them. Allende indulges in such musings as gay and lesbian emancipation movements are celebrating a staggering triumph: a law sanctioning same-sex marriages has just been passed in Spain. However, this success in the struggle against homophobia does not change anything because it still concerns marriage, that is, a 'voluntary immersion in bourgeois normalisation.' This is a mistake Allende can no longer afford to make. The narrator's comments on the dilemma that afflicts the protagonist when

68 'Allende se daba cuenta de que lo que él mismo rechazaba en estas estampas no era tanto el bienestar o la buena comida (cosas que Allende disfrutaba como el que más) sino la inmersión deliberada en la normalización burguesa. ¿Era la homosexualidad compatible con esta *vita beata*? Lo que es evidentemente incompatible con esto es una idea de la homosexualidad inspirada en Gide, Wilde, Proust, Verlaine y Rimbaud, Luis Cernuda, Whitman, García Lorca, E.M. Forster o Gore Vidal, por no hablar de Tennessee Williams o Truman Capote o Auden o Christopher Isherwood. La lista interminable de homosexualidades no caseras se extendía hacia atrás hasta Teognis de Mégara y Sócrates y Platón […].' Pombo, *Contra*, 417–8.

the possibility of a relationship with Ramón Durán appears are rife with irony about emancipation discourse:

> An opportunity opens up for him. There is a great chance for a wedding, a resounding epithalamion. Shouldn't we now intone a new nuptial song, a bright, determined and powerful song in honour of homosexual love? It is wedding time. Why doesn't Allende now believe in all this? Wasn't Allende rather forward when young? Has Allende by any chance grown into a dribbling conservative? Has he got no 'gay pride'? Where has his gay pride gone? […] Allende truly loves Durán. […] But […] Allende […] is aware of what lies ahead of him. […] if engagement time is to come – and it will have to come – both future spouses will be compelled to enact the old, outmoded patterns of fiancées and fiancés who were there before them – gender identity will not help alleviate these theatrics.[69]

This ironic commentary delivered by the narrator is reminiscent of numerous passages in *Huesos de Sodoma*, where the successes of the 'Sodomite' (i.e. gay) activists resulting in the imposition of a single relationship model are reported in a similarly sarcastic style. The difference is that *Huesos de Sodoma* envisages an alternative to homonormativity by having absolute sexual freedom – open relationships, bisexuality, polyamory – championed by Andrés Quijano and his married partner, with whom he forms a permanent, transparent union, accepted by bisexual Nazari Heré's wife. In contrast, polyamorous relations are not considered an option altogether in Pombo. While rejecting postmodernity in its entirety as a 'liquid state,' Pombo advocates a monogamous model based on mutuality, respect and authentic commitment, where the parties involved must develop their own ethical principles, given the lack of *non-homonormative* models for homosexual couples.[70] In a sense, Pombo envisages a 'new homonormativity' understood not as a mirror image of heterosexual arrangements, but as an insistence on one 'right' model. I will revisit the predicament of postmodernity that Pombo confronts at the end of this chapter, because the account of how he uses the existing discourses of homosexual tradition begs some additional explanation.

69 'Ésta es su ocasión. Ésta es la gran ocasión nupcial, el gran epitalamio. ¿No debiera cantarse ahora el nuevo epitalamio, el intenso y claro y fuerte epitalamio del amor homosexual? Ésta es la hora nupcial. ¿Por qué Allende no cree en todo esto ahora? ¿No era, de joven, más bien lanzado Allende? ¿Se ha convertido Allende en un conservador baboso? ¿No tiene «orgullo gay»? ¿Dónde está su orgullo gay? […] Allende ama de verdad a Durán. […] Pero […] Allende […] es consciente de lo que le espera. […] si va a haber un noviazgo – y tendrá que haberlo – ambos futuros contrayentes tendrán que seguir viejas y antiguas pautas de novios y de novias que les precedieron: la identidad de género no aliviará estas prácticas teatrales.' *Ibid.*, 504–6.

70 Fajardo, *Homotextuality*, 174.

As the examples of Javier Salazar and Paco Allende make clear, the protagonists of *Contra natura* realise that they are ensnared in a discursive trap. Specifically, they have been deeply affected by both the discourse framing homosexuality as a pathology and the homosexual *malditista* tradition, which arose in reaction to this discourse. They ponder how this has influenced their perceptions of their own sexual otherness. At the same time, the gay and lesbian emancipatory discourse in place is unacceptable to them. Mira lists two more available traditions: homophile and camp. The former is heavily indebted to ancient conceptualisations of homosexuality, and the latter represents a response to the notion of homosexual identity as a sexual inversion and engages in a subversive game with and within the masculinity-femininity dichotomy.[71] These two frameworks for homosexuality are also woven into *Contra natura*.

As already mentioned, some characters resort to entrenched conceptualisations of homosexuality in order to manipulate others. This is primarily done by Javier Salazar and Juanjo Garnacho in their relations with young Ramón. While Juanjo is constructed as a cynical manipulator, in which he resembles Salazar and César Quirós in *Los delitos insignificantes*, Ramón is shown as a naïve and immature young man who is easy to impress. This feature is taken advantage of by Juanjo Garnacho in his scheming. Disappointed with his affair with his former coach in Madrid, Ramón sorrowfully remembers their old days in Málaga:

> in one of these reveries, Juanjo is still a coach, first admired and then adored, whom Ramón Durán kissed and caressed and with whom he indulged in sweet sodomy. This first image involves not only carnal pleasure but also an enthusiasm for sports: […] In this context, sodomy and oral sex were part of a secret ritual, the initiation […] of a marvellous athlete and as such were not only pleasant acts for both, but also an element of admirable *paideia*, as Juanjo would time and again emphasise. Durán perceived him then as an unusually educated man, perfectly versed in the entire pedagogy of sport in ancient Greece, which Juanjo taught Durán to call *paideia*.[72]

71 Mira, *Sodoma*, 25–6.

72 'en una imagen Juanjo es aún el entrenador, admirado primero y adorado después, que Ramón Durán había acariciado y besado y con quien se había entregado a la dulce sodomía. En esta primera imagen de Juanjo, además del deleite corporal, hay el entusiasmo deportivo: […] En este contexto la sodomía y las mamadas formaban parte del ritual secreto, de la iniciación […] de un atleta maravilloso, y no eran por lo tanto sólo actos placenteros para ambos sino también una *paideia* admirable – cosa que Juanjo solía subrayar, porque Juanjo le parecía a Durán entonces un hombre cultísimo que

Early in the novel, Juanjo's is not an unalloyed portrayal of a cynic. The character consistently evolves in this direction, and his true self is more directly revealed in the second part of the work, when the narrative focuses on interactions between Juanjo and Javier. At the beginning, there is an impression that the coach did not manipulate the student and that a strong homoerotic bond emerged between them, redolent of antiquity. However, having heard Ramón's story, Javier Salazar immediately senses the motives behind Juanjo's actions and asks Ramón to introduce him to his former love. During their first encounter, Javier seeks to humiliate the coach, using his knowledge about the circumstances of the old affair: 'So you were twenty-six, and you sexually abused a minor? If you did all this with Ramón, and I believe you did, and you were ten years his senior, you deserve a term in jail, don't you?'[73] Juanjo tries to muster up excuses, pointing out that Ramón himself wanted that and that they eventually fell in love with each other. Yet Salazar continues his biting remarks ('Minors are always willing'[74]) and insists that it was a vulgar instance of depravation. This is a humiliation Juanjo does not forget and takes his revenge at the end of the novel.

Salazar returns to this story in order to reproduce Juanjo's manipulation himself, but in a far more refined and taunting way. In the second part of the novel, he persuades Ramón to sodomise him. To this purpose, he reminds the young man of the Greek *paideia* and his teen affair with the coach. As an intellectual, he avails himself of a far richer vocabulary than Juanjo's and tells Ramón about eromenoses and erasteses: '[P]lease, kiss me, even if only for a moment, my *eromenos*, for I am your *erastes*, can't you see that? Oh no, no. You are my *erastes*, and I'm your *eromenos*.'[75] Salazar inverts the order because he is to be the passive party, despite being older, and Ramón is to be active. But Durán does not understand the Greek terminology and is lost in such complexities: 'I didn't get what you said at the end. Was it Latin or Greek? […] I didn't get who is who and whether it's you or me.'[76] Javier clarifies to him the etymology and meanings of the words, referring to his relationship with Juanjo. Taking advantage of the boy's memories and ignorance, Javier manages to convince him that his active part in sexual contacts with Juanjo is a testimony of his intrinsic propensity for being an erastes

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conocía toda la pedagogía deportiva de la Grecia clásica que Juanjo enseñó a Durán a denominar la *paideia*.' Pombo, *Contra*, 93–4.

73 '¿Así que tenías veintiséis y te aprovechaste de un menor? Si, según creo lo hiciste todo con Ramón y le llevabas diez años, mereces la cárcel, ¿o no?' *Ibid*., 124.

74 'Los menores siempre quieren.' *Ibid*.

75 'bésame por favor por un momento, mi *erómenos*, porque soy yo tu *erastés*, ¿no te das cuenta? No, no. Tú eres mi *erastés* y yo tu *erómenos*.' *Ibid*., 313 (italics original).

76 'Lo que has dicho al final, no lo he entendido. ¿Era en latín, o en griego? […] No entendí qué era quién, si tú o si yo.' *Ibid*., 314.

rather than an entirely passive eromenos. They have sex, which involves a cynical shift of roles, giving Javier a perverted pleasure:

> And so, both naked, they caress each other time and again. Indeed, Durán, the young one, the *erastes*, gets a hard-on, and Salazar, the old one, the *pseudoeromenos* doesn't. This surprises Kenneth Dover (who's reading this novel translated into American English in 2006): the member of *erastes* Durán was fully erect even before the physical contact took place while the old member of the *eromenos*, Salazar's member that is, remains flaccid … Excellent! Excellent, indeed![77]

At the level of the plot, the sardonic, oxymoronic reversal of the classic order (the older erastes adopts the passive role as a pseudoeromenos, whereas the younger eromenos is an active party as a pseudoerastes) is not only a sophisticated taunt at Ramón, Juanjo and their former relationship. It also conveys the narrator's scornful attitude to homophile discourse as incompatible with the present times, as suggested by the allusion to Kenneth Dover, who authored the classic study *Greek Homosexuality* (1978), a key point of reference for the so-called homophile tradition. Given Pombo's mischievous temperament, the allusion is anything but coincidental in *Contra natura*, a novel which equally pointedly references Villena in the context of 'accursed homosexuality.'

In the novel, the dismissal of emancipatory, homophile and *malditista* discourses is combined with a derogatory portrayal of camp as a manifestation of postmodern superficiality and irrelevance. Importantly, in the Spanish context, the concept of camp tends to be wrongly narrowed down to homosexual mannerisms and flippancy. In this chapter, it is this colloquial construal of the term that is of interest to me. Fajardo, who meticulously examines *Contra natura* in terms of existential authenticity, postmodern hedonism, morality, the master-slave relationship and hetero- and homorelationality, does not draw on Mira's study to explore how Pombo exposes discursive pitfalls that lurk for his homosexual protagonists. However, Fajardo devotes ample attention to the inversion of sexual roles, one of the most widespread conceptualisations of homosexuality in Spanish-speaking countries, which Mira claims to be the point of reference for the camp tradition. Fajardo analyses the dichotomies of masculinity-femininity and activity-passivity in the context of homosexuality in terms of the strongly tabooed anal intercourse

77 'Así que se acarician una y otra vez ambos desnudos, y sí, está empalmado el joven, el *erastés*, Durán, y no empalmado el viejo, el Salazar, el *pseudoerómenos*. Esto ha sorprendido a Kenneth Dover (que está leyendo esta novela traducida al inglés-americano en el año 2006): el pene del *erastés*, de Durán, ya estaba erecto antes de establecerse el contacto corporal. En cambio, el viejo pene del *erómenos*, el pene de Javier Salazar, permanece fláccido … ¡Oh, delicia, delicia!' *Ibid*., 316–7 (italics original).

and asymmetrical relations established by the protagonists.[78] He rightly observes that Juanjo Garnacho, Pombo's 'alpha male,' perceives homosexual identity as the 'hermaphroditism of the soul.' Initially, Juanjo does not even consider himself homosexual, and what interests him in Ramón is the youngster's femininity.[79] Fajardo comments that Juanjo is unable to imagine Durán as a lover without attributing feminine features to him as a result of the powerful impact of 'compulsory heterosexuality' with its male-female binary.[80] Importantly, Juanjo Garnacho at the same time 'props up' his sense of maleness in homosocial contacts with other participants in the coaching course, which corroborates Fajardo's insights. The construal of homosexual identity as an 'inversion of sexual roles' is shown in *Contra natura* to be a fallout of the 'heterosexual matrix' and associated with male chauvinism, as vividly exemplified in Juanjo Garnacho. Furthermore, Pombo rejects not only *machismo* with its typical feminisation of the homosexual but also the parodic performance of femininity by gays as their own 'identity mark.' Pombo adopts a similarly critical attitude to the endorsement of homosexuality as vice and pathology within the *malditista* tradition, which is conveyed through the character of Javier Salazar.[81] In his analysis of Hernández, Gonzalo Ortega's

78 This is also the angle from which he delves into the Greek *paideia* motif in the relationship between Juanjo and Ramón. Fajardo focuses on power relations inscribed in the active-passive binary. Surprisingly, he passes over a far more important episode involving Ramón and Salazar, which parodies the erastes–eromenos relationship. Fajardo, *Homotextuality*, 197–200.

79 *Ibid*., 194.

80 *Ibid*., 195–6.

81 The eloquence of Salazar's tragic end corroborates this interpretation. David Vilaseca, on the other hand, interprets this character in terms of Lee Edelman's 'sinthomosexuality' and the death drive (Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* [Durham: Duke University Press, 2004]). He also draws on Alain Badiou's concept of a 'love event' to argue that both Javier Salazar and Paco Allende are '[a]gents of an unabashedly universalist, anti-normalizing and anti-communitarian drive [and they] emerge […] as champions both of a radical queer ethics and of the new "materialist-dialectic" politics advanced by Badiou.' Vilaseca, 'Queer Ethics,' 245. However, this interpretation suspends or, in a sense, operates against the distinction between the ethical and unethical models of homosexual conduct laid out by Pombo in the epilogue of *Contra natura*. As Vilaseca puts it: 'It will be my contention that even though the novel (*via* its idiosyncratic and opinionated narrator) appears to cast thoughtful Paco Allende as the only source of a proper ethical act, we find also in the deeply unsympathetic Javier Salazar, *via* his traumatic suicide in response to Juanjo Garnacho's rejection, the uncompromising subject of a love-event.' *Ibid*., 245. In my view, though, Salazar's suicide, which purposely echoes Ortega's death in *Los delitos insignificantes*, should be understood as resulting from Salazar's earnest espousal of the *malditista* discourse. His final monologue on homosexuality and death clearly becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. This is how, I believe, Pombo depicts the protagonist's entrapment in an obsolete discourse – one of the many which lurk for a homosexual subject and from which Paco Allende has managed to escape. This reading dovetails with Martínez Expósito's conclusion about the ground-breaking quality of *Contra natura*. Martínez Expósito claims

effeminate friend in *Los delitos insignificantes*, Fajardo concludes that Pombo tends to portray effeminate gays in conjunction with superficiality and a 'lack of substance,' while the enactment of femininity, in Pombo's view, 'in a sense reinforces and reconstructs the gender dichotomy inherent in phallogocentric discourse […].'[82] In other words, Pombo does not believe that camp theatricality carries a subversive potential and entirely repudiates this model.[83] Hence, *Contra natura* paints the entire Chueca neighbourhood in pejorative terms as a hub of homosexuals who sculpt their bodies in gyms and at the same time go out of their way to perform 'feminine' gestures and use feminine grammatical forms, living inconsequential, inauthentic lives typical of liquid modernity. This poses some fundamental questions, such as: What would it mean exactly to say that Pombo's writing is 'critically queer'? To what extent does the predicament of postmodernity that bothers Pombo limit the subversive potential of his literature?

If Pombo is to be classified as a 'queer' writer, the major rationale for that lies in his insistence that homosexual identities are constructs, that is, effects of the discursivisation of sexuality, as well as in his detailed scrutiny of cultural mechanisms for the production and ascription of meanings to homosexuals, both by heterosexuals and by queers themselves. This is what makes his fiction compelling from the point of view of queer studies. Explicitly ensnared in a tangled discursive web, Pombo's protagonists struggle to find their own ways of extricating themselves from the 'pitfall of identity' and, regrettably, as a rule fail in the process. Pombo, who seeks to reflect the predicament of postmodernity concerning homosexuality in his texts, builds his own position on this issue and turns the entrenched discourses inside out, coming across as an ingenious writer, who is subversive in his own, unique way. His play with the inherited discourses to construct his own tale of homosexuality is reminiscent of 'Mazuf's gesture.' The difference between Pombo and the Syrian artist scribe is that Mazuf was capable of creatively tapping into the feminine – and thus underestimated – voice resonating within him, while Pombo, despite his subversive attitude to homoerotic literature, seems not to notice the relevance and power of this voice.

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that Pombo's 'poetics of oppression' in the novel works to expose the usually unnoticed mechanisms of overlapping and intersectional oppressions. In Martínez Expósito's view, the complexity of the varied homosexual experiences depicted by Pombo is best conveyed by the rhizome metaphor. Martínez Expósito, 'Interseccionalidad,' 160–1.

82 Fajardo, *Homotextuality*, 103.

83 Interestingly, Hernández in *Los delitos insignificantes* is, like several of Pombo's characters, a frustrated author struggling with a writer's block. In a telephone conversation, he tells Ortega that he is writing a new novel 'in a more humoristic spirit' ('en una línea más humorística'). He adds that he has found inspiration in the songs of Los Panchos, a Mexican band that specialises in boleros with lyrics typically dwelling on unrequited love. This implies that he is planning on a camp novel. This stirs no interest in Ortega, who perfunctorily dismisses his boring and inconsequential interlocutor. Álvaro Pombo, *Los delitos insignificantes* (Barcelona: Anagrama, 1986), 137–40.

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Conclusion

That's why I don't raise my voice, old Walt
Whitman, […]
against men with that green look in their eyes
who love other men and burn their lips in silence.
But yes against you, urban faggots,
tumescent flesh and unclean thoughts […]
Always against you, who give boys
drops of foul death and bitter poison.
Always against you,
Faeries of North America,
Pájaros of Havana,
Jotos of Mexico,
Sarasas of Cádiz,
Apios of Seville,
Cancos of Madrid,
Floras of Alicante,
Adelaidas of Portugal.
Faggots of the world, murderers of doves!

Federico García Lorca,
'Ode to Walt Whitman'[1]

Opening my explorations of contemporary homoerotic prose in Spain with a chapter on the controversies around homosexuality in the work

1 Federico García Lorca, 'Ode to Walt Whitman,' trans. Greg Simon and Steven F. White, in Federico García Lorca, *Collected Poems: A Bilingual Edition*, ed. Christopher Maurer (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1991), 731, 733. 'Por eso no levanto mi voz, viejo Walt Whitman / […] contra los hombres de mirada verde / que aman al hombre y queman sus labios en silencio. / Pero sí contra vosotros, maricas de las ciudades, / de carne tumefacta y pensamiento inmundo. […] / Contra vosotros siempre, que dais a los muchachos / gotas de sucia muerte con amargo veneno. / Contra vosotros siempre, / *Faeries* de Norteamérica, / *Pájaros* de La Habana, / *Jotos* de México. / *Sarasas* de Cádiz, / *Apios* de Sevilla, / *Cancos* de Madrid, / *Floras* de Alicante, / *Adelaidas* de Portugal. / ¡Maricas de todo el mundo, asesinos de palomas!' Federico García Lorca, *Poeta en Nueva York*, ed. María Clementa Millán (Madrid: Cátedra, 1987), 222–3.

of Federico García Lorca was not a random choice, nor was winding up my argument with a chapter on Álvaro Pombo. In his 'Ode to Walt Whitman,' Lorca, who longed to write explicit homoerotic literature of self-reveal, bolder than the works of Oscar Wilde himself, articulated his own interpretation of the homosexual self as an authentic and above all ethical identity engaged in a love relationship. The opposition that this poem outlines between an amoral, affectatious and abusively pleasure-seeking homosexuality and a pure love founded on a genuine brotherhood of male souls and responsibility for the other in an increasingly dehumanised and superficial world resonates uncannily with the tenor of Pombo's fiction. Like the 'Spanish Oscar Wilde,' Pombo projects a clear contrast between moral and amoral, selfless and selfish, Platonic and Dionysian-hedonistic homosexualities.[2] Though Pombo was inspired by his own experiences and existential philosophy rather than directly by Lorca's verse, his fiction would likely have been applauded by the poet.

Notably, the graphic censure of 'urban faggots' with 'tumescent flesh and unclean thoughts' in 'Ode to Walt Whitman' has often been used to argue that because Lorca disparaged homosexuals in this way, he could not possibly have been gay himself. The dispute between 'Lorca experts' and gay critique arising in the late 20th century focused, among other things, on whether there was something like homosexual literature in the first place. Today, Pombo's fiction is proving equally troublesome for Spanish criticism. The difference is that the current dispute revolves not around the existence of homoerotic literature as such but around the discursive strategies for constructing homosexual identity in this literature. The division into moral and amoral, monogamous and promiscuous, ethical and unethical homosexualities sketched in *El cielo raso* and fleshed out in *Contra natura* keeps the question of the homophobic implications of Pombo's fiction very much alive. Is the homosexual self that emerges from his works as an antidote to postmodern fluidity acceptable to readers today? Does Pombo's denouncement of sexual laxity perhaps speak to his surrender to the homophobic imaginary? To what extent is his manner of polemicising with existing conceptualisations of homosexual identity innovative? Does he avoid stereotypes, or does he instead reproduce them? Is he closer to the Martínezian artisan scribe or to an artist scribe who harbours some 'anxiety of influence' by convention and, driven by this, makes an original contribution to the history of homoerotic literature?

I have sought to answer these questions for each of the seven authors I have discussed: José Luis de Juan, Juan Gil-Albert, Luis G. Martín, Juan Goytisolo, Eduardo Mendicutti, Luis Antonio de Villena and Álvaro Pombo. All of them writing at the turn of the 20th century, their

2 See Frederick Fajardo, *Homotextuality in the Writing of Álvaro Pombo: A Phenomenological Perspective on Existential Dissonance and Authentic Being* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia, 2009), 171–2.

texts emanate a profound awareness that a multiplicity of homophobic discourses and corresponding homosexual traditions coexist with emergent phenomena and developments powered by the dynamic of postmodernity, on which they also should take a position as representatives of homoerotic literature. They all rewrite literary traditions and engage in a critical dialogue with them in more or less spectacular ways, producing more or less effective results. Whether entirely or only partly successful in this enterprise, they are unmistakably no longer common scribes committed to crafting as many copies as possible in order to sustain the tradition in place. Rather, they do what Mazuf did in sabotaging the inherited literary tradition and endeavouring to transform it by imprinting his own stamp on it in a gesture of insubordination. He made his mark as an individual from the fringes, existing 'against nature,' as a conscious artist pitting his vocal utterances 'against culture' and – above all – as a queer rebel freely rewriting the literary tradition.

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