

Paisajes de varones. Genealogías del homoerotismo en la literatura argentina

Jorge Luis Peralta

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One of the most important questions that one should ask when reading a book is what its political stance is. Or, more particularly: In which ways does this book consider literature as part of a political discussion inscribed in its time and place? It is clear that Jorge Luis Peralta's recent book *Paisajes de varones* analyzes literature as a discursive battleground in which homoerotism and the development of dissident subjectivities and desires create their own space. His book's main concern deals with the representation of a "homoerotic space" by specific subjects, in which men desire other men, and how these representations also sustain the construction of such subjects. Space then is not seen as a mere scenario or set in which events take place, but rather as a highly eloquent device that speaks loudly of the constitution of a heterodox desire and subjectivities. For this reason, Peralta's study observes a varied range of literary work (fiction and drama) written or published in Argentina prior to the period of affirmation of homoerotic literature in the 1950s. From "El matadero" (c. 1839) by Esteban Echeverría to Manuel Mujica Láinez's *El retrato amarillo* (1956), this book aims to reveal spatial representations tied to specific realities of their time. Then, this is not a "historical" itinerary, but a "genealogical" analysis of the spatial discourse in which homoerotism takes place.

So, again, I ask myself: What is its political stance? In my view, Peralta's book not only enhances literature's place as a historical device, but also as living material from which it is possible to fight for a more free way of living. It is, in my perspective, an extreme political gesture to analyze literature so rigorously in order to envisage how those fights were inscribed in space and are, in some way, still part of our daily battles.

First, Peralta offers a detailed explanation of its methodological tools and clear definitions of theoretical concepts. He sees, for example, the "homoerotic space" as a social product in constant re-creation and as something lived in its concrete historical circumstances (22). The analysis of literary works begins with Esteban Echeverría's "El matadero" and Leopoldo Lugones' "La lluvia de fuego" published in 1906; some early works that show "espacios esquivos," i.e. spaces that suggest a (certain) (homo)sexual otherness (36). As explained by the author, the homoerotic space is later "appropriated" by the subjects, as it happens in José González Castillo's play *Los invertidos* (1914). Other texts or excerpts (like the well-known scene in *El juguete rabioso* by Roberto Arlt), instead, show an internal and external oppression that subjugates men that desire men. In my view, the most interesting concept that arises from Peralta's analysis is what he calls "homotextuality." By

comparing Abelardo Arias' *Álamos talados* (1942), José Bianco's *Sombras suele vestir* (1941) and *Las ratas* (1943), and Manuel Mujica Láinez's *El retrato amarillo* (1956), Peralta observes that a certain mode of enunciation creates a "spatial discourse" in which homoeroticism is concealed. In other words, these texts create a "rhetorical homoerotic space" through discourse; and homoeroticism becomes incorporated in the form of allusions and ambiguity.

Unlike many other studies on Argentine homoerotic literature, Peralta's book clearly intends to propose something different. On the one hand, it does not offer a historical journey, but a genealogical study that compares a selection of texts constructing their own logic. On the other hand, it does propose a study through the literary production that portrays subjects or homoerotic acts, but rather it focuses on the constitution of space as a key concept to understand the development of such subjects. Peralta's book gives a literary device the role of a sociological, political, and historical element with highly eloquent evidence.

In addition, this book returns to past productions in order to unveil some of the predicaments that contemporary texts also face. By focusing on literary works prior to the constitution of a more defined and explicit homoerotic literature, Peralta deviates from current trends that solely observe recent production. For this book, the more "encrypted" homoeroticism of these texts contains a conceptual paradigm that can also unveil more current textualities. It provides a clear path in which these dissident subjectivities existed somehow and left their mark in literature for us and other literatures to find. Then, Peralta's analysis holds the idea that literature does not happen disconnected or isolated from a long journey in which texts and their contexts intertwine.

In conclusion, Peralta's *Paisajes de varones* provides a detailed analysis of a range of literary works that shows the constructions of "homoerotic spaces" and their subjectivities. It explains a conceptual development and clear transformations of such spaces as they become inscribed in the textual production from the second half of the 19th century up until the 1950s. The literary discourse functions as a fierce battleground in which the constitution of one's own space seems to become the ultimate goal. This may look as an outdated or undervalued *pathos* for current literary production that deals with dissident sexualities and identities, but as Peralta's study shows, this was not the case in the past and will clearly continue being in the future.

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