APPROACHES TO SEXUALITY IN LATIN AMERICA:
Recent Scholarship on Gay and Lesbian Studies

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THE NIGHT IS YOUNG: SEXUALITY IN MEXICO IN THE TIME OF AIDS. By Héctor Carrillo. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002. Pp. 371. $58.00 cloth, $20.00 paper.)

THEY DREAM NOT OF ANGELS BUT OF MEN: HOMOEROTICISM, GENDER, AND RACE IN LATIN AMERICAN AUTOBIOGRAPHY. By Robert Richmond Ellis. (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2002. Pp. 219. $55.00 cloth.)

UN AMOR QUE SE ATREVIÓ A DECIR SU NOMBRE: LA LUCHA DE LAS LESBIANAS Y SU RELACIÓN CON LOS MOVIMIENTOS HOMOSEXUALES Y FEMINISTAS EN AMÉRICA LATINA. By Norma Mogrovejo. (México D.F.: Centro de Documentación y Archivo Histórico Lésbico—CDAHL, 2000. Pp. 397.)

LESTIMONIOS: VOCES DE MUJERES LESBIANAS, 1950–2000. By Norma Mogrovejo. (México D.F.: Plaza y Valdés, 2001. Pp. 136.)

REINALDO ARENAS: THE PENTAGONÍA. By Francisco Soto. (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1994. Pp. 193. $24.95 cloth.)

THE BEAR AND HIS SONS: MASCULINITY IN SPANISH AND MEXICAN FOLKTALES. By James M. Taggart. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1997. Pp. 344. $40.00 cloth, $17.95 paper.)

FAKING IT: U.S. HEGEMONY IN A 'POST-PHALLIC' ERA. By Cynthia Weber. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999. Pp. 151. $37.95 cloth, $14.95 paper.)

The recent effervescence of Latin American gay and lesbian studies is quickly changing the face of the field. As it is impossible within the scope of this essay to attempt even a modest overview of this emerging subfield, I will simply offer a few preliminary comments. While there remains today some unity to queer literary studies, the growing number of gay and lesbian studies within the social sciences seems to augur an increasing diversification and complexity, rather than a confluence,

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within Latin American approaches to sexuality. The hegemony of traditional notions of heterosexist masculinity and femininity, as well as other forms of representation, including political representation, are being challenged from a number of directions. This essay will attempt to illustrate this diversity by reviewing first literary scholarship and then turning its attention to folklore and anthropology, political science, political activism, and health policy.

QUEERING THE LITERARY CANON

The widespread popularity of writers like Manuel Puig and Reinaldo Arenas, among many others, appears to have been decisive in forcing literary studies to reflect more systematically on homoeroticism in Latin America. Critical efforts during the last decade contributed to making apparent the significance of homosexual desire in texts written by gay-identified as well as by ostensibly heterosexual authors. This 'queering' of the canon has contributed enormously to highlighting the importance of queer readings of Latin American literature.[1] A related path of inquiry has involved itself with untangling the complex relationships between national discourses and discourses of sexuality in Latin America. These studies have helped to bring to the fore questions of national pedagogy and heterosexism, marginal voices and the state, and the relationship between gay and lesbian writers and discourses of national identity.[2] Recently, books have appeared that address more directly the imbrications of canonical queer writers with the national project.[3]

The publication of Arenas's five-book sequence, the *pentagonía*, intended as a secret history of contemporary Cuba as well as a personal autobiography, was completed two years after the author's suicide in

1. An indispensable starting point is David William Foster, ed., *Latin American Writers on Gay and Lesbian Themes: A Bio-Critical Sourcebook* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1994). Also see David William Foster, *Gay and Lesbian Themes in Latin American Writing* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1991) and *Sexual Textualities: Essays on Queer/ing Latin American Writing* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1997). For studies on both Spanish and Latin American writers, see Emilie L. Bergmann and Paul Julian Smith, eds., *¿Entiendes?: Queer Readings, Hispanic Writings* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1995). See also Sylvia Molloy and Robert McKee Irwin, eds., *Hispanisms and Homosexualities* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1998).

2. Necessary starting points are Daniel Balderston and Donna J. Guy, eds., *Sex and Sexuality in Latin America* (New York: New York University Press, 1997) and Daniel Balderston, ed., *Sexualidad y nación* (Pittsburgh, Penn.: Instituto Internacional de Literatura Iberoamericana, 2000). See also *Revista Iberoamericana* 187: *Erotismo y escritura* (April–June 1999), issue directed by Daniel Balderston.

3. Notably, Licia Fiol-Matta, *A Queer Mother for the Nation: The State and Gabriela Mistral* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), and Emilio Bejel, *Gay Cuban Nation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001).

1990.[4] Francisco Soto's *Reinaldo Arenas: The Pentagonía* has the merit of concentrating entirely and in depth on Arenas' pentalogy.[5] It constitutes a systematic effort to show the coherence of Arenas' five novels and to demonstrate how Arenas' writing subverts the narrow tenets of socially committed writing that had become dominant in revolutionary Cuba. In the first part of the book, Soto traces how the Cuban documentary novel or *novela-testimonio*, a literary genre epitomized by Miguel Barnet's *Biografía de un cimarrón* (Biography of a runaway slave, 1966), became the kind of literary expression officially endorsed by Cuba's socialist regime. The testimonial novel, which privileged 'reality', eyewitness accounts, a linear conception of time, and politically committed writing, is discussed by Soto as the background against which Arenas rebelled and which his writing radically subverted. In the second part, Soto discusses in detail the specific characteristics of the Cuban documentary novel that are parodied and subverted in Arenas' novels. He shows how Arenas splinters the first-person narrative voice, deconstructs the reliability of witness accounts, parodies the use of documentation, and subverts linear time as well as the conventions of literary realism. These stylistic characteristics are traced throughout the five books and illustrated in some detail. The book also includes as an appendix an interview the author conducted with Arenas in 1987.

According to Soto, Arenas' writing represents "a staunch defense of our imaginative capabilities and our right to self-expression in a world beset by barbarity, intolerance, and persecution" (48). Soto's analysis tends to overstate, however, the importance of the documentary novel as a pre-text for Arenas' writing. Soto discusses the documentary novel only as an instrument for the Cuban regime's cultural politics. While it is true that the documentary novel was captured by the Cuban state in its efforts of self-mythologization, it would be unfair to suggest that the effects of testimonial writing in Latin America can be reduced to ideological manipulation. The decentering of the authorial voice and the displacement of the author-intellectual in testimonial fiction, for example, are not taken into account in this discussion. In this regard, the proliferation of testimonial narratives since the Cuban Revolution suggests that this genre has, in fact, helped (however problematically) to "give voice to the voiceless."

While Soto states that Arenas wove a diversity of voices into "a creative text that indeed presents vital 'testimonies' of human existence"

4. The *pentagonía* is composed of the novels *Celestino antes del alba* (retitled *Cantando en el pozo* in 1982), *El palacio de las blanquísimas mofetas, Otra vez el mar, El color del ve rano*, and *El asalto*.

5. See Francisco Soto's *Reinaldo Arenas* (New York: Twayne, 1998) for an excellent overview of Arenas' *oeuvre*. See also Esteban Montejo, *Biografía de un cimarrón*, ed. Miguel Barnet (La Habana: Academia de Ciencias de Cuba, Instituto de Etnología y Folklore, 1966).

(136), the structure of his argument against the documentary novel contributes to underplaying Arenas' own testimonial vein. Perhaps it would be more accurate to state, then, that Arenas subverts not merely the conventions of the documentary novel, but the conventions of literary realism in general and of any realist conception of experience. The portrayal of Arenas as a high-modernist artist struggling for freedom of expression, while clearly true in some respects, is also incomplete. This is not intended as a criticism of Soto's book, which remains an excellent and scholarly introduction to Arenas, but as a note of caution against an increasingly dominant image of Arenas as an apolitical and passive victim of totalitarianism and a defender of liberal democratic values. This image, popularized in part by Julian Schnabel's film *Before Night Falls*, also tends to underplay Arenas' political rage and to domesticate his aggressive sexuality to the needs of North American gay visibility.

A more ambivalent reading of Arenas can be found in the next book under review, Robert Richmond Ellis' study of homoeroticism in Latin American autobiography, *They Dream Not of Angels but of Men: Homoeroticism, Gender, and Race in Latin American Autobiography*. Ellis concentrates on the more autobiographical and testimonial texts by Arenas, his memoir *Antes que anochezca* and *Arturo, la estrella más brillante*. Ellis argues that in all of his writings, and particularly in his autobiographical texts, Arenas reflects on the importance of historical happenings and their effects on people. "But," he writes, "by reading these events through the dynamics of homoeroticism he also makes visible the economic and labor exploitation of gay and feminine-appearing men" (125). Thus *Arturo, la estrella más brillante* documents the exploitation of gay men relegated to Cuba's Unidad Militar de Ayuda a la Producción (UMAP) labor camps where they are forced to work as virtual slaves in the production of sugar for the Castro regime. Under such conditions, homoeroticism is deployed as violence rather than as freedom, and a bond of solidarity among queers remains unimaginable. Reading Arenas' memoir, Ellis points out how the writer, infected with AIDS, is haunted by dreams of imprisonment that ultimately reveal an internalized hatred of his own queer (i.e., feminine) identity. In one of Arenas' dreams, "his flight is obstructed by a bevy of fellow 'queerbirds', who sabotage his quest for freedom by literally filling his head with their noise and then themselves" (148). Queers in Arenas tend to constitute a non-community of traitors to each other, agents of an alternate violence to that of the state. It is this dimension in particular of Arenas' writing that makes highly problematic any attempt to situate him within North American discourses of gay identity and community.[6]

6. For a useful discussion of Arenas' anti-communitarianism see Carmelo Esterrich, "Locas, pájaros y demás mariconadas: el ciudadano sexual en Reinaldo Arenas," *Confluencia* 13, no. 1 (Fall 1997): 178–93.

They Dream Not of Angels but of Men is concerned with the intersections between homoerotic desire, race, and autobiography in Latin American writing. By examining the dynamics of homoeroticism and homophobia as well as the interplay between power, desire, and race, Ellis moves from early constructions of desire and race in the autobiographical writings of Juan Francisco Manzano and Augusto d'Halmar to the construction of masculinity and whiteness in Mario Vargas Llosa and the writing of gay male lives in Elías Nandino, Raúl Thomas, Reinaldo Arenas, and Héctor Bianciotti. The book looks at both fictional and nonfictional autobiographical writing. Ellis is attentive to the ways in which homoeroticism and race constitute relationships of inequality and violence in the writings of Manzano and d'Halmar, but is also concerned with how these writers envision utopian spaces crossed by homoerotic desire and male-male solidarity. These spaces reappear as brief visions in the writings examined in the latter part of the book, including Ellis' discussion of Xavier Villaurrutia's 1936 poem, "Nocturno de los ángeles," written in Los Angeles. Ellis' discussion of homoerotic utopian spaces highlights the crucial importance of language and of dreaming for transcending the real and imagined prisons of heterosexism and homophobia.

Ellis' discussion of Mario Vargas Llosa's autobiography, *El pez en el agua* (*A Fish in Water*) is particularly of interest because it intersects writing about homoeroticism with the discursive self-construction of masculinity. Ellis' analysis of Vargas Llosa shows how the young Vargas Llosa, a victim of his father's homophobia, became a writer in defiance of paternal machismo. Ironically, writing became a way for him to assume a role of masculine hegemony in Peruvian society, which culminated in the political leadership of the neoliberal right in his country. Vargas Llosa's assumption of a male heterosexual identity is linked, as Ellis demonstrates, to a denial of his own whiteness and an underplaying of his racial hegemony in Peru. Ellis also points out the significance of the "talk of homosexuals" that is present throughout Vargas Llosa's novels, a kind of talk which is necessary to constitute a male heterosexual identity, "as if the characters, and Vargas Llosa himself, were making a concerted effort to publicly affirm a heterosexual identity" (78), and which features problematic portrayals of homosexuals as helpless victims of society.[7]

Ellis' discussion is an important step in opening up a debate that has only begun to take place. While it is often assumed that *macho* masculinity is normative in Latin America, Vargas Llosa is one example among

7. Ellis mentions, for example, the particularly odious way Vargas Llosa gets rid of his Trotskyist hero in *Historia de Mayta* (Barcelona: Seix Barral, 1984) by suggesting his radicalism is really a cover-up and denial of his homosexuality.

many of how men of letters construct a masculine identity as a rejection of *machismo* and traditional male roles. It would be incorrect to assume, therefore, that a critique of *machismo* is absent from the writers of the 'boom'.[8] It would be equally incorrect to conclude, however, that such a critique necessarily renounces homophobia and misogyny. As Vargas Llosa illustrates, it is possible to subvert traditional models of masculinity while at the same time reasserting phallic power and denigrating women and homosexuals. It is therefore to a discussion of masculinity and femininity that we now turn for the next couple of books under review.

RETHINKING MASCULINITY AND FEMININITY

A critical revision of discourses on masculinity in Hispanic and Latin American culture is beginning to emerge. The common image of Hispanic men as either conforming to or rejecting stereotypical *machismo* is being displaced by more nuanced discussions of how different models of masculinity are reproduced and disseminated in Latin American culture. James Taggart's *The Bear and His Sons: Masculinity in Spanish and Mexican Folktales* represents an important contribution in this respect. This valuable study of folklore and anthropology is organized as a systematic comparison and analysis of several Hispanic folktales as retold by two very different storytellers: a Spanish man from Cáceres in Extremadura, and a Nahuatl-speaking Indian from Puebla, Mexico. Taggart applies the "cognate folktale comparative method" to discern similarities and differences in the informants' telling of the same basic folktales, including "The Bear's Son" and other folktales that represent relationships between fathers and sons, brothers, and men to each other and to women. Each chapter consists of a comparison and discussion of a specific folktale, which is given in English translation. An appendix provides the versions of "The Bear's Son" in Spanish and Náhuat, as told by the informants.

In his analysis of each teller's narrative strategies, Taggart pays considerable attention to the personal histories of each man, as well as to local history. He argues that in retelling and modifying folktales that circulate in other versions, his informants "represent their own experience" (237) by inserting details from their own lives into the telling. Taggart's most interesting findings have to do with how different models of masculinity are constructed and deployed in each culture through

8. The critique of *machismo* extends from (at least) Octavio Paz's *Labyrinth of Solitude* (Mexico City: Cuadernos Americanos, 1950) to the novels of the 'boom'. Especially noteworthy are Vargas Llosa's *La ciudad y los perros* (Barcelona: Seix Barral, 1962) and *Conversación en la Catedral* (Barcelona: Seix Barral, 1969), as well as Cuban writer Jesús Díaz's *Las iniciales de la tierra* (La Habana: Editorial Letras Cubanas, 1987).

the use of folktales, since in telling them these men were "reproducing masculinity . . . because they presented to their listeners models of manliness that justified and perhaps encouraged behaviors appropriate to their cultures" (15). Thus Taggart discerns in the Spanish man's use of brash and blasphemous language an identification with the hero, an exaggeration of his deeds, and a model of competitive masculinity linked to individualism and overdetermined by capitalistic relations of production which privilege the male's independence from other males. This helps to explain why male characters in the Spanish version of the folktales appear disconnected from each other and from their fathers, while heavily dependent on women. His Nahuatl-speaking informant, by contrast, distances himself from the hero and from any acts of violence that exemplify *ilihuiz* (a Nahuatl adverb signifying 'inconsiderately') and that threaten the cosmic order of nature. Men appear as much more connected to each other and to their fathers, which according to Taggart reflects both the persistence of a communal mode of production and the strong bonds of solidarity in his informant's own extended family.

Taggart's analysis is insightful and extremely well informed about his storytellers. In his approach to anthropology and folklore studies, however, Taggart tends to privilege a comparative and generalizing approach to gender. While he is careful to use revised psychoanalytic theories of gender (Nancy Chodorow and Robert Stoller), gender categories are treated as transcultural, so that while there is considerable flexibility as to how masculinity is defined and interpreted in each culture, there remains little doubt that masculinity is something real. Furthermore, very little attention is paid to how discourses of masculinity and femininity are deployed in a postcolonial context, and no mention is made of the ways in which homophobia and homoeroticism are constitutive of modern masculine identities. While it may be argued that the "talk of homosexuals" mentioned by Ellis in relation to Vargas Llosa is a rather modern and urban aspect of masculinity, it is hard to ignore its importance even for rural communities given the colonial history in Latin America of the 'feminization' of indigenous peoples by Spanish conquerors, including the demonization of homosexual behavior. While masculine identities are 'expressed', 'reproduced', and 'interpreted' diversely in Taggart's reading of folktales, they are not 'performed'. A more active dialogue with performance studies could help to enrich a discussion of the relationship between gender and storytelling (a kind of performance), especially in light of the crucial connection between gender and performance underscored by Judith Butler in her famous definition of gender as "an imitation for which there is no original."[9]

9. Judith Butler, "Imitation and Gender Insubordination," in *Inside/Out: Lesbian Theories, Gay Theories*, Diana Fuss, ed. (New York: Routledge, 1991), 13–31.

The Bear and His Sons remains, nonetheless, an outstanding example of ethnographic research and an invaluable resource for the student of folktales and folk culture, as well as a bold step in the direction of revising gender categories in the discourse of Latin American studies.

A much more radical approach to gender and sexuality is evident in Cynthia Weber's *Faking It: U.S. Hegemony in a 'Post-Phallic' Era*. A provocative and theoretically sophisticated book, it is organized as a series of essays about U.S. hegemony in the Caribbean. Weber's book pays considerable attention to the ways in which gender and sexuality not merely reflect, but indeed constitute, international politics. Using queer studies and deconstruction to push the boundaries of political science, Weber describes the United States body politic as she sees it today (i.e., in 1999), as

> a white headless body of indecipherable sex and gender cloaked in the flag and daggered with a queer dildo harnessed to its midsection. This figure finds its global footing on Caribbean islands and its hegemonic identity reflected in the Caribbean Sea. (1)

Each chapter concentrates on a different episode of American foreign policy in the Caribbean, which allows Weber to read a story of phallic loss, denial, and reassertion, culminating in transvestism, in the American interventions in Cuba, Dominican Republic, Grenada, Panama, and Haiti.

Weber uses Roland Barthes' *S/Z* to read America's "loss" of Cuba to Fidel Castro as a symbolic "castration" of the American body politic that has shaped subsequent policies in the Caribbean up to the present as efforts to compensate or disavow that traumatic loss of masculinity. According to the logic of the Cold War, the American body politic was cast as masculine and penetrative, and the Caribbean Sea as feminine, a mistress to be courted, dominated, and rescued from the invasive forces of international communism. The Caribbean Sea/See is thus recast as the mirror that reflects U.S. hegemony by projecting (sometimes as a screen) an image of phallic dominance and completeness.

Weber goes on to argue, however, that in a post-Reagan and post-Cold War era, the American body politic is no longer cast as masculine but instead as more fluid and queer, as exemplified in Bush's strategy in dealing with Manuel Noriega of Panama, which privileged encircling tactics and confused the inside and outside of the body politic by conflating international politics with the "domestic" problem of drug traffic. Clinton further queered the American body politic by disavowing America's phallus and appealing instead to a feminine or transvestite strategy of masquerade and dissimulation, which Weber analyzes in connection to the "intervasion" of Haiti. The United States "emerged from the intervasion of Haiti as a mixed foreign-policy figure because it overcame its castration anxiety in the Caribbean by embracing castration. As an already castrated figure, it has nothing left to lose and,

therefore, nothing left to fear losing" (126). Clinton's "kinder, gentler" strategy was therefore more appropriate to the new global order because a transvestite body politic is immune both to castration and to accusations of being a regional bully. Weber concludes that the present era is "post-phallic" in the sense that in order to ensure global hegemony the United States must conceal its "big stick" and instead cloak itself under the resolutions of the United Nations, as was evident in Clinton's policy towards Haiti.

While *Faking It* may appear to many social scientists as going too far in its dissolution of political science into sexual symbolism, its value lies in using humor to unmask categories of dominance and hegemony that are constantly at play in political discourse. For Latin Americanists, it offers a reminder that U.S. hegemony in the Caribbean is crucial to U.S. global hegemony. The Caribbean emerges then not as the passive victim of U.S. dominance, but as a site of instability that threatens to reveal the incompleteness of the American body politic. Weber's discussion of how the American body politic can no longer be cast in clear-cut terms inside and outside also reminds us of how immigration, particularly from Latin America, is reshaping the boundaries of the United States in accordance with the rules of the new global order.

LESBIAN AND GAY SEXUALITY

The following books under review are of particular interest because they focus in detail on the construction of gay and lesbian identities in Latin America and on the ways in which such constructions are mediated by critical engagement with politics, cultural identity, and personal and collective values. Norma Mogrovejo's *Un amor que se atrevió a decir su nombre: la lucha de las lesbianas y su relación con los movimientos homosexuales y feministas en América Latina* is a groundbreaking overview of lesbian emancipation movements and their relationship to gay liberation and feminism in Latin America. Submitted as the author's doctoral dissertation in Latin American Studies at the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, the book is structured as a history of the lesbian movement in Mexico as retold by many of the women who took part in it. It is based on extensive interviews conducted in Mexico and Latin America between 1994 and 1999. By using recorded testimonies, Mogrovejo engages in an effort to reconstruct and preserve the history of lesbian emancipation in Mexico and Latin America, a project that adds to Mogrovejo's organization of the Nancy Cárdenas Lesbian Historical Archive and Documentation Center in Mexico City in 1995.

Un amor que se atrevió a decir su nombre privileges the use of "life history" testimonies and in particular those of activist leaders who participated in more than one movement or group. Thus, Mogrovejo

takes a stand for lesbianism as both a sexual option and a political practice. Her use of oral history allows her to trace the dynamics of lesbian activism both within the homosexual and feminist movements in Mexico, and within autonomous lesbian-identified groups from the late 1970s to the 1990s. While the book centers on the Mexican case, references are constantly made to lesbian organizations in the rest of Latin America. An introductory chapter outlines the theoretical debates that have informed lesbian political practice, including radical feminism and contemporary queer theory. In the following chapters Mogrovejo traces the emergence and evolution of lesbian activism in Mexico and its progressive demarcation and autonomy from gay and feminist organizations. In the last few chapters she sketches out the development of lesbian conventions throughout Latin America and the difficulties of lesbian organizations at an international level. Of especial value is a chapter that maps out the development of lesbian activism in Brazil, Argentina, Peru, Chile, Costa Rica, and Nicaragua.

Mogrovejo's main argument is that, not unlike the feminist movement, lesbian emancipation followed three clear stages or waves. The first stage emerged in the context of homosexual emancipation in Mexico and in solidarity with anarchist and Trotskyist student movements. This helps to explain, for example, the adherence of the Mexican Homosexual Front of Revolutionary Action to a march in support of the Cuban Revolution in 1978. That same year, gays also adhered to the commemoration of the student massacre at Tlatelolco in 1968. In 1979 the first "Gay Pride" march took place in Mexico City. The context of emergence of homosexual liberation in Latin America thus coincided with left-wing student movements that criticized the authoritarianism of the Mexican state. In countries like Brazil and Argentina, the presence of military dictatorships made this solidarity between socialism and gay liberation more evident, even though gays and lesbians had to be much more cautious than in Mexico. Also significant was the fact that gays and lesbians organized around issues of political repression and joined their voices to the protests of other left-wing groups that were denouncing police brutality, raids, and political disappearances, thereby forcing many of these groups to take sexual repression seriously as a form of political oppression. This context of emergence helps to explain why lesbian emancipation in its first stages bore so many traces of left-wing political critique. Groups such as Lesbos, Oikabeth, and Lambda, for example, originally required their members to read texts such as Friedrich Engels' *Origin of the Family* and Kate Millet's *Sexual Politics*.

Mogrovejo demonstrates how lesbian liberation movements in Latin America have been strongly shaped by two currents. On the one hand, the international gay and lesbian movement was particularly significant during the 1970s and had its greatest impact on countries like

Mexico, Brazil, Argentina and Puerto Rico. On the other hand, feminism, which developed during the 1980s in these countries and the rest of Latin America, provided crucial spaces for the discussion of lesbian issues and the organization of lesbian groups. Under the influence of these two currents, argues Mogrovejo, the lesbian movement has evolved from a demand for equality to a struggle for difference and distinctiveness. In the 1990s it has reached a stage based on "diversity," by which is meant the consolidation of an autonomous identity, united with a renewed desire for participation in public spaces, in civil society, and in solidarity with other sexual minorities. Mogrovejo's narrative is explicitly evolutionary and sets the present stage as a more developed awareness of lesbian specificity. If the first stage helped to give a sexual turn to radical politics, the second stage, influenced by radical feminism, emphasized gender *difference* as a way of breaking away from gay men's monopoly over the homosexual movement. In this light, the "feminism of difference" (which Mogrovejo criticizes for its emphasis on essentialist categories of masculinity and femininity) should be understood as a natural reaction to the dominance of men in oppositional spaces and as an effective strategy in creating a sense of community among women.

Un amor demonstrates how lesbians throughout Latin America have been successful at using feminist spaces to put lesbian issues on the table and also to organize collectively and create webs of lesbian solidarity. Nevertheless, Mogrovejo also accuses the feminist movement in Latin America of hetero-centrism and of consistently disavowing its lesbian constituency. While Mogrovejo takes a stand for lesbian autonomy, however, she is also highly critical of the ways in which the lesbian movement has been plagued by fractures that have led to struggles for personal protagonism. She also expresses skepticism concerning the extent to which the lesbian movement's efforts to institutionalize lesbian-only groups benefits the majority of organized lesbians, who continue to militate in feminist or homosexual groups. Lesbian emancipation in Latin America also runs up against the institutionalized homophobia of Latin American countries, which throughout the 1990s often did little to protect gays and lesbians from persecution by conservative sectors and the Catholic Church. This often resulted in the inability to hold lesbian conventions in certain countries. Some of these "democratic" countries only very recently abolished laws that made homosexuality a crime, such as Ecuador in 1997 and Chile in 1998. However, homosexuality continues to be legally punishable in Nicaragua and Puerto Rico.

Un amor que se atrevió a decir su nombre is a pioneering effort and will remain an indispensable document for students of lesbian emancipation and for anyone interested in social movements in Latin America.

Its value in making the history of lesbian activism available to Latin American readers cannot be overstated. Mogrovejo's *Lestimonios: Voces de mujeres lesbianas, 1950–2000,* complements the former book by depicting the intimate aspects of lesbian life in Latin America. Mogrovejo here engages in what she terms "lesbian auto-ethnography" by weaving together different testimonial voices of lesbians into a text of short narratives about coming out, developing friendships and relationships, negotiating lesbian and feminist identities, and meeting women in other Latin American countries. The book depicts butch and fem lesbians against the background of rural towns and conservative families. It shows lesbian teachers, nuns, activists, mothers, daughters, and lovers. Two aspects that stand out are the overwhelming force of the family in Latin American culture and the crucial importance of international networks of friendship and solidarity in helping to develop lesbian self-awareness in Latin America. As if to emphasize this point, the last narrative in the book consists of an e-mail romance between two women from Peru and Mexico. An enjoyable and highly readable book, *Lestimonios* complements the view of lesbian public and political existence by looking at the aspects of gay existence related to personal and emotional life.

A closer look at gay and lesbian everyday life and a more focused reflection on sexual practices, against the background of personal and collective values, is beginning to emerge in Latin American studies. Héctor Carrillo's *The Night Is Young: Sexuality in Mexico in the Time of AIDS* is based on the author's research on HIV and AIDS prevention in Guadalajara, Mexico's second-largest city.[10] Carrillo successfully combines ethnographic research with public health policy and cultural studies. The book is structured around a nuanced argument that first explores how sexual identities are constructed and negotiated in contemporary Guadalajara and then moves on to analyze how gender and sex roles are internalized, interpreted, and acted out. He concludes by proposing health policies that would effectively integrate HIV and AIDS prevention into the totality of cultural meanings associated with sex and sexuality in Mexican culture.

The Night Is Young goes far beyond traditional scholarship on health issues and public policy by reflecting critically upon the ways in which ideas about sexuality are imbricated within a larger struggle to negotiate "traditional" and "modern" identities in a society that values its

10. Guadalajara is significant as a modern city that is also the seat of traditional values of *mexicanidad,* which makes it, as Carrillo explains in his preface, an ideal case study for changing attitudes towards sex. In 1991 Guadalajara was chosen to be the site for the ILGA (International Lesbian and Gay Association) conference. Violent local opposition from conservative sectors, however, forced the meeting to be moved to Acapulco.

cultural distinctiveness very highly. Carrillo's work shows that instead of simply adopting modern values or rejecting traditional ones, most people construct their identities by simultaneously drawing from both, thus creating a superposition of the old and the new that can be characterized as "cultural hybridity."[11] Carrillo demonstrates, for example, how participants in his study shifted back and forth from a traditional mapping of sexual identities based on gender and sex roles (masculine, feminine), to a more modern system based on choice of sexual object (heterosexual, homosexual, bisexual). In reflecting upon sexual identities, people did more than passively apply categories; they created multiple layers of interpretation and thus "were not only selecting their own identifications but also contributing to the shaping of the sexual landscape itself" (96).[12]

Perhaps one of Carrillo's most important insights, therefore, is that by critically reflecting upon their own sexuality, people engage in an effective transformation of the conceptual map that makes ideas about sexuality possible. Consequently, Carrillo's public policy recommendations emphasize the importance of creating the conditions for such a reflection to take place as one of the most effective ways of favoring ideas about sexuality that would lead to greater gender egalitarianism as well as increased awareness of the importance of safe sex.

As *The Night Is Young* makes abundantly clear, when it comes to sex people tend to enact "cultural scripts" that regulate not only which behaviors are appropriate but also what makes the experience of sex emotionally fulfilling. The case of Guadalajara suggests that in Mexican society sexual intimacy is strongly linked to relational and emotional needs that far exceed the sexual moment itself. Most of the participants in the study, hetero- and homosexual alike, described the experience of sex as one of intense emotion and unreasoned logic that presupposed a clear break from everyday rationality. Carrillo therefore suggests that sex can be understood in Mexican culture as an "altered state" that relies on abandonment (*entrega*) to the spontaneous flow of passion. For most of the people interviewed, then, the fact that they "knew" about condoms and safe sex did not translate into an ability to integrate them into the natural flow of

11. García Canclini's notion of "cultural hybridity" has been criticized because it often conceals a tendency towards synthesis, which renders it little more than a postmodern figure for "mestizaje" or "transculturation." Carrillo's use of the term, however, seems to respond more to a need to describe aspects of Mexican culture that resist, as well as incorporate, modern ideas about sexuality.

12. Carrillo's mapping of sexual identities builds on the work of, among others, Richard Parker in Brazil and Roger Lancaster in Nicaragua, both of whom Carrillo cites. See Parker's *Bodies, Pleasures, and Passions: Sexual Culture in Contemporary Brazil* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1991) and Lancaster's *Life Is Hard: Machismo, Danger, and the Intimacy of Power in Nicaragua* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1992).

sexual energy. Instead, condoms and safe sex practices were seen as conspiring against sexual fulfillment and even as evidencing distrust of one's sexual partner. Furthermore, pervasive cultural scripts about gender roles made it extremely difficult for women and nondominant men to suggest safe sex without ruining the sexual moment.

Carrillo's findings therefore indicate a fundamental incompatibility between public health discourse in Mexico and people's actual behavior. Health policies for HIV and AIDS prevention largely rely on theories of human action that "focus on the behavior of isolated individuals who are also assumed to be 'rational actors' who are fully in charge of their actions" (225). Hence, the highly medicalized discourse on HIV prevention rarely addresses how to integrate condoms and safe sex within the larger personal and collective values associated with sex. Consequently, efforts to increase awareness by emphasizing rational planning and "risk assessment" are unlikely to have a significant impact on AIDS prevention, Carrillo argues, without an effective integration of safe sex practices into the cultural dynamics associated with sex in Mexican society. Carrillo's conclusion is that in addition to disseminating information, health policy should be directed at creating the conditions for critical reflection about sexuality. This can be better done by acknowledging, rather than denying, the ways in which condoms interfere with the spontaneity of sex, while emphasizing the necessity for safe sex within the larger meanings associated with sexual intimacy, trust, and love.

One of the most valuable aspects of *The Night Is Young* is the author's ability to integrate his findings about sexual attitudes within the larger context of cultural identity. Despite the differences between homosexuals and heterosexuals, for example, Carrillo found that both "sought to effect change without disrupting fundamental aspects of Mexican traditional collective and family life" (110). Many young people in Guadalajara live at home and strongly rely on their families for emotional and material support, and thus face the challenge of seeking out more sexually liberated spaces without disrupting their relationships with family and nonhomosexual friends or creating a separate gay society. This often means that gays and lesbians end up reaffirming the status quo that oppresses them by leading double lives. It also helps to explain middle-class homosexuals' distrust of gay and lesbian activism, which they consider as "too radical." Nevertheless, attitudes to sexuality in Mexico are changing dramatically in large measure due to increased gay visibility facilitated by Mexican society's desire to be more "modern."[13] *The Night Is Young* is extraordinary in its breadth of scholarship, conceptual

13. This is evidenced by the emergence of gay bars in Guadalajara during the 1990s, creating what Carrillo describes as a "grid of homosexual spaces and social networks that was superimposed on the nonhomosexual city" (111). Carrillo's section on urban

rigor, and flexibility, and is likely to be influential across many disciplines. It is extremely valuable as an honest and critical look at sexuality and the politics of everyday life in Latin American society, and thus complements approaches to gay and lesbian self-representation through literature and political activism. It is of interest to practically anybody interested in contemporary Latin American culture.

As the books by Mogrovejo and Carrillo suggest, the construction and representation of sexual identities in Mexico and elsewhere is politicized differently than in the United States. Carrillo notes, for example, that "the broader cultural values influencing the direction of Mexican sexual identities seem to be defined by perceptions of family, solidarity, and belonging, more than by identity politics of the form that exists in the United States and other countries" (128). The negotiation of sexual identities in Latin America is thus imbricated within distinctive dilemmas about cultural self-definition, including Latin America's postcolonial heritage and the uneasy relations between indigenous and Hispanic cultures, the hegemony of literature vis-à-vis other cultural representations, and the limits of traditional political self-representation. As the case of Arenas and others illustrates, gay and lesbian identities in Latin America have been significantly shaped by direct opposition to often brutal authoritarian regimes and continue to be strongly influenced by a desire to belong within a larger, sometimes political, collectivity. In negotiating sexual identities, Latin Americans are constantly adopting European and North American ideas about sexuality, but also adapting them to a context that is radically different from that of North American liberal individualism. Consequently, taking sexuality seriously as an analytical category also leads to a critique of traditional political representation, not in order to cast sexuality as a post-political category, but rather to insist that politics cannot remain progressive without being informed by an awareness of gender and sex inequality.

To conclude, the diversity of approaches to sexuality in contemporary Latin America suggests that gay and lesbian studies will continue to expand and diversify in the future. The queering of the literary canon and the increased awareness of homoeroticism in literature is being complemented today by a number of approaches to sexuality across

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space and gay life adds to the study of homoeroticism and urban space in Latin America. Important studies are Néstor Perlongher's ethnography of male prostitution in São Paulo, *O negócio do michê* (São Paulo: Editora Brasiliense, 1987), and Juan José Sebreli, "Historia secreta de los homosexuales en Buenos Aires," in *Escritos sobre escritos, ciudades bajo ciudades: 1950–1997* (Buenos Aires: Sudamericana, 1997), 275–370. Also of interest is Flavio Rapisardi and Alejandro Modarelli, *Fiestas, Baños y Exilios: Los gays porteños en la última dictadura* (Buenos Aires: Sudamericana, 2001).

disciplines. It is worth pointing out, in this context, that while literature has been crucial in articulating a debate about the politics of desire in Latin America, the emergence of minority sexual identities also coincided with the gradual displacement of literature as the hegemonic category for articulating Latin American identity. Thus, we are faced today with the paradox of a growing body of literary scholarship on sexual identity in a field that has become increasingly post-literary. It is natural to expect that in the future literary studies will continue to be challenged and enriched by a closer dialogue with the social sciences. Notably absent from the books reviewed in this essay are topics such as bisexuality and transgendered identities, and the significance of queer diasporas of Latin Americans and in Latin America. It is to be expected that more scholarship on these and other topics, including more nuanced discussions of the interplay between sexuality, race, and class, will become available within Latin American studies in the near future.