

Alfredo Martínez Expósito

Los escribas furiosos: configuraciones homoeróticas en la narrativa española actual

(New Orleans: University Press of the South, 1998, 202 pp).

Since the publication of Paul Julian Smith's ground-breaking study *Laws of Desire: Questions of Homosexuality in Spanish Writing and Film, 1960-1990* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), there has been a steady stream of articles and books analyzing the representations of male same-sex desire in Spanish culture. On the whole, these articles and books have focussed their attention on already well-known authors or film directors such as Juan Goytisolo, Terenci Moix or Pedro Almodóvar. In *Los escribas furiosos*, Alfredo Martínez Expósito carries us several steps further along the path to a more complete understanding of the complex place of male same-sex desire in Spanish culture by filling in some of the gaps left by previous studies. In his book, Martínez Expósito analyzes the portrayal of male homosexuality in novels, short stories, (auto)biographies and films produced in Spain between the recriminalization of male homosexuality in 1970 as a result of the notorious Ley de Peligrosidad Social and the decriminalized present. Martínez Expósito's aim in his book is to draw our attention to the recurrent thematic and formal configurations of male homosexuality in texts whose contribution to the Spanish homoerotic paradigm has been insufficiently appreciated. In achieving this aim, Martínez Expósito uses research in a number of scholarly disciplines and develops a sophisticated theoretical framework for his analyses at the same time as successfully exemplifying his arguments through detailed readings of a wide range of primary texts.

In his wide-ranging introduction, Martínez Expósito addresses a number of different questions, including the pressing importance of developing, in response to the situation of "intraducibilidad epistemológica" (p.6) that currently reigns between English-language and Spanish critics on the subject of male same-sex desire, a critical perspective on the narrative representation of homosexuality in Spain that takes into account the specificity and difference of male homosexuality's position in Spanish culture, especially when compared with England and the United States, and that is not based on the uncritical importation of Anglo-Saxon theoretical models. In connection with this, Martínez Expósito rightly points out the tremendous amount of basic research still required before such a critical perspective can be said to be established. In the introduction's second main section, Martínez Expósito outlines the four most influential traditions on which Spanish writers of homosexual narrative, the "escribas furiosos" of the book's title, have drawn since the 1970s: the Francoist tradition of silence,

censorship and denial, the tradition derived from French, English and North American writers, that influenced by surrealism and, finally, the tradition of male same-sex desire as Greek love.

Martínez Expósito begins the first chapter, "La construcción del personaje homosexual", by examining the use of gay characters in the 1970s and 1980s to personify particular ideological interpretations of male homosexuality, a use that had the aim of changing Spanish society's attitudes and represented an alternative to psychological treatises or political and moral texts. As Martínez Expósito points out, in many cases such texts effectively constitute a homosexual literature "*de tesis*" (p.39) with potentially destabilizing social consequences (p.34). The second half of the chapter analyzes the place that sexual orientation is given in the construction of contemporary gay characters as well as the different types of gay characters in circulation since the transition. A very interesting aspect of the book's analysis of the latter is the change Martínez Expósito traces in the position of the subject of gay literary enunciation according to which texts "*sobre [...] la homosexualidad*" have tended to give way, in recent times, to texts "*desde la homosexualidad*" (p.53).

The second chapter, "La homosexualidad tematizada", studies male homosexuality's emergence as a literary theme since the 1970s, an emergence made possible, according to Martínez Expósito, by the establishment of a homosexual dialectic as a result of the introduction of new ideas about male same-sex desire which challenged traditional views. This chapter also examines male homosexuality's "*irradiación temática*" (p.58) or ill-informed mixing with a range of other, essentially unrelated themes (such as incest or transvestism) as well as its transformation into a metaphorical model that gives displaced expression to other contents.

In his third chapter, Martínez Expósito outlines some of the dominant metaphors through which male homosexuality has traditionally been interpreted, namely, those of homosexuality as heterosexuality's unintelligible, unthinkable and unimaginable other, as inversion/perversion, as a crime, a sin and an illness. As its double-edged title, "*Metáforas enfermizas*", suggests, this chapter's core is a detailed and critical analysis of the use in recent Spanish homosexual narrative of the various interpretative possibilities of the homosexuality-as-illness metaphor, including homosexuality's metaphorical links with AIDS, contagion and the biblical story of Cain.

The fourth chapter, "El clero y el deseo", begins with an overview of the traditional and contemporary positions of the Catholic Church in relation to male homosexuality and draws on a range of texts, from the Bible to three recent Vatican pronouncements. In the second part of the chapter, Martínez Expósito analyzes the literary representation of homosexual priests in works by Antonio Roig Roselló, Miguel Ángel Riera and Alvaro Pombo and distinguishes, within the contemporary paucity of narrative treatments of the theme, two rather depressing types – "*los sacerdotes castrados*" and "*los sacerdotes reprimidos*" (p.134) – of which the latter at least contain the potential for rebellion, a rebellion realized,

however imperfectly, in the works of Roig Roselló.

The book's last chapter charts the gradual shift in Spanish narrative's depiction of male homosexuality away from the versatile "cauce trágico" so favoured in the 1970s, for different reasons, by all sides of the debate (homophobes, liberals and gay-affirmative activists) and towards the development since the 1980s of "una poética del humor" (p.137) in the work of writers such as Eduardo Mendicutti and Alberto Cardín as an element of the "normalización cultural" of homosexuality and the creation of an interpretative code for male same-sex desire beyond both tragedy and homophobic jokes. Finally, one of the many strengths of *Los escribas furiosos* is its excellent bibliography which includes a uniquely comprehensive listing of Spanish homosexual literature and film since the 1970s and a plentiful number of theoretical texts on homosexuality in Spanish and English particularly.

In conclusion, therefore, *Los escribas furiosos* is an engaging and innovative piece of research that makes an extremely valuable contribution on several fronts to the study of the representation of male homosexuality in contemporary Spain and opens up many new avenues for further research into an important but still relatively little studied aspect of Spanish culture.

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