

Por un chato de vino

Raquel (Lucas) Platero. Ilustr. Eva Garrido

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In *Por un chato de vino*, Raquel (Lucas) Platero offers a first-person reflection, supplemented by Eva Garrido's poignant illustrations, on the social climate Spanish transmen in modern-day Spain. While laws like the 2005 same-sex marriage law and the 2007 law allowing transgender people to change the gender listed on their national identification document could be used to argue that Spain is becoming increasingly more supportive of its LGBT citizens, this work makes the compelling argument that, in terms of social attitudes and knowledge, a significant amount of work remains to be done.

The volume's title might seem strange for a book about the experiences of transmen; however, it is used to illustrate ways in which every day experiences, such as ordering a small glass of wine in a bar, are moments that transmen are subjected to constant vigilance. In the opening paragraph, the narrator describes a painstaking process of getting ready: tucking away curves, mounting a prosthetic penis, and relishing in the pleasant surprise of a shirt that actually fits his body well. This cultivated masculinity is the narrator's gift to himself, way of ensuring a sense of bodily comfort.

Despite the narrator's pleasure in his own body, he knows that he will still be scrutinized by passersby, who, "entre escandalizados y sorprendidos, no pueden dejar de mirarnos" (14). Transmen and their intentional markers of masculinity become objects subjected to the stares of strangers, who are constantly assessing them and trying to figure out exactly what they are: are they gay men? butch lesbians? It is from this deliberate refusal to fit into an immediate and easy classification of either masculinity or femininity that produces a sense of unease, of being "scandalized," among the cis-gender Spanish public.

To contextualize the experiences of transmen in modern-day Spain, the narrator also reflects on the probable experiences of M.E., a Franco-era transman who was arrested in 1968. Considering this, the book's title takes on a more concrete meaning: M.E. was arrested in a bar where he had ordered a glass of wine for not passing as a man within the rigid gender binary set by the Franco regime. M.E. was wearing boxers, socks, and basketball sneakers, masculine attire that did not fit with the feminine attire required of people viewed as women.

Because M.E., a person whose body was assigned female at birth, refused to conform to the dictatorship's expectations of a woman, he was thought to be a threat to the fabric of Spanish society, what the 1954 Law of Vagrants and Thugs deemed a "social danger" (22). As the narrator explains, the law did not directly condemn "conductas homosexuales" such as the use of men's clothes by a "woman." Instead, it punished people whose actions in some way offended or

scandalized any onlookers (22). M.E. was charged with a crime because of Francoist society's perception of him as a "mujer travestida de hombre" whose mission was to seduce unsuspecting women, an intolerable social scandal (16).

The use of "escandalizados" to describe the people who stare at trans people in modern times now takes on a historically-charged meaning, implying that trans people are still guilty of causing a scandal. Even though gender categories might not be as rigid as they were during the dictatorship—the narrator points to how female-bodied people who wear socks and pants are no longer considered transvestites (14)—trans people who deviate from the expectations associated with their biological body are still punished, except now they are diagnosed with a psychological disorder.

312

Perhaps one of the most brilliant aspects of this book are Eva Garrido's illustrations. There are several drawings that feature the same person, probably the mysterious M.E. By all physical markers, M.E. is a man: short hair, lean build, a flat chest. The only feature that might be slightly feminine is the face, perhaps too round and devoid of facial hair. M.E.'s unremarkably normal appearance highlights the absurdity of his arrest. In one picture, we see him being led somewhere by a police officer, and we find ourselves asking why. It does not appear that he offended anyone; indeed, in another picture he is seen chatting with a woman in a bar, who, not appearing seduced, leans in willingly.

A particularly interesting illustration shows two hands: one sets down a glass of wine in the background, while the other, in the front, reaches for it from across an open fissure. We can't see the owners' faces, but the hairy forearm of the reaching hand makes us want to believe the owner is a man. This picture reinforces the meaning behind the title, that seemingly normal events can be filled with risk or discomfort for trans men in a society that constantly uses physical clues to try to assume whether a person is a man or a woman.

It is clear that despite the progress achieved since the end of the Franco dictatorship, Spanish society still tends to view gender and sexuality as binaries: either male or female, straight or gay, with no room for the "otros espacios posibles para ser y estar" (53). Trans people, by virtue of their non-conformity to their birth-assigned sex, inherently occupy one of these other spaces of being, specifically, that of "*la no definición*" (33), a space that offers a valuable opportunity to deconstruct the categories of gender and sexuality. It is precisely this ambiguously grey space which the authors rightly claim deserves further exploration and recognition.

Por un chato de vino, through its text and illustrations, serves as an insightful wake-up call meant to stir Spanish society from any sense of complacency that might have settled after the passage of the 2005 marriage equality and 2007 transgender laws: There is still work to be done in order to fully resist and break from Spain's repressive Francoist past.

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