2010-05-21

Queering Latin American Theater: A Panoramic Study and Its Performative Implications.

Joanne Pol

University of Miami, joannepol@hotmail.com

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarlyrepository.miami.edu/oa_dissertations

Recommended Citation


https://scholarlyrepository.miami.edu/oa_dissertations/415

This Open access is brought to you for free and open access by the Electronic Theses and Dissertations at Scholarly Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in Open Access Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Scholarly Repository. For more information, please contact repository.library@miami.edu.
UNIVERSITY OF MIAMI

QUEERING LATIN AMERICAN THEATER: A PANORAMIC STUDY AND ITS PERFORMATIVE IMPLICATIONS

By

Joanne Pol

A DISSERTATION

Submitted to the Faculty of the University of Miami in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Coral Gables, Florida

May 2010
A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

QUEERING LATIN AMERICAN THEATER: A PANORAMIC STUDY AND ITS
PERFORMATIVE IMPLICATIONS

Joanne Pol

Approved:

Hugo Achugar, Ph.D.
Professor of Spanish

Terri A. Scandura, Ph.D.
Dean of the Graduate School

Lillian Manzor, Ph.D.
Associate Professor of Spanish

Steven Butterman, Ph.D.
Associate Professor of Portuguese

Stephen Di Benedetto, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor of Theatre History & Theory
The aim of this dissertation is to analyze Latin American play texts (1970-2006), within their historical and geographical framework, under a queer theoretical lens. What I specifically focus my analysis on are destabilized identities through the play text's performative construction of gender as well as the theatricality. A queer theoretical dialogue not only breaks with the compulsory gay and feminist criticism, under which these plays have been categorized, but also allows for a (re)conceptualization of queer performativities in Latin American Theatre.
Appreciation

I would first like to thank both of my co-directors Dr. Hugo Achugar and Dr. Lillian Manzor. Since my arrival to the University of Miami, they have helped and supported me in countless ways. Thank you for demanding excellence until the end. It was through Dr. Manzor that I was able to make the ninety mile voyage and conduct research in Cuba. Words cannot express the significance of the trip. I am forever grateful to Dr. Achugar who destroyed every argument I had ever made which allowed me to further deepen and question, “el lugar desde dónde se habla” while simultaneously eliminating the word apply from my academic vocabulary because, of course, “lo que se aplica es loción”. My co-director’s guidance throughout my career is immeasurable.

My committee members, Dr. Butterman and Dr. Di Benedetto took a sincere interest in my project and offered me an open door policy along with countless hours of their much appreciated time before during and after the thesis writing process. Their engagement during those meetings was insightful and absolutely necessary for this accomplishment, thank you.

A special thanks to Dr. Laurietz Seda, for opening the door to the world of theater. I cherish her input as it has been invaluable in every degree I have attained. No matter where she is in the world, she has always only been a phone call away.

I would also like to thank Dr. Edwin Murillo, Dr. Sabrina Dräi-Wengier, Maidelín Rodríguez, Edwin Cuperes and Yesikka Vivancos for their unwavering support and friendship which made an otherwise solitary process seem like a group effort.
To Manny, I cannot thank you enough for all of the years of love and untiring faith you have shown me throughout my career. Thank you for showing me life outside of academia and supporting this dream to come true.

Para mi familia, esto es para y por ustedes. El apoyo y amor que ustedes me han dado no tiene precio. A mi madre, Rosa María y mi padre Jorge Luis, gracias por inculcar en mí lo que Miguel de Unamuno había expresado en un poema, “La sangre de mi lengua es mi espíritu y mi patria es allí donde resuene”. Ustedes siguen siendo mis maestros favoritos. Son mi tesoro, los adoro. Ustedes, me dieron la base y más para poder lograr sus sueños y el mío. Todo esto fue posible por el sacrificio heroico que hicieron en febrero de 1971.

To my brother José, thank you for always pushing me and having blind faith in my work and capacities. Rachel and Sebastian Pol, thank you for giving me my daily dose of happiness. I don’t know what I would have done without it. Sebastian, you’re my number one cheerleader!

To everyone who has helped me in achieving this goal: Thank You.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I.</td>
<td>INTRODUCTION</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II.</td>
<td>QUEERING HISTORICAL TIMES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III.</td>
<td>QUEERING HISTORY AND POP CULUTRE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV.</td>
<td>REDRESSING TRANSVESTISM IN A QUEER CLOAK</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V.</td>
<td>PERFORMING THE EXPLICITLY QUEER</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VI.</td>
<td>CONCLUSION</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Works Cited | 202 |
Appendix | 213 |
Chapter 1: 
Introduction

El género deja aquí de ser una frontera impenetrable. Se construye maleable, se puede desaprender y reaprender (Fuera de género).

Point of Departure:

The *theoretical* term queer is well known in the United States, in the academic arena, and has propelled a plethora of scholarly work as well as specializations in the field. In Latin America, academia has recently begun to embrace and dialogue with queer theory. Brazil, Uruguay and Argentina are the countries where the studies are most visible. A 2008 article, by Mariangela Giamo, documents the first academic seminar on the subject of queer in Montevideo, “Área académica queer Montevideo”. Virginia Lucas was one of the organizers of the symposium and reiterated that queer studies started in the eighties but has just recently arrived in Latin America. In the article, Roberto Echavarren also commented on the time lapse of the queer academic movement in the region: “Hay una cuestión de números que hace que acá todo llegue después” (Giaimo 13). The “time lapse” did not affect the Uruguayan critic. Roberto Echavarren has published two books, *Arte andrógino* and *Fuera de género*, which interestingly dialogue with queer theory and performativity but never explicitly mention either term. He does however, describe the theory as well as performativity in *Fuera de género*,


Although Echavarren had published *Arte andrógino* in 1998, a dialogue was not established with well known Latin American critics in the United States such as Daniel Balderston and Sylvia Molloy. In fact, the absence of Latin American critics residing in Latin America is palpable in compilations such as *Hispanisms and Homosexualities* (1998), in which all of the contributors form part of US academia. The possible reason for this is that both Balderston and Molloy are Latin Americans within the United States academic university system.¹ This points towards a disconnect in dialogue between those in Latin America who work with queer theory and those in United States academia. A bridge between the two regions seems to be forming as Virginia Lucas recently participated in “Queer Cultural Geographies” at The Sixth International Latin American Cultural Studies Conference at the University of Pittsburgh with queer U.S academics such as José Quiroga.² This indicates a hopeful point of dialogue. There is another point of contact that is still left to formulate. Although queer theory has made its mark in U.S academia, the dialogue between queer theory and Latin American Theater has been left on the outskirts.

As was previously noted, queer theory has recently begun to be embraced in Latin America. For some in Latin America the term queer is known as an

---

¹ Balderston is the Mellon Professor of Modern Languages at the University of Pittsburgh and Molloy is the Albert Schweitzer Professor in the Humanities at New York University.

² This conference took place April 1-3, 2010.
English pop culture term that is synonymous with homosexual; its theoretical underpinnings are discerned on a lesser scale. This was further elucidated in the interviews I conducted with critics and playwrights from Latin America. When I explained my dissertation and mentioned the term queer, they immediately associated it with homosexuality. Even after I clarified how I understood the term, its theoretical use as well as its implications, it was not understood. The e-mail communication below is reflective of the misunderstanding or perhaps resistance encountered:

Querida Joanne, para mí mariconería es un término que engloba una tendencia de ciertos homosexuales varones a imitar, sobrevalorar, hipertrofiar, conductas, ópticas, estilos y estéticas femeninas o relacionadas con la mujer. Creo que la mejor definición de esto la hace Lorca en uno de sus poemas: "Esclavos de la mujer, perras de su tocadores". Yo veo la homosexualidad masculina como un hecho profundamente viril, un amor rudo, crudo, hermoso en su sencillez, en la igualdad, en lo idéntico. Cualquier afeminamiento de esto es para mí una verdadera depravación. Me interesa mucho el arte relacionado con la vida homosexual, con ese arte de camaradas como diría Whitman, de hecho mi obra Soledades trata el tema. Yo soy alérgico a discotecas gays, espectáculos de transformistas etc. Tengo un grupo de amigos de toda la vida y con ellos me divierto mucho burlándome de ese arquetipo "gay-mariquita". Creo que esa cultura Gay es un producto genuinamente estadounidense exportado a través del fenómeno de la globalización. Aquí hay directores muy centrados en ese mundo Queer como Carlos Díaz (E-mail).

Sarraín is pointing towards a definition of a homosexual man who performs his sexuality correctly without “excessive theatrical visibility” (Molloy 153). His interpretation of performance of sexuality and gender is closely affiliated with Sylvia Molloy’s concept of posing. In her study of the turn of the century Argentinean psychologist José Ingenieros, she analyzes how Ingenieros equates posing with lying. Molloy suggests that effeminacy, “the exhibition of the
“feminine” for Ingenieros takes place when, “a man poses as what he is not—a woman—because, Ingenieros tells us, he is really a man (Molloy 153). Sarraín’s communication also reveals that what he perceives as posing a cultural displacement, as he describes it, was something that was exported. Molloy analyzes another one of Ingenieros’ cases where a young writer demonstrated effeminacy because he was influenced by the French “fumistes”. Molloy suggests, the displacement “produces something like a cultural relief, similar to the ‘we don’t have that here’ of certain anxious constructions of nationality” (154).

Sarraín’s response to my original question and explanation of queer theory illustrates the belief in subscribing to essentialist binaries; such as, defining a fixed sexual identity, regulating the performance of that identity, that queer theory purports to disrupt.

In another similar e-mail exchange with a theater critic, Edgar Antonio Moreno Uribe, about a specific character’s possible queer gender and sexuality, the critic replied that although that could be a possible interpretation, it deviated from the more important political facet of the play. That is, it deterred from a more valuable interpretation. My experience is not isolated; critics who work in the field of queer theory and dialogue with Latin America have had similar reactions. David William Foster succinctly affirms in “Relations between Queer Studies and Cultural Studies”,

Those of us working in Latin American queer studies often hear from colleagues, the writers themselves, and the Latin American public in general that the discussion of gender and sexuality is trivial—even irrelevant and impertinent—to the appreciation of the artistic quality of a work (66).
Despite the palpable resistance, I believe that this dissertation’s analysis of the theoretical dialogue with Latin American Theater can “aportar un granito de arena” by contributing to the field in offering a perspective that destabilizes the regulating hegemony.

I. Overview and Contextualization

In order to give the reader a historical and thematic contextualization, I provide a brief overview of New Latin American Theatre using the following critics: George Woodyard, Beatriz Rizk and lastly, Manuel Sosa-Ramírez.

George Woodyard, creator of the *Latin American Theatre Review*, described his conceptual framework of the New Latin American Theatre in the introduction to *Dramatists in Revolt: The New Latin American Theater*. The descriptive analysis he provides is based on a historical context as well as what he perceives to be the New Latin American Theatre’s literary antecedent. He determines the decade of the sixties in Latin America, which he also circumscribes, in his introduction, as the continent of South America, as the beginnings of the New Latin American Theatre: “The decades of the sixties witnessed a surge in popularity in Latin American prose unparalleled in the literary history of that area” (xi). He presents writers such as Julio Cortázar and Gabriel García Marqués as exemplary authors of the time who influenced Latin American dramatists. In drama, he perceives the move from the “regionalist to the universal” as a sign of change that marks the New Theatre in Latin America. Woodyard also expresses that the “incorporated expressionistic devices and
techniques [employed] in order to break the bonds of straightforward realism" were one of the key factors in defining this new theatre (xiii). He further categorizes these plays as new because of the incorporation of "major European trends as existentialism, the theatre of the absurd, and the theatre of cruelty and ritual" (xiii).

Woodyard's introduction, published in 1976, limits its description of Latin American Theatre to the literary movements that were concurrent with his chronological study. Manuel Sosa-Ramírez approaches New Latin American Theatre in a contestatory way in *El nuevo teatro español y latinoamericano: Un estudio transatlántico*, published in 2004, explicitly challenging the conceptual framework of the New Latin American Theatre. His analysis of critics’ use of the term, *nuevo teatro latinoamericano*, is founded on the careless use of the phrase *nuevo teatro latinoamericano* as an all encompassing umbrella term: “La noción de nuevo teatro, sin embargo, es en extremo problemática al momento de intentar definirla, ya que presupone la existencia de un teatro latinoamericano indistinto, consolidado y convenientemente teorizado” (Sosa-Ramírez 58). Sosa-Ramírez’s examination of the term, New Latin American Theatre, elucidates the levity with which it has been utilized by critics in the field. Furthermore, it calls attention to the implications of using this term as a signifier, in the Saussurean sense, with an intended universal signified that encompasses vast historical, thematic and geographical locations. He critiques the critics, who “simply” make use of the term “teatro latinoamericano”, with the supposed intent to describe and encapsulate, “la diversidad de prácticas teatrales del continente” (58). By first
questioning what is understood or is meant by Latin American Theatre, Sosa-Ramírez calls into question the task and difficulty of defining Latin American Theatre and by extension New Latin American Theatre.

An earlier text, by Beatriz Rizk, *El nuevo teatro latinoamericano: Una lectura histórica* (1987), defines el nuevo teatro latinoamericano in the spirit of Woodyard, that is, with determinate historical markings: “Llamamos nuevo teatro a ese movimiento teatral que surge al finalizar la década de los 50, extendiéndose a todo el continente latinoamericano hasta llegar a las comunidades hispanoamericanas en los Estados Unidos” (13). The previous statement is exemplary of what Sosa-Ramírez determines a misuse of what is purported to be an encapsulating term because of its generality. By explaining that the term nuevo teatro was coined out of a “necesidad de marcar el momento de ruptura con todas las formas heredades del teatro directamente anterior: el teatro burgués, llámese naturalista o costumbrista”, she echoes Woodyard’s conceptual framework of the genre, specifying markers that frame New Latin American Theatre (“El nuevo teatro latinoamericano” 13). She posits that the New Latin American Theatre “se fue ahondando en una problemática nacional propia, el mismo contenido fue dando la forma, creando sus propias estructuras” by breaking with Aristotelian drama (“El nuevo teatro latinoamericano” 34). Rizk summarizes the rupture with Aristotelian drama as follows: With respect to the formal elements, the dramatic representation had ties to epic theatre but was not solely limited to Brecht’s alienation effect but recompiled other traditions such as Comedia dell’arte and Agitprop. The drama’s action is no longer narrated solely
by a character’s point of view but the author’s reality which in turn has to be representative of “las contradicciones que marcan la circunstancia histórica que el autor quiere encarar” without forgetting Brecht’s notion, “en cualquier proceso en que existen contradicciones, existe una contradicción principal que es la que desempeña el papel fundamental dirigente, mientras que las demás son de importancia menor” (“El nuevo teatro latinoamericano” 41). The dramatic representation should also be episodic whereby the time, although not limited, should consciously historicize the events so that a confrontation can occur between the present and the past. The staging takes second place to the costumes worn: “El decorado [en la escenografía] no es tan importante como el traje” (“El nuevo teatro latinoamericano” 45). The characters can speak in the third person and frequently also, “salen de su papel para interpelar el público directamente” (“El nuevo teatro latinoamericano” 46). Brecht’s technique of Verfremdung is used in a different way, “El efecto V, […] se puede emplear de muchas formas; ya sea en la estructura de la obra, por ejemplo, con el uso de la parábola de la contraposición de sueño y realidad, con el uso del lenguaje […]” (“El nuevo teatro latinoamericano” 48).

In my dissertation, I use these markers, established by Rizk, by revisiting them and expanding upon them simultaneously with a queer theoretical perspective. Herein lies the questions that rise in the previously summarized texts, which span from the mid seventies to the twenty-first century: Why is there an absence of the term queer, an absence of the term Gay within the conceptual configuration of New Latin American Theatre? Is there a silenced dialogue that
can be evidenced in the texts that span the chronological time frame that the critics have established for the genre? These are some of the questions that I address in this study. The silence around the concept of queer in texts representative of New Latin American Theatre is the silence that I pierce in my dissertation.

II. Rationale

I uncover and analyze in depth the queer silences highlighted in the study of New Latin American Theatre and what later Beatriz Rizk in *Posmodernismo y teatro en América Latina: teorías y prácticas en El umbral del siglo XXI* (2001) and Alfonso de Toro in *Hacia una nueva crítica y un nuevo teatro latinoamericano* (1993) categorize as a tendency towards a postmodern vision of Latin American Theatre. The time frame I am concerned with is 1970-2006. I would like to clarify that although there have been articles and texts that work with the topic of queer and Latin American theatre, very few texts have addressed the relationship between the term queer and Latin American theatre. I emphasized the term and theory because of the existent conflation between the terminology queer and queer theory and its application in the academic arena of Latin American Theatre. The following selection of critics each highlights, in different capacities, the misuse of the term queer, queer theory and their application in their work.

Rizk’s text, *Posmodernismo y teatro en América Latina: Teorías y prácticas en el umbral de siglo XXI*, illustrates the lack of rigor with her
employment and definition of the term queer. Before I continue my analysis, it is important to note the marginal state of queer Theory within Rizk’s text which is exemplary of the field. The critic dedicates less than twenty five pages to the topic. Her contribution to the notion of queer appears insensitive. Her careless use and appropriation of the term queer and her lack of in-depth analysis is evident in her description and dictionary definition, “en el que el queer (término que en inglés significa literalmente ‘lo diferente’, ‘lo raro’, o ‘lo anormal’)” (“Posmodernismo y teatro” 248). Theoretically, this definition is deficient. Her text is written in Spanish and her translation of the term is just that, a dictionary definition. Without a theoretical basis she consistently conflates and misappropriates queer for gay. She acknowledges queer as a theory but categorizes it as a “generic” term which is used to identify certain artists because of their sexuality, “Queer es el nombre “genérico” con el que la crítica especializada en los Estados Unidos, y no pocos artistas, […] se han identificado e identifican a la producción artísticas de las personas homosexuales o bisexuales, sin distingos de género” (“Posmodernismo y teatro” 248). This definition is problematic on several different levels. Not only, as we previously mentioned, is the lack of theoretical basis painfully evident, but Rizk also essentializes the theoretical term, basing it solely on the author’s sexuality. Throughout her brief analysis she uses the terms and represents them as “queer/gay”, that is to say, for Rizk, the terms are interchangeable and synonymous.
The other problem that arises is her location of queer. If we refer to the title of her text, it seems as though what she designates as queer occurs solely in Postmodern Latin American theatre. My dissertation focuses on queer performances, within play texts that are categorized within the New Latin American Theatre framework. It is the queer performances that allow them, regardless of their chronological categorization, to dialogue more with the concept of the postmodern.

Another example of conflation of terms is an article by David William Foster, “La representación del cuerpo queer en el teatro latinoamericano” (2004). Upon my excitement of finding an article that discussed queer and Latin American Theatre, I immediately went to the article’s bibliography where there was not one theoretical text on queer theory. Unfortunately, this bibliographical lack was reflected in the article. From the onset of his study, he employs the term queer but never defines it. Critics need to define how they are using the theoretical term queer in their studies instead of leaving it as a signifier with a universal signified; by this, I mean that the critics assume that the term can only have one denotation that the readers are supposed to automatically understand what they mean by queer and how they are using the term. It is not until the very end of his analysis that Foster defines what he means by a queer body,

Si masculino/femenino, como todo par binario se tensa sobre la relación independiente entre los dos términos- femenino es no masculino; masculino es no femenino- media entre ellos lo queer

---

3 The way critics in Latin American Theatre have used queer theory in their analysis is reminiscent of Stanley Fish's seminal study, *Is there a Text in this Class?* These critics are using queer terminology (it may not necessarily be the theory) as if their readers belonged to a unique interpretative community.
In his definition, Foster alludes to terms such as masculine and feminine and uses them as examples of binary oppositions which queer theory deconstructs. Unfortunately, throughout his article, he continuously utilizes phrases such as, “la masculinización del personaje de Evita” and “se masculiniza” as markers of transgressions, but never questions the idea of masculinization (“La representación” 34). He also does not contextualize what he refers to as “masculinity” in its historical or geographical parameters within the theatrical text. What I perceive as problematic in this “queer reading” is Foster’s simplistic definition of queer theory as a tool that simply deconstructs sexual binaries. Foster is partly right, in that queer theory deals with sexuality, but it is not solely relegated the realm of sexuality.

Foster’s emphasis on sexuality in queer theory is apparent in one of his earlier articles, “Queer Theater” (1999). Throughout his article, he positions queer as the tool which opposes Adrienne Rich’s concept of “compulsory heterosexuality”. Foster later affirms this by discussing the relationship between queer and theatre: “The consequence has been that, when the queer comes on stage, its presence is mediated by the ways in which deviation from the norm of compulsory heterosexuality can and cannot be shown” (“Queer Theater” 20).

---

4 It should be noted that Foster directly uses Adrienne’s Rich’s theoretical concept of “compulsory sexuality” from Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence (1994), throughout his essay without directly citing her contribution.
Although queer theory does challenge compulsory heterosexuality, it is only a partial facet of the theory. I will later explain my understanding with respect to the theory. He further defines that for him, queer theory “[is] synthesized under the rubric of an investigation of how society defines and maintains ideologies of sexual identity, how resistances to those ideologies take place, and how those ideologies interact with other controlling principles and revisions of them in a society” (“Queer Theater” 19).

Aside from Foster’s use of the term queer, his visual representation in his later article “La representación del cuerpo queer en el teatro latinoamericano”, is the same as Rizk’s use; a synonym for lesbians and gay men, “La figura de Eva Perón ha sido asociada extensamente con la cultura lesbigay/queer en la Argentina” (“La representación” 32). Here Foster conflates and dismantles the theoretical views he described in his earlier article “Queer Theater” by misappropriating the term queer to specify a culture and not a theoretical standpoint. This causes confusion as to how Foster uses the term or theoretical term queer in his analysis.

David William Foster is not alone in equating queer theory solely with the study and question of sexual identity. The introduction to Reading and Writing the Ambiente (2000)—regardless of their chronological categorization—defines queer theory as “Queer critique differs from lesbian/gay critique, not only because of its emphasis on the constructedness of sexuality, but also because it examines the mechanisms through which sexuality can be discerned and known to all” (4). Later in the introduction, Robert Richmond Ellis reconfirms the
synonymous relationship between queer and sexual identity, “Queer theory might seem better suited to the task of reading Latino and Hispanic writing, since its fundamental interrogation of sexual identity in principle decenters Anglo-European configurations of sexuality” (5). In my dissertation, I attempt to disentangle the misappropriation of queer theory as a tool that is exclusively utilized to question sexual identity.

The last two texts, *Tropics of Desire: Interventions from Queer Latino America* by Jose Quiroga (2000) and *Plot Twists and Critical Turns: Queer Approaches to Early Modern Spanish Theater* by Matthew D. Stroud (2007) similarly dialogue with queer theory. Although Quiroga does not analyze Latin American theater in his texts he uses the tool of queer theory as the basis for the methodology for his text. Quiroga posits his queer methodology in the introduction of his text by explaining that desire is “rather an attempt to unsettle existing categories by exposing their complicities with those regulatory systems that kill desire” (6). The fault that I perceive with this study and Stroud’s is the essentializing element prevalent in both texts: The equating of a possible queer text vis-à-vis the author's sexuality. This is also apparent within the second sentence of Quiroga’s first chapter “The Mask of the Letter” where he analyzes Lota Macedo de Soares’ relationship with Elizabeth Bishop through Bishop's letters. Throughout the chapter, he continuously refers to the relationship as a homosexual relationship; that is, he categorizes it without questioning what he set out to do, analyzing the queer or “unsettling categories”. By contradicting his aim in the text, he reinscribes the categories he set out to question.
Where Quiroga’s text can be interpreted as falling into an essentializing trap, Stroud’s text explicitly states, in part, that the author’s life, specifically sexuality, is of importance when analyzing a text: “I am a middle-aged, gay, white American male. Although I have never before begun a critical study with a disclosure of my particulars before, I now firmly believe that literary criticism usually tells us as at least as much about the author as it does the text in question” (15). The opening statement of his work troubles me, not only because it makes a gross over generalized assumption, but also in how it was constructed as a narrow essentialized theory-less premise. In one swoop, he also limits and implies who can study the field and makes a stereotypical assertion as to who studies what and why:

It is mostly Latinos who study Mexican American literature and in general, at least there is a tendency for Spaniards to study Spanish literature, Argentines to study Southern Cone literature, and Puerto Ricans to study Caribbean literature. Not only do I find nothing wrong with these correlations, I consider this phenomenon a perfectly understandable manifestation of extending one’s personal journey of discovery to the literature of the culture to which one belongs (15).

Stroud’s statements are not isolated. In fact, the use of “I” within his text is common for the vast majority of queer theorists or critics who employ the term “I” or “our” in their work. Not using the biographical “I” is a definite distance I employ within the ideological framework of my dissertation. I believe that the use of “I” is a recurrent problematic in the existing dialogues within queer studies because it not only brings about the resurgence of the author but the author’s sexuality as a marker. Under a queer theoretical lens, the critic’s sexuality should
not form part of the analysis because it reinscribes a binary imposed on sexuality which is precisely what queer theory challenges. In the foundational essay, “Queer Theory: Lesbian and Gay Sexualities, An Introduction” (1991), De Lauretis defines herself within a sexual orientation, “Most of us lesbians and gay men, do not know much about one another’s sexual history, experiences, fantasies, desire, or modes of theorizing” (vii). There are critics who came after De Lauretis, who unlike the pioneer theorist, impose a divisory line that presupposes an “our” and an 'other'. This becomes explicit and direct in Suzana Danuta Walter’s essay, From Here to Queer (2005). After questioning the terrain of queer theory, Danuta Walters states that, “One of the interesting aspects of this phenomenon of queer theory in the academy is that you do not have to be gay to do it; in fact it is much better if you are not” (9). For her not being what she defines as the opposite, gay or lesbian, “lets you off the identity hook” (9). As problematic as this statement is, her footnote to the statement opens Pandora’s Box, “I say this only half-jokingly. Although, clearly most queer theorists are gay, there does seem to be a proliferation of the ‘Sedgwick’ phenomenon in which married, heterosexual college professors throw off their married heterosexuality (but stay married and heterosexual) and claim ‘queerness’ (193). The binary of sexuality Danuta Walters analyzes has been destabilized by Judith Butler in her text, Undoing Gender. She defines and “opens” the field of queer theory by positing,

After all, queer theory and activism acquired political salience by insisting that antihomophobic activism can be engaged in by anyone, regardless of sexual orientation and that identity markers are not prerequisites for political participation (7).
Butler’s understanding of queer theory is salient with how I view and dialogue within the theoretical field. (I will later define this in the methodology section.)

Another problem in Stroud’s queer approach is the way he uses queer as an umbrella term: “queer is much broader and encompasses not only all things homosexual and gay but bisexuality, transgendered individuals, and other blurring of traditional narrow, binary categories" (22). All of the categories that he chooses to place under the term queer to deal with mainly sexuality. He further clarifies how he chooses his play texts by stating, “In other words, here it is enough for a text to ‘read queer,’ or for a play to resonate with a modern gay and lesbian spectator, or for one to notice theatrical themes currently associated with alternative sexuality […] the preferred term here is that which encompasses the greatest variety of nonstandard sexual behavior: queer” (24). I can then summarize that what he is studying here are not unstable identities but a categorization of sexualities, specifically, homosexuality and alternate sexuality. Herein lies another misappropriation of a term where I find a serious gap between queer theory and the dialogue with the texts analyzed. In the section that follows I propose how to bridge this very gap.

III. Contribution and Methodology

In the previous two parts of this introduction, I have underlined the exclusion of queer from the studies of Latin American Theatre as well as a rigorous queer theoretical methodology within the few existent studies of Latin
American Theatre. It is here, within this established gap between queer theory and Latin American Literature and Theatre, that I hope my dissertation contributes to the field of Latin American Theatre. Opening a dialogue between queer theory and play texts from 1970-2006 allows me to elucidate the play texts' queer performative moments. As previously noted, queer theory has been utilized loosely and there has been a lack of concrete articulation with respect to queer and its theoretical possibilities. I define queer following the editors' introduction to *LGBT Studies and Queer Theory: New Conflicts, Collaborations, and Contested Terrain*. Perhaps the following is one of the most succinct and salient definitions of LGBT studies and queer theory: “gay and lesbian studies have tended to emphasize the stability of gay and lesbian identities, while queer theory, though growing out of LGBT studies, primarily aims to continuously destabilize and deconstruct the notion of fixed sexual and gender identities” (*my emphasis* 6). In *What’s Queer about Queer Studies Now?* (2005), David Eng, Judith Halberstam and José Muñóz start their analysis by stating how the term queer was interpreted (since what they consider) its inception in 1990,

> It was a term that challenged the normalizing mechanisms of state power to name its sexual subjects: male or female, married or single, heterosexual or homosexual, natural or perverse. Given its commitment to interrogating the social processes that not only produced and recognized but also normalized and sustained identity, the political promise of the term resided specifically in its broad critique of multiple social antagonisms, including race, gender, class, nationality, and religion, in addition to sexuality. (1).

I would like to adopt this understanding of queer, in part, in its encompassing ability to go beyond the discourse of the disruption of fixed sexualities to include the disruption gender, identities and class. In addition, I share Karen Lovaas
Johan P. Elia and Gust A. Yep’s understanding of the rift or a tension between LGBT studies and queer theory. They posit that the “clashes” between LGBT studies and queer theory lie in “their respective positions on sexual identity politics” (5).

Utilizing queer theory within the previously articulated theoretical configurations, I analyze and reconceptualize Latin American Theatre by focusing on the (de)construction of gender and on destabilizations of sexuality. My analysis focuses on the performativity of these destabilizations theoretically from two camps: queer theory and performance theory.

How I do this varies from the previous studies of Latin American theater which have treated the play text as literature by solely analyzing plot and character. I analyze the play text as a theatrical piece by taking into account the written elements such as stage directions, setting, mise en scène, that configure the texts theatrically. The play text forms part of the primary research. Archival material such as reviews, interviews, production histories and digital copies of the performances also form part of the primary evidence. These materials are important because they allow for a contextualization of the period and region in which these plays were written and produced. In other words, the chronological, historical and geographical specificities of these plays a theatrical event are of prime importance in order to demonstrate the way in which queer themes, subjects, identities and genders are specific to their region or a trend in Latin American Theatre. The results of this analysis also allow for a comparative study
among the different play texts’ queer moments and their construction of the queer within their historical and geographical contexts.

The “Playbill”

The play texts that I have chosen span from 1970-2006. In part, some of them were chosen because of what some may perceive as a complete disassociation from queer due to the playwrights' sexuality and the text itself. The first chapter, “Queering Historical Times,” focuses on René Marqués play, *David y Jonatán* (1970). It was chosen partly because of René Marqués’ privileged status in Puerto Rico as a literary master and because of the content of his play. Marqués constructs his drama to interrogate what some have denominated as a provocative relationship between the Old Testament’s characters of David and Jonathan. The possible homosexual relationship that exists between these two characters does not solely explain my choice to include this text in my dissertation. There is also an interrogation and challenge of masculinity and how it is defined as well as a desire of incest between Jonatán and his sister Mikol. This play’s stage directions explicitly dialogue with queer and how the queer performative is to be acted out within its historical framework. The staging employed also destabilizes Marqués’ trajectory as a playwright. It should also be noted that this is one of Marqués’ lesser known plays and that the little criticism dedicated to it focuses on the homosexual relationship between David and
Jonatán. It is through a queer reading of the theatrical elements of the play text that I elucidate the destabilizations of masculinity between David and Jonatán, the Biblical story as well as Marqués’ production of play texts.

The second chapter, “Queering History and Pop Culture” focuses on the playwright José Ignacio Cabrujas and his play text, *El día que me quieras*. Both have been canonized and have subsequently been reviewed by the critics who have solely focused on its historical and political aspects. The plot of *El día que me quieras* (1978) is situated in the early twentieth century. Pío, one of the main characters, expresses a heavy communist political discourse. The play begins with Pío communicating his disbelief of Vladimir Lenin’s death to his girlfriend of ten years, María Luisa, with whom he’s remained celibate. Cabrujas also centers his play around another historical event, the famed tango singer Carlos Gardel’s visit to Venezuela on April 27, 1934. It is specifically around Gardel’s visit that I elucidate the queer performativities of gender destabilization between some of the male characters: Carlos Gardel and Plácido, María Luisa’s uncle, as well as Pío and Carlos Gardel. In this chapter, I reveal, through a queer lens, how the décor and the set description of the living room, in which the action takes place, frames and dialogues with the subsequent destabilizations that occur between the male characters. It is through this analysis that I also demonstrate how the use of history and specifically pop culture challenges the play text’s prior heteronormative conception.

---

5 This is evident both in the content and in the titles of the following articles: *Biblica histórica puertorriqueña: La impotencia según Marqués*, by Matías Montes-Huidobro and *Historias de familia:: Migraciones y escritura homosexual en la literatura puertorriqueña* by Jossianna Arroyo.
The third chapter, “Redressing Transvestism in a Queer Cloak”, analyzes queer moments in Cachafaz, written by Raul Natalio Roque Damonte Botana better known by his nom de plume, Copi. I chose this piece, because of the little critical attention it has received and because the majority of the existent criticism on Copi’s work has centered on the author’s well known homosexuality. The playwright’s open sexuality is often applied to the analysis of his work. In my analysis, Copi’s sexuality and gender performance dialogues with Cachafaz in order to disentangle the application of his sexuality to the text and his literary production.

The two main characters of the play, Cachafaz and Raulito, live in extreme poverty and Cachafaz, out of necessity reconciles his hunger for nourishment by murdering government officials and committing cannibalism. After Cachafaz conducts his assassinations, he brings his “fresh meat” home, butchers it and hangs it in the home he shares with Raulito. Most of the play is centered on the butcher scenes that take place in their home. These descriptions are reminiscent of the butcher scene in Esteban Echeverría’s, El matadero. The play also refers to another literary text of Argentina, the epic poem Martin Fierro, due to the story line of an impoverished gaucho who befriends another male and both are persecuted by the police. The poetic prose employed is the same as in the epic poem. Another facet of the play analyzed is the construction of gender vis à vis the performance of queer gender by Raulito/a and Cachafaz’s queer desire. Through a queer reading of the intertextual use of the two canonical texts I demonstrate how Cachafaz questions conceptions of progress, the gaucho and
national identity, and heteronormative sexuality as well as a possible rewriting of two national texts.

The last chapter, “Performing the Explicitly Queer,” focuses on the play text and a digital performance of *Mi muñequita, la farsa* by the young Uruguayan playwright, Gabriel Calderón. Calderón was selected because of how he explicitly and openly deals with sexuality and gender without delineating the topic as subtext: because of his historical timeframe he is also able to establish openly a dialogue with a possible queer sexuality. The archetype of a traditional middle class family is presented and the institution of the family is simultaneously destabilized. The main character Nena, who at first we perceive to be a child, plays with a doll who is portrayed by another actor. The interaction between Nena and the doll allows the spectator to understand the pain and loneliness that Nena feels. It is not until later in the play that it is revealed that the little girl, Nena, is not really a little girl. She is an adult who is in a child’s mental state because of her uncle’s emotional and physical rejection after a sexual experience she had with him. The inclusion of this facet of taboo sexuality sets up the parameters for a text, where the revelation of the sexual taboo and the toll it takes on Nena are at the forefront of the arguments for her and her relationship with her mother. The destabilizations described are Nena’s interaction with her doll as well as Nena’s relationship with the doll and her mother, “el qué dirán”, the construction of gender and sexuality. It is through an analysis of the destabilized staging that I elucidate the direct dialogue between the theatricality and the construction of gender as well as society’s role within that creation. This
allows me to also demonstrate how the archetypal family is completely destabilized and mirrored in the theatrical representation.

To conclude, these play texts have been circumscribed to compulsive heteronormative criticisms. Under a queer theoretical lens, the play texts can be “outed” of the stringent criticism that the closet that has imposed on them. The ultimate goal is to challenge and destabilize the play texts as well as the criticism that shrouds them.
Chapter 2: Queering Historical Times.

David y Jonatán

"I am distressed for thee, my brother Jonathan: very pleasant hast thou been unto me: thy love to me was wonderful, passing the love of women. (2 Samuel 1:26)

René Marqués and His Relationship with Puerto Rico:

¡Si yo no quiero, ni usted ni nadie puede hacerme americano! (Caballero)

René Marqués is undoubtedly one of Puerto Rico’s most prolific and multifaceted writers, whose works of literature, whether poetry, drama, short stories, novels or essays, demonstrate an intrinsic relationship with Puerto Rico's cultural and political state. Throughout his writings he crystallized his political affiliation and thoughts as an ardent supporter and advocate for his homeland’s independence of what he perceives as the United States’ domination. His unenthusiastic views of the United States and its invasive imposition within the economic, political, and cultural aspects of Puerto Rico championed and permeated his literary production. In the article “René Marqués 1919-1979”, Luis A Gautier summarizes the main theme throughout Marqués' production of literary production:

El tema central en la obra de René Marqués es su preocupación por el destino político de su país, así como el amor por la tierra, la cultura, y las tradiciones puertorriqueñas, que deben ser conservadas y preservadas a toda costa contra la amenaza que representan para éstas 'los bárbaros del norte' (Gautier 60).
Eleanor J. Martin’s text, *René Marqués*, also affirms the central theme in Marqués’ work, “Marqués’ work is a mirror of his times; it is particularly a reflection of the United States’ intervention in Puerto Rico’s economy, culture, and politics since the turn of the century” (17). Marqués’ political views are overtly palpable throughout his literature pieces.

René Marqués’ experience as an author was not spatially or geographically limited to Puerto Rico. He had expanded his cultural experience early on in his career. He first travelled to the University of Madrid in 1946 where he wrote *El hombre de sus sueños* (Martin 11). In 1949, on a Rockefeller Scholarship, Marqués travelled to New York to study drama at Piscator’s Dramatic Workshop at Columbia University where he also wrote, in English, *Palm Sunday* (Martin 11). René Marqués’ criticism has exhausted the indubitable link between his literary production and its relationship with the political aspects on a national level and its direct relationship to the biographical.⁶ Marqués lived through some of Puerto Rico’s most tumultuous times: The modernization of Puerto Rico and later the Vietnam War.

Marqués’ later works, however, have been referred to as “the Biblical trilogy”: *Sacrificio en el Monte Moriah* and: *David y Jonatán. Tito y Berenice: Dos dramas de amor, poder y desamor* are dramatic texts that have not received as much critical attention as Marqués’ other works. Much emphasis and scholarly study has been placed on the link between Puerto Rico’s modernization at the

⁶For a more in depth study on the link between Marqués’ biography and his literary production, see Ileana Diéguez Caballero *Lo trágico en el teatro de René Marqués* and Eleanor J. Martin’s *René Marqués*. Both critics have linked Marqués’ agricultural upbringing and college major to the author’s portrayed disdain towards the industrial movement in Puerto Rico.
helm of the United States and his earlier work, but the criticism seems to have quietly dismissed his last three written plays which are more closely linked to the event and timeframe of the Vietnam War.

**René Marqués: The Closet and the Critics**

Any inquiry to find criticism of his earlier works will have fruitful returns. Nevertheless, most of the criticism has been positioned mostly around themes such as nationality, feminism, misogyny and sociopolitical historic moments of the island and its relationship with the United States and Spain. On a more interesting note, within the critical body of works on René Marqués, what is increasingly difficult to come across are details of the author’s personal life. Only recent texts, which deal with the topic of Queer, have openly discussed, albeit briefly, Marqués’ sexuality. Arnaldo Cruz-Malavé’s article, “Toward an Art of Transvestism: Colonialism and Homosexuality in Puerto Rican Literature”, in ¿Entiendes? Queer Readings Hispanic Writings, openly states:

In order to understand the centrality of homosexuality in Puerto Rican literature and culture even prior to the emergence of a lesbian and gay literature of identity, in order to understand, that is, how the specter of homosexuality is not only its excluded other but its objected self, one must first know that one of the most important Puerto Rican writers of the twentieth century, a writer who is generally cited as the Puerto Rican classic, René Marqués, was a homosexual (141).

Cruz-Malavé further highlights the fact that the playwright, “never identified himself as a ‘gay’ writer and whose comments on what he saw as a North American phenomenon, the gay movement were quite disparaging” (141).
Another critic which also chooses to draw attention to Marqués’ sexuality is Agnes I. Lugo-Ortiz’s. In her article, “Nationalism, Male Anxiety, and the Lesbian Body in Puerto Rican Narrative” in *Hispanisms and Homosexualites*, she analyzes “El asedio”, a short story by Emilio Díaz Valcárcel. As Lugo-Ortiz explains, although this short story was written by another Puerto Rican author, René Marqués decided not to include it in the collection of short stories *Cuentos puertorriqueños de hoy*. The critic rationalizes that the exclusion of the work within the collection of short stories is due to the elimination of a short story, “‘El asedio’ the ‘sordid theme’ in question, no doubt, was lesbianism, ‘the love that dare not speak its name’” (78). Moreover, she also considers that:

Beyond biographical explanations that would suggest that Marqués was suppressing a text that personally implicated him (Marqués himself was a homosexual), it is possible to formulate other reasons linked to the programmatic coherence of Marqués’ literary project as it is articulated in the anthology and to the systems of representation that are privileged there” (78).

Interestingly, Lugo-Ortiz also clarifies any doubt about Marqués’ opinion of the novel; that is, Marqués gave the story “the most extensive and celebratory comments” (78). By including Marqués’ positive overview of the short story, “it revealed to us an author with a great mastery of narrative techniques” the critic then leaves as the only possible option for the exclusion of “El asedio” from the anthology because of the implications it may inspire of René Marqués’ guarded sexuality” (78).

Josianna Arroyo also discusses the playwright’s sexuality in her article, “Historias de familia: Migraciones y escritura homosexual en la literatura puertorriqueña”, “Para René Marqués, que nunca hizo pública su
homosexualidad” (363). René Marqués is even excluded, in part, as an author in David William Foster’s Latin American Writers on Gay and Lesbian Themes: A Bio-Critical Sourcebook. Although the author is not explicitly listed as a writer in the anthology, he is included, to some degree, in the preface.

Foster’s words are chosen very carefully as he refers to René Marqués, “I venture to suggest René Marqués under the category of writing with a ‘gay sensibility’ (“Latin American Writers” xi). He also includes Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz and Jorge Luis Borges in the same category. Whereas Foster further explains why Jorge Luis Borges and Sor Juana might fit in the last category, he leaves Marqués out of the explanation. Foster’s preface does not “out” the author as a homosexual man; instead he only “ventures” about his writing. On one hand, Cruz- Malave, Lugo- Ortiz and Arroyo made a conscious decision to alert their readers, inform, or reconfirm to their readers the playwright’s sexuality. It is important to note that these critics write after Foster’s groundbreaking work in the early 90s. It is only after the foundation was laid out by pioneers such as Foster that direct statements such as: “Marqués was a homosexual” and “Marqués himself was a homosexual”, were possible.

Alfredo Villanueva Collado’s article, “René Marqués, Ángel Lozada, and the Constitution of the (Queer) Puerto Rican National Subject”, enlightens the Puerto Rican’s author’s omission from David William Foster’s sourcebook. He explains, “I found out Joe Lacomba (his former lover) had refused permission for Marqués to be included” (181).7 Villanueva Collado also indicates that Luis

---

7 Joe Lacomba is also known as José Lacomba. He received his Ph.D. from the University of Kansas in 1970. His thesis is titled: Symbolism in the Works of René Marqués. He also had a
Rafael Sánchez, a gay Puerto Rican well-known author, also preferred to veil his sexuality. The critic, Villanueva Collado, "received an urgent message from one of his [Luis Rafael Sánchez’s] colleagues at City College of New York (CUNY), advising me that if he were to be included in the volume ‘his mother would die from a heart attack’" (181). Sánchez, however, is included in Foster’s anthology because of the two caveats he imposed upon the anthologist: “Foster himself would write the section on him and would not describe Sánchez as a ‘gay author!’” (181).

René Marqués’ sexuality, however disclosed or undisclosed it might be, will not be a direct source for our interpretations of his work. Most of the studies published on Marqués draw a direct line from his bibliographical information to his literary production. From his upbringing in an agricultural arena, “The grandson of agronomists, Marqués followed in the family tradition earning an agronomy degree from the college of Agriculture and Mechanical Arts in Mayagüez in 1942”, to his fervent disagreement with Operation Bootstrap within the analysis of his works, and within recent years his homosexuality (Martin 15). To clarify, this is not to say that the studies which have made a direct correlation between the author’s life and his work are faulty. My analysis draws on the author’s historical background but in a different capacity; that is, his previous themes in his play texts will be utilized in order to demonstrate the queering of his play *David y Jonatán* as well as his theatre production. This will be done by very close professional relationship with the author. In 1951, in conjunction with René Marqués, they started the theater program, which is still in existence, at the Ateneo Puertorriqueño (Pottlizer 62). He also put together, “the stage set for the production of this work [*Sacrifico en el Monte Moriah*] in the Culture Institute’s Thirteenth Annual Theatre Festival” (Reynolds 97).
comparing the playwright’s trajectory with his other literary productions, specifically his plays. An analysis of queer moments such as incest, queer masculinity and homosexual desire through the stage design and stage directions will reveal destabilizations of the Biblical text as well as Marqués’ trajectory as a playwright.

Understanding *David y Jonatán* within the Biblical Trilogy.

Between 1969 and 1970 René Marqués wrote and published what is often referred to as the “Biblical trilogy.” These three plays, in sequential order, *Sacrificio en el Monte Moriah*, *David y Jonatán*. *Tito y Berenice: Dos dramas de amor, poder, y desamor*, were three out of the five last plays the playwright writes and publishes before his death, March 22, 1979. The first play of the trilogy premiered in Puerto Rico in, Teatro Tapia, in San Juan during the Festival de Teatro Puertorriqueño in 1970 ("La leyenda de Abrahán" 273). *Sacrificio en el Monte Moriah* separates itself from the latter two dramas with respect to its dramatic component of the stage directions and its immense attention to details.

In order to understand what sets *David y Jonatán* apart from the first play in the trilogy and Marqués’ earlier dramatic production, an understanding of the

---

8 F. Vázquez Álamo’s prologue leaves this distinction to the critics in the introduction to: *David y Jonatán. Tito y Berenice: Dos dramas de amor, poder y desamor*, “¿Constituyen éstos, junto a *Sacrificio Monte Moriah* una especie de ‘trilogía’? ¿Se trata de otro ciclo en la trayectoria creadora del autor? ¿Un ciclo que podríamos llamar bíblico histórico? Queden estas interrogantes en manos de estudiosos y exegetas de la obra del dramaturgo (8).

9 These were the last plays published, however in 1971 he, "publishes *Ensayos 1953-1971, Carnaval afuera, carnival adentro*, and *Vía crucis del hombre puertorriqueño*. Later in 1976, he published “his second novel, *La mirada*, and a third collection of short stories, *Inmersos en el silencio*” (Martin 13).
Sacrificio en el Monte Moriah, its conception, and process of creation will prove fruitful as a base of comparison for our analysis. Sacrificio en el Monte Moriah published and written in 1969, follows the same style which is present across the genres he wrote: meticulous attention to detail. The essay, “La leyenda hebrea de Abrahán, Sara e Isaac” in Puertorriqueño dócil y otros ensayos (1953-1971) gives insight to his fastidiously detail oriented writing. In July of 1971, Marqués writes “La leyenda hebrea de Abrahán, Sara e Issac”. In the introduction to his essay, he discusses the first staging of Sacrificio en el Monte Moriah and the purpose of his essay,

Por falta de tiempo y espacio no pudimos vaciar en aquellas notas ensayísticas todo el material bibliográfico hebreo y cristiano estudiado, como tampoco ampliar el análisis e interpretación del mismo. El presente ensayo cumple esa función. Nuestro punto de vista no ha variado, pero se han expandido y explicado, casi diríamos exhaustivamente, las dos teorías que más controversia suscitaron cuando el estreno de la obra (“La leyenda de Abrahán” my emphasis, 273).

Marqués' use of the word, “exhaustivamente”, is not a euphemism. He employs it in the strictest sense of the word. His bibliography for the essay is extensive as it encompasses a thorough analysis,

En nuestro caso hemos analizado el texto [la Biblia] en español (dos versiones católicas) así como en inglés (versión King James), aparte de consultar y estudiar obras extrabíblicas, históricas y arqueológicas, así como de exégesis de aramistas y hebraístas, judíos y cristianos (“La leyenda de Abrahán” 286).
In addition, the playwright also conducted an interview with a priest before his play was published on September 27, 1968, about the different terminology of names such as Yavé, El and Baal (“La leyenda de Abrahán” 306).

Although his essay was published after the staging of *Sacrificio en el Monte Moriah*, it is clear throughout the piece and his works cited that Marqués had thoroughly researched the topic before (and/or during) his writing of the play text. This is palpable in the prologue to *Sacrificio en el Monte Moriah*, where the playwright includes “Notas preliminares sobre: La leyenda hebrea de Abrahán Sara e Issac” which, as its footnote states, was supposed to be part of the playbill explaining the poetic licenses of the playwright,

Originalmente el autor (para explicar sus licencias poéticas respecto al material legendario) concibió este trabajo como unas breves notas a incluirse en el programa del estreno de *Sacrificio en el Monte Moriah* en Puerto Rico, dando por sentado que el público cristiano actual estaría al tanto de la leyenda hebrea y de la evolución histórica del texto (“La leyenda de Abrahán” 21).

Once can discern from his detailed essay, his play is not simply about the Biblical story of Sarah and Abraham but about the complexities that surround the story. I have chosen to refer to it as a Biblical story. Marqués, on the other hand, clearly refers to both within the essay’s title and throughout the essay as a legend. He further states that his analysis of the “legend” is not, “teológica [...] sino sencillamente histórica, psicológica y literaria” (“La leyenda de Abrahán” 274). From his perspective, we can then better understand the underpinnings of the rest of his plays within the Biblical trilogy; that is, he is analyzing the Bible from a literary critic’s perspective, “Abordamos la leyenda hebrea como lo que
es: un texto literario susceptible de someterse, en todo lugar y tiempo, al análisis y la crítica literarios. Nada más, pero nada menos” (“La leyenda de Abrahán” 274).

Within the playwright’s literary criticism of the Biblical story, he takes every opportunity available to demystify historical inconsistencies both within Sara and Abraham’s story as well as the Bible itself. With respect to the Bible, he traces the oral origins of the Old Testament and the adaptations the stories “suffered” throughout the centuries. He explains that the stories,

(…) habrían de sufrir, naturalmente, alteraciones desde su concepción original, de acuerdo a la imaginación y habilidad dramática de cada narrador oral, adaptándolas éste a cada auditorio específico y aplicándolas (para fines tanto de recreación y entretenimiento, como de lección moral o ética, a las circunstancias… (“La leyenda de Abrahán” 275).

Marqués also problematizes the written aspect of the religious text in addition to the numerous editorial processes the Biblical text underwent,

Unos cortaban o evitaban piadosamente pasajes que les parecían ofensivos en las leyendas populares. Otros respetaban las profanidades o irreverencias de la leyenda, pero añadián o interpolaban nuevos episodios para justificar o excusar los pasajes más crudos, escabrosos o bárbaros (“La leyenda de Abrahán” 276).

The playwright also takes into account and ardently criticizes priests as the Bible’s last editors, and what he refers to as their sloppy work, “chapucería”. Marqués admits that the priests of the time had a difficult task to complete, “fueron los que se toparon con la tarea más ardua” (“La leyenda de Abrahán”
He does, however, perceive that the priests did their job, by adding confusion and contradictions to the text,

Causa asombro que después de tantos siglos de ediciones, cortes, correcciones, añadiduras, deformaciones, interpolaciones y manoseos del material original oral, en manos de tantas escuelas de escritores, éste haya logrado preservar en términos generales indudable valor literario, simbólico y humano (“La leyenda de Abrahán” 276).

In effect, the playwright’s study of the Bible, specifically the Old Testament, does not exactly perform a critical literary analysis but more of a historical analysis of the text. By analyzing the text only as a historical document Marqués demystifies any wonder or miracle that the Old Testament contains for its endless believers. Through his historical analysis of the text, he demonstrates the gaps between the oral and what was actually written and rewritten. The playwright demystifies the text and its inconsistencies by logic and historical facts. Within these gaps, he inserts his sharp critical commentaries.

His analysis of Sara is an excellent example of Marqués’ historical analysis. He traces back her genealogy and finds an inconsistency with her name within its historical framework, “Sara en hebreo quiere decir ‘princesa’ y es inadmisible que este nombre se diera a una niña en una tribu semita, nómade y maloliente donde no existía el concepto clasista de ‘nobleza’ (“La leyenda de Abrahán” 286). Marqués could have left the description of the other tribes as Semites or nomads. Instead, he chooses to add the pejorative adjective of “maloliente” or foul smelling. The insertion of this adjective is necessary in understanding the playwright’s intimate perspective of what most believers would
consider to be blasphemous. Marqués also goes through the great detail of referring to Genesis 17:15, where Sara's name appears as “Sarai”. He focuses on the genealogy of her name and its incompatibility with the “legend” to fully demonstrate the written inconsistency as well as to exhibit Sara as a foreigner; that is, not pertaining to Abraham’s tribe.

Throughout his essay, he continuously refers to the Bible as a literary text. He consistently makes references to Biblical figures as characters in a novel, “Sara es coprotagonista con Abrahán en el drama conyugal que supuestamente, ha de dar origen al pueblo de Yahvé” (“La leyenda de Abrahán” 287). He also refers to the author(s) of the Bible as narrators, when he continues his exposition on the genealogy of Sara's name, “Para parir a Isaac tenía que “hubarizarse” o “hebraizarse” (de hecho, el lenguaje era arameo), lo cual el narrador tardío logra con un mero juego lingüístico atribuido a Yahvé” (“La leyenda de Abrahán” 288). Marqués’ persistent labor in uncovering what he portrays as a written history which does not conform to historical fact seems to be the main goal in this essay. Every example he provides from the Biblical text is counteracted by his ever meticulous research on the topic. Not only does he challenge the concept of the creation of the text from its oral beginnings to its written form as he ceaselessly brings to the reader's attention its faulty rewritings, but he also discloses his own personal opinion of the credibility of the story.

Marqués succinctly delves into the contradictions embedded within the legitimacy of the Egyptian Pharaoh’s interest in Abraham’s wife, Sara, as a lover and member of his many concubines. As the playwright describes the previous
scene he also incorporates his meticulous research which always attempts to invalidate the written text or supplement another verifiable possibility, “Abrahán hace pasar otra vez a Sara por hermana para satisfacer el apetito sexual del príncipe presumiblemente cananeo (aunque de existir, pudo quizá ser filisteo) Abimelec de Gerar, (“La leyenda de Abrahán” 289). He also examines Sara's appearance and age as factors for staging Sara's entrance into the Pharaoh's concubine as incredulous.

Tendría aún que seguir siendo Sara mujer joven y hermosa, pues ¿cómo vamos a imaginarnos a un sofisticado príncipe de aquella época (fuese cananeo o filisteo) deseando acostarse con una maloliente mujer del desierto (de edad avanzada, además) teniendo él en su propio reino las mujeres más jóvenes y hermosas a su entera disposición? (“La leyenda de Abrahán” my emphasis, 289).

Marqués' continual reference to Sara as foul smelling, and her depiction as an old lady who has lost her sexual luster for others reinforces his historical stance with respect to the religious text he analyzes. For the playwright, the Bible contains a level of exaggeration which, as he examines, reaches ludicrous proportions. The essayist's sharp tongue is not only reserved for the characters he analyzes but also for those who wrote and rewrote the texts. Marqués historically contextualizes Sara's age with respect to the countless other beautiful women which would have been more appealing to the Pharaoh. After much thought on the matter, he wonders, what was so unique about Sara that made the Egyptian Pharaoh want to recruit her into his concubine? He resolves, based on his premise, Sara's old age, and status as a nomad and her more than likely unattractiveness in general, but specifically to the Egyptian prince, the literary
incredibility is botched by its author, the Catholic church, “Partiendo de nuestra premisa (contraria ésta a la imagen sumisa y un tanto idiota impuesta a este personaje a posteriori por la iglesia cristiana primitiva)” (“La leyenda de Abrahán” 289).

His negative opinion on the church is preface to his essay, “La leyenda hebrea de Abrahán Sara e Issac”, Marqués summarizes the audience’s reaction to his play’s premiere. The playwright states that there were some audience members who were shocked and displeased at his interpretation of the Biblical story; that is, Sara portrayed as a Sumerian and Abraham’s impotence. Not explaining how he was able to discern audience members’ faiths, he claims, “Curiosamente, los consabidos aspavientos no surgieron de miembros de la colonia judía en San Juan (intelectualmente más sofisticados, sin duda), sino de algunos cristianos puertorriqueños (católicos y protestantes)” (“La leyenda de Abrahán” 273). Marqués bases his criticism of the other religious denominations, such as Catholics, on what he believes is their lack of in depth readings of the Bible,

Entendemos. A los católicos laicos, por tradición, jamás se les ha estimulado a leer y estudiar a fondo el Viejo Testamento. Por otro lado, los sacerdotes, ex-sacerdotes e incluso obispos y arzobispos de la vieja guardia, no familiarizados con las más modernas escuelas de exégesis bíblicas, siguen tan en babia como sus cófrades laicos (“La leyenda de Abrahán” 273).

Marqués also analyzes the Protestant faith and what he perceives as their pitfall,

En cuanto a los protestantes son, en su popular mayoría, fundamentalistas, es decir, toman con ingenuidad conmovedora cada versículo literalmente en vez de literariamente, destruyendo
Through the playwright’s essay and preface, which as he stated should have formed part of the dramatic text, *Sacrificio en el Monte Moriah*, Marqués gives his readers and audience another layer of his play’s significance as a criticism of the Puerto Rican followers of the Catholic, Christian and Protestant faith. His essay seeks to demystify the Bible as an infallible text and exposes the psychological and literary qualities of the Bible by treating it, as he said as, “un texto literario susceptible de someterse, en todo lugar y tiempo, al análisis y la crítica literarios” (“La leyenda de Abrahán” 274). His conclusion cements his act of “exposing” the Biblical text by concluding that, based on his historical research and inconsistencies found in the Old Testament, “los cristianos de hoy [siguen] proyectando retrospectivamente la maravillosa unicidad de Jesús, sobre la multiplicidad de figuras totalmente ficticias o semi-históricas de la primitiva literatura hebrea” (“La leyenda de Abrahán” 304). Marqués’ criticism elucidates the construction of the Bible, specifically the Old Testament. He also goes on to favor the Jewish believers by clearly stating that they are more sophisticated and intellectual, “intelectualmente más sofisticados, sin duda” (“La leyenda de Abrahán” 273). Marqués’ essay, replete with its brash criticism, gives insight into his play *Sacrificio en el Monte Moriah* and, more importantly for this study, augments the playwright’s perspective into the two subsequent plays of the trilogy, *David y Jonatán. Tito y Berenice: Dos dramas de amor, poder, y desamor.*
Queering David y Jonatán

The dramatic text David y Jonatán. Tito y Berenice: Dos dramas de amor, poder, y desamor was published immediately after Sacrificio en el Monte Moriah in 1970. Although this analysis will focus on David y Jonatán, as a play text which stands on its own, the editor F. Vázquez Álamo, provides the playwright’s thought on staging the plays as separate entities, “El autor pide o exige que ambas obras (David y Jonatán y Tito y Berenice), relativamente cortas, se representen conjuntamente a pedido al editor que se publiquen” (Vázquez Álamo, 10). Vázquez Álamo states that the playwrights reasoning for this is obvious, “Aunque período histórico, trama y personajes son muy distintos, hay en ambas el tema común subyacente de ‘amor, poder y desamor’ ” (10). Although the central themes, which the editor points out, may unify both of the plays, they can nonetheless stand alone and be staged separately.

Whereas René Marqués’ Sacrificio en el Monte Moriah was staged in his lifetime, the two latter Biblical plays remain unstaged.10 In fact, to date, the two play texts have not been staged as a three dimensional object. A recent personal e-mail communication with Roberto Ramos Perea, the current director of the Archivo Nacional del Ateneo Puertorriqueno y Rector del Conservatorio de arte Dramático del Ateneo, about David y Jonatán’s possible staging, enlightens even more so the intricacies that were involved in the staging history:

10 Ileana Diéguez Caballero’s prize winning essay, Lo trágico en el teatro de René Marqués indicates that as of 1983, neither of the plays had been staged.
En efecto, la obra nunca se ha escenificado. Trató de hacerse una vez en un teatro de una universidad privada (la Universidad Interamericana) pero fue censurada por la administración. Nuestros records sobre esa obra son mínimos pues los herederos de la obra de Marqués son en extremo celosos con esos documentos (E-mail).

Ramos Perea’s statement is in consonance with the apparent tight hold, which Marqués' heirs continue to maintain on his literary production. Earlier, Alfredo Villanueva Collado’s essay, “René Marqués, Ángel Lozada, and the Constitution of the (Queer) Puerto Rican National Subject”, shed light onto this apparent censorship from José Lacomba, René Marqués’ supposed former partner, on Marqués' inclusion into David William Foster’s Gay and Lesbian Sourcebook. From the critics’ perspective, it would then seem as if there is an impenetrable shroud over certain aspects of Marqués’ work which seem to come forth when directly or indirectly linked to the playwright’s sexuality.

Since there is no staging of the play, this study will be based on the play text. David y Jonatán is based on the Biblical story of the two Old Testament figures David and Jonathan. Marqués constructs his drama around what some have denominated as a homosexual relationship between the characters of David and Jonathan in the Old Testament. Those who wish to conform to the traditional heteronormative Biblical interpretation have maintained that the passage in the first book of Samuel does not elicit an interpretation of a provocative sexual relationship but rather speaks of a true platonic friendship between two men. In David y Jonatán, the Biblical story referenced is utilized to further destabilize fixed sexual constructs in the story, which religious scholars
have tried to maintain. The play text’s ensuing analysis will provide more detail on the possible homosexual relationship evidenced in the play text. Vázquez Álamo explicitly describes and underscores the relationship between the two protagonists in the play as a homosexual love,

Ahora, no obstante, nos sorprende a la inversa no con una, sino con dos piezas escritas casi simultáneamente sobre tema y ambiente bíblico-históricos (David y Jonatán, amor homosexual, y Tito y Berenice, amor heterosexual) bajo el título común de Dos dramas de amor, poder y desamor (8).

From the outset of the prologue, the nature of the sexual relationship is revealed openly; that is, there are no hesitations to mask the homosexual relationship. Understanding the type of sexual relationship that evolves in the play would then prove reason for the heirs of René Marqués’ literary production to be guarded. This assumption is based on the previous articles analyzed which all pointed towards René Marqués' self-imposed and imposed by José Lacomba, closeted homosexuality.11

A phone call to the René Marqués Foundation in San Juan Puerto Rico, however, provided more insight on homosexuality in David y Jonatán and the playwright.12 Throughout most of the duration of my conversation, I was completely unaware with whom I was conversing. I was assured that it was someone who had an immense knowledge of René Marqués and his literary production. I immediately disclosed that I was a doctoral student researching the

11 If we recall, Alfredo Villanueva Collado's article, “René Marqués, Ángel Lozada, and the Constitution of the (Queer) Puerto Rican National Subject”, clarified that José “Joe” Lacomba refused to have Marqués included in David William Foster’s Latin American Writers on Gay and Lesbian Themes; A Bio-Critical Sourcebook.

12 This phone call is the result of the advice and information Roberto Ramos Perea provided to me in an e-mail communication.
play *David y Jonatán*. The response on the other end of the phone was very positive, “Ahh qué bien. Sabes que fue una de las última obras que René publicó e incluso han querido volver a publicarla, pero imagínate gratis” (Personal Interview). From the onset of the conversation, there was a warm welcome and openness in discussing the play. This attitude contradicts the previous criticism which portrayed Marqués’ heir(s) as being overly guarded with respect to a connection between homosexuality and the playwright. The interest from the interviewee was readily palpable and an attention to talk about the much forgotten play was directly exposed, from his question to me, “¿Tiene tiempo?” (Personal Interview). After explaining my interest in the text, its status as never being staged and the lack of attention received from the critics, the response I received to my comment was very revealing,

**Interviewee:** También, René aborda un tema que nunca lo había interpretado y lo hace de una manera más sutil que lo trabaja más en lo político. Que es un tema que lo tiene hasta los animales. Fíjate que el título de la obra es Fulano y otro hombre y **eso** es importante (Personal Interview).

Without me implicitly or directly even mentioning homosexuality, the interviewee openly discussed it. As a matter of fact, its inclusion in the play text was given as the first reason for the play’s omission on stage. It was not until later that the interviewee revealed his identity firstly through his comments and secondly through his confirmation:

**Interviewee:** La simbología me parece sumamente importante como *La muerte no entrará en el palacio* o *Los soles truncos*.  
**Pol:** Sí eso lo vi en una tesis, ¿con quién hablo? ¿Es el señor José Lacomba?
It is extremely interesting to note that the man who had been accused earlier as a censor of René Marqués’ homosexuality and the possible link with his literary production, was freely talking about homosexuality in direct relation to René Marqués’ work and demonstrated interest in the study of this play text by stating, “Tienes un tema muy nuevo”, “Sí, me parece que tiene un tema nuevo, algo que no se ha tocado” (Personal Interview).

The René Marqués Foundation has the largest collection of René Marqués’ literary production. Its president, José Lacomba, confirmed the lack of attention the play text has received to date. The literary critic, Matías Montes-Huidobro, expressed why he thought the play text has been excluded by the critics,

---

13 What also adds intrigue to the plays is the lack of attention they have received among the critics. In actuality, it is not only the latter two plays but the trilogy of Biblical plays which have seemingly escaped critics’ attention. *Sacrificio en el Monte Moriah* has received more attention than the latter two plays, but not by far. In book length publications, where René Marqués’ collection of works has been analyzed, the Biblical trilogy is minimally included. That is, these latter plays are not studied, as the others are in the collection, but instead, briefly summarized. One of the few exceptions is Bonnie Hildebrand Reylnd’s *Space, Time and Crisis: The Theatre of René Marqués*, which by comparison provides a more in depth analysis of the techniques employed by the playwright throughout the plays and its implications on her literary analysis. The attention furnished to the trilogy of plays within academic journals proves to be just as scarce. Out of the three plays, within the MLA’s collection, Jossianna Arroyo’s 2002 article, “Historias de familia: migraciones y escritura homosexual en la literatura puertorriqueña” includes *Sacrificio en el Monte Moriah* as part of her analysis, however she does not spend much time analyzing that play as she does with René Marqués’ novel, *La mirada*. The only other article which studies the Biblical trilogy while at the same time allowing for a more than superficial analysis of the play, *David y Jonatán* is Matias Montes-Huidobro’s, “Bíblica histórica puertorriqueña: La impotencia según Marqués” (1983).
Muy curioso, ciertamente, que no se haya escrito mucho sobre ellas. Quizás se deba, cuando menos en parte, a que por su carácter bíblico no resulten "populares". (...) Re-considerándolas hoy en día, me parece curioso que "David y Jonatán" no haya sido más estudiada, y hasta revalorizada, por el movimiento gay (E-mail).

My approach to reading the play text is first to analyze the available criticism in order to be able to understand the obscure nature of this play within its limited criticism and in part, some of the criticism that has surrounded René Marqués. My analysis of David y Jonatán focuses on the relationship between the two main characters and their performance of masculinity and homosexual desire through Marqués’ visual designs. This focus will reveal how the Biblical story as well as the playwright’s trajectory of play texts are destabilized.

**Marqués and a Textual Dramatic Technique**

Bonnie Hildebrand Reynolds elucidates in her book, *Space, Time and Crisis: The Theatre of René Marqués*, “the harmonious balance he created between technique and thematic content reflects a similar equilibrium between the regional and universal levels of his dramas” (58). She further emphasizes Marqués’ use of contemporary dramatic techniques as the key element that set him apart from other playwrights, “technical mastery of contemporary theatrical recourses placed him at the leading edge among the Spanish American playwrights of his day” (9). Within the named Biblical trilogy plays, Marqués employs his latest dramatic technique, a cinematographic technique. In the
prologue to *Sacrificio en el Monte Moriah* Marqués explains what he means by cinematographic and how he or the director should plan on achieving this goal when staging the play,

La obra debe fluir ininterrumpidamente de escena a escena durante el tiempo aproximado que dura una película de metraje normal. Así fue concebida y así debe realizarse. Para ello he pasado el trabajo de dar, tanto al director como a los técnicos, no sólo en el texto, sino en un Apéndice especial, exhaustivas direcciones de cómo lograrse esto sobre escenografía a base de plataformas, ya que en Puerto Rico no contamos con escenario giratorio. De hecho, tuve que DIRIGIR la obra mientras la escribía. Nada de entreactos pues, (“Sacrificio en el Monte Moriah” 19).

The playwright who once referred to his research and writings in the essay, “La leyenda hebrea de Abrahán Sara e Isaac” as *exhaustive* has chosen to once again utilize the same adjective for the stage directions he included for the first play in the Biblical trilogy. The meticulously detail oriented Marqués that flourished through the pages of this essay clearly exposes his emphasis on particularities, throughout the endless pages of stage directions, which are also replete with diagrams in *Sacrificio en el Monte Moriah*. Marqués’ care and attention given to precision indicates that he was not just solely a playwright but he thought as a director as well. In the act of writing the play he was also creating it visually as a three dimensional object. It is important to highlight that this simultaneous creation should be considered an innovation as the playwright could have thought of the stage directions from a pure literary perspective.

In a personal interview, José M. Lacomba discusses Marqués as a playwright and director,
Lacomba: René se adelantó mucho. René al abordar una obra piensa en la totalidad de la producción. No es como algunos otros dramaturgos. No sólo tenía preocupación por el detalle y en eso era bien exigente. Era muy bueno pero, ¡cuando estaba con un grupo de profesionales estaba con el látigo! Eso es así, así, así y así (Personal Interview).

Lacomba, who knew him practically all of his life, believes that Marqués’ stage directions and plays were excessive because of the playwright’s beliefs on possible future scenographic interpretations of his plays:

Porque él quería que las obras se hicieran tal como él las imaginó. El no quería las interpretaciones, no es así. Con las interpretaciones él decía, “Nacariles, esa obra se tiene que escenificar como yo la concibo porque eso es parte de la obra” (Personal Interview.).

However, David y Jonatán and Tito y Berenice are an exception. Whereas Sacrificio en el Monte Moriah is exemplarily of one of Marqués’ fundamental characteristics of being extremely particular, the latter two plays of the trilogy do not have the inclusion of as much stage directions as the first of the three plays. Vázquez Álamo discusses this extreme opposite side of the pendulum in his prologue to David y Jonatán under the apt title, “Técnica sorpresiva”,

Quien está acostumbrado a la exuberancia descriptiva de Marqués en relación a sus escenografías o decorados (que persiste hasta Sacrificio en el Monte en el Moriah) no dejará de parecerle dramático el contraste que ofrecen Dos dramas de amor, poder y desamor con sus lacónicas indicaciones (9).

Many adjectives have been attributed to René Marqués’ production of both literary and dramatic works. Before the last two plays, laconic would have
scarcely come to mind. The introduction of the two twin plays, as Vázquez Álamo refers to *David y Jonatán* and *Tito y Berenice*, in effect destabilizes the once perceived fixed authorial identity of René Marqués. José Lacomba expounds upon the new style that Marqués employs in the last two plays, *David y Jonatán. Tito y Berenice: Dos dramas de amor, poder y desamor.*

**Pol:** ¿Y en *David y Jonatán*, se relaja un poco con las acotaciones e instrucciones o ... ?

**Lacomba:** Muchas de las cosas están en la Biblia. Sobre todo, el aspecto bíblico es tan lejano. Aún así, habla de la vestimenta de los personajes. Todo está allí. Es que está en la Biblia. René tenía una Biblia con unos dibujos espectaculares y allí lo tenía. Esa copia la tengo en la fundación René Marqués que fundé justo después que murió (Personal Interview).

It could be possible to surmise that the unsophisticated stage directions offered by Marqués in *David y Jonatán. Tito y Berenice: Dos dramas de amor, poder y desamor* are necessary for the employment of the cinematographic technique. If we recall, however, *Sacrificio en el Monte Moriah* had previously utilized the technique. José Lacomba’s possibility also leaves me at odds because *David y Jonatán* much like *Sacrificio en el Monte Moriah*, is a Biblical story, but yet there was not any shortage of stage directions and details for the first of the three plays. One possibility is that minimum stage directions and props were necessary in order to be in consonance with the cinematographic technique, which required quick scene changes. Once again, *Sacrificio en el*  

---

14 Montes-Huidobro, who is also a playwright, is not impressed by the cinematographic technique Marqués employed in the Biblical trilogy, “Desde el punto de vista estrictamente dramático, ninguna de estas obras representa un paso de avance en su teatro” (149).
Monte Moriah also required rapid transformations, as it had already implemented the same techniques. Another possible explanation is that the playwright was trying out a new technique by taking a step away from his signature meticulous stage directions. Contextualizing this possibility with José Lacomba’s thoughts on the play seem to be more probable,

**Lacomba:** Me parece muy importante ubicar la obra en su desarrollo temático de la obra, ubicar la obra dentro de la producción de René. Es significativo que es una de sus últimas obras” (Personal Interview.).

The unlikely simplicity of stage directions does not however detract from the play. In fact, the stage designer and assistant to René Marqués, José Lacomba, alluded to the difficulty of staging the play,

**Pol:** ¿Por qué cree que la obra tiene muy poca crítica? ¿También por qué cree no se ha escenificado?  
**Lacomba:** Creo que la obra es difícil en el sentido de espectáculo. René mismo me decía que eso se podía hacer (Personal Interview).

The editor and writer of the prologue, F. Vázquez Álamo, similarly asserts that, “Sin embargo, aunque de modo apretadamente sintético, todo está dado; decorado, periodo histórico, atmósfera, iluminación, sonido, música y movimiento escénico” (9). Although the simplicity of the stage directions do not limit the staging of the play, they continue to destabilize Marqués’ trajectory as a playwright.

Another theatrical element which is distinct from Marqués’s previous theatrical work is the use of minimal stage props. For this play, they are utilized, in part, in order to create an intimate as well as a distant relationship with the
audience. The only note Marqués provides is in reference to a fundamental stage prop for the play *David y Jonatán*: a gauze that must cover the open side of the proscenium stage, “Nota: Las cinco primeras escenas se desarrollarán a través de gasa transparente que cubrirá la embocadura del proscenio. Las otras cinco escenas, *sin gasa*” (20). Montes-Huidobro describes the function of the gauze:

> Al presentarnos al desnudo el contenido sexual de la historia, al quitar el telón de gasa, René Marqués nos está diciendo que allí está el trasfondo del acontecer histórico, su verdad desnuda (163).

That is, the scenes are presented with the veil of the gauze, history, lies and masks are in direct association. The removal of the gauze delineates a direct relationship with homosexuality, truth, and uncovering (163).¹⁵

Although Montes-Huidobro effectively explains the correlation between the use of this particular stage prop and its correlation with some of the themes of the play text, he fails to discuss the relationship and / or possible effect the gauze and the employment of the other stage props may have on the audience. This is because Montes Huidobro analyzes the play text as drama not as theater. José Lacomba concretized the type of playwright René Marqués was and the importance he placed on visual symbols on his play texts in his interview:

> **Lacomba:** Sí, ah, lo más importante para René era el espectáculo. René tenía un concepto visual en donde él va creándole imágenes al lector cuando hace su descripción, de tal modo que el lector lo va visualizando (Personal Interview).

¹⁵ Montes-Huidobro’s article, “Bíblica histórica puertorriqueña: la impotencia según Marqués” presents this relationship in the form of a visual word model.
I view the combination of the importance of staging for the playwright and his attention to detail, albeit the comparably sparse stage directions in *David y Jonatán*, as a need to communicate with his audience via a performative vein. Lacomba, Marqués’ stage designer of many years, was not quite sure how to go about designing the stage and its necessary props. Although this may have seemed like an “easier” René Marqués play to stage, José Lacomba thought, “Creo que la obra es difícil en el sentido de espectáculo” (Personal Interview). Whereas previously, Lacomba and others who had staged Marqués’ plays had an infinite amount of details and directions, now he is faced with uncharacteristic directions for a play text whose homosexual theme was a first in Marqués’ repertoire. Interestingly, René Marqués did not share Lacomba’s thoughts on the staging difficulty involved in presenting the play as a three dimensional object. Lacomba recalls the playwright’s thoughts on staging the play, “René mismo me decía que eso se podía hacer” (Personal interview).

I find the way in which the gauze is implemented within *David y Jonatán* in resonance with Montes-Huidobro’s thoughts on the correlation between themes throughout the play and its interrelationship with the scenography. I do however find the visual implications upon the audience even more revelatory of its queer connotations. The last five scenes in *David y Jonatán* would logically imply the need for gauze. Since the last five scenes overtly expose homosexuality and, according to his critics, Marqués did not want to allude to any correlation between homosexuality and himself, why would he visually and symbolically expose homosexuality to his audience members? That is, it is precisely in these
scenes where the playwright could have incorporated the dramatic device of the veil to hide or cover homosexuality where here is a symbolic association between the open and direct view of the last five scenes and his audience.

The implementation of the gauze in the first five scenes can be interpreted as a “stand in” for a literal fourth wall while the exclusion of the gauze from the proscenium symbolically opens the fourth wall. Visually, the first five scenes effectively distance the audience members. Although the gauze is transparent, it is not so in its entirety. The gauze also physically reminds the audience of the fourth wall, which usually if present is through the imagination. The physical impediment, effectively reminds them of their distance as a member to the audience. Also, the gauze directly and indirectly summons secrecy; it can be interpreted as a need to veil. In our reading, it is homosexuality; that is, the history of homosexuality that is veiled. If firstly the gauze created distance and an air of secrecy, the removal of gauze, or the fourth wall, effectively allows for more intimacy and an ambience of revelatory truths. The truth that “comes out of the closet” need not be linked to the playwright’s biography but a coming out of the non heteronormative history. With this queer interpretation, the play text *David y Jonatán*, theatrically destabilizes the history of homosexuality. This reading is also extended to the audience. The audience is participatory or at minimal implicated in the veiling of history.

To conclude, the previous critical analysis of René Marqués, as a person, indicates towards a tightly veiled imposed homosexual identity both by the playwright during his lifetime as well as his heirs. *David y Jonatán*, however deals
with homosexual desire which was supposed to be hidden. Not only is homosexuality a main theme throughout the play, but through my analysis of the gauze, Marqués effectively creates a distance and later closes it with the dramatic technique of unveiling homosexual love visually with the elimination of the gauze. It is through the dramatic technique of the inclusion and subsequent removal of the gauze that homosexuality becomes visible.

It is important to note an additional understanding of the gauze’s function in the play. As was previously noted, the gauze literalized the fourth wall for the audience. However, conceptualizing the gauze as a fourth wall is only possible, during the last five scenes, when it is removed. This is because it is through the invisibility of the gauze (its removal) that the gauze becomes visible and the way in which the prop is used is revealed and assimilated. To explain, the staging exposes the contrapuntal relationship between the visibility and invisibility of the fourth wall and the visibility and invisibility of homosexuality.

**Stage directions**

The uses of props are not the only instances whereby Marqués destabilizes any fixed notion about himself as a playwright and the problematics of sexuality. Quite possibly, two of the most revelatory stage directions are most prevalent in scene six and seven.

Scene six highlights the culmination of the tension between David and Jonatán. David attempts to deny himself the future role of king because he does not want to cause any harm to Jonatán. In the interim, Samuel places David in the palace as a musician. Although at first sight, this placement in the court might
seem as a trivial role, it in effect has emotional repercussions both for Saúl and his son, Jonatán.

The king, Saúl had, throughout the play, been distanced from his son Jonatán and his daughter Mikol. As a result, Jonatán, has been emotionally detached from his father. The realization of this emotional indifference from his father is congealed with David’s imposed entry, into court, through the prophet Samuel. It is in this scene, Jonatán’s preoccupation with respect to David and his father’s relationship is explicit. As Montes-Huidobro earlier pointed out the scenography and the themes in the play text are complementary. This scene requires the removal of the gauze, “Se ha removido la gasa que cubría la embocadura de proscenio” (36). The removal of the gauze, compliments the unrestrained communication of Jonatan’s inner emotional feelings about David. Aside from the removal of the gauze, the stage directions also call for David to play his sitar in the background while next to Saul’s throne, “A través de la pared, fondo, se oye música de la cítara tocada por DAVID” (36). David’s sitar playing in combination with his the physical space he occupies next to Jonatán’s father precipitates and quickly incites an insecurity within Jonatán,

**Jonatán:** ¿No lo oyes?

**Mikol:** Oigo música

**Jonatán:** Sí. Su (sic) música.

**Mikol:** ¿La del forastero? ¿Por qué te entristece? Ha puesto alegría en el corazón de nuestro padre. ¿No debemos regocijarnos por ello? Quizás ahora... *(Trata de abrazarlo.)*

**Jonatán:** *(Rechazándola.)* ¡No hay regocijo en mi corazón! El ocupa mi puesto allí *(Levantándose.)* No sólo a los pies del rey, sino en el corazón de mi padre (36).
David’s presence, specifically his action of playing music for the king, is the catalyst for the return of Saul’s happiness.

On the other hand, Mikol’s reaction is positive not only because her father is out of his depressive slump but because of the possible marital implications it may have for her and her brother. Earlier in scene IV, Jonatán asked the king for Mikol’s hand in marriage, “Jonatán: Pido tu autorización para… Para tomar a Mikol por esposa”, which Saúl denied. (30). Jonatán, in the beginning, showed a deep interest in marrying his sister; however, asking his father once again for Mikol’s hand in marriage is truncated by his jealousy towards David.

David effortlessly attained Jonatán’s long sought after achievement: Saul’s love and adulation. For Jonatán, David occupies three enviable positions, the physical closeness to his father, particularly his positioning; that is sitting right next to the king therefore creating a symbolic usurpation of the thrown, and finally the coveted emotional side of Saul. Jonatán directs all of his anger towards David and even declares hatred:

**Jonatán:** ¡No quiero verlo! Desde su llegada no sólo he oído su música. Escondido en mis habitaciones, por días oigo su música. Y odio esa citara tanto como le odio a él. ¡No quiero verlo! (Volviéndose a ella bruscamente.) ¿Le has visto tú? (36).

Jonatán requests Mikol not see David, immediately after declaring his jealousy and hatred towards him, he straight away tries to physically secure her love with an excessive passionate kiss.

**Jonatán:** (Abrazándola.) No lo veas. No lo veremos. (*La besa apasionadamente en la boca.*) Vamos a mi habitación, Mikol.

---

16 This proposition was commonplace in Biblical times, as Marqués illustrates in his essay “La leyenda de Abrahán y Sara”. 
Devuelve a mi corazón la paz que esa música hechizante ha perturbado (37).

Throughout the play text, Jonatán and Mikol’s relationship takes on a more subtle tone. To explain, the hints towards incest between the siblings were prevalent but at the same time restrained. That is, the incestuous relationship is never the central theme but continues to remain at the periphery.

Although these incestuous scenes evoke a queer and perhaps abject feeling among its audience members, I find that this modern-day taboo does not take center stage but rather remains as a leitmotif throughout the duration of the play. Immediately after Mayordomo sees Jonatán and Mikol in an embrace, the stage directions call for the siblings to separate but does not describe how. It simply states, “se separan” (37). I interpret their separation as an indication on their part as knowing that this display of affection between brother and sister was not acceptable. As Marqués earlier explained in his essay, “La leyenda de Sara y Abrahán”, incest was common practice in the Bible. The playwright was well aware of all the factual intricacies related to the Biblical times. The action of separating them is not a mistake by René Marqués if not a decision he made in order to either include a sense of ill-doing on their part or a conscious effort on both their parts to keep their sexual desires for each other a secret.

As Jonatán approaches his father, he is unable to mask his anger towards David, who is sitting next to Saúl. When Saúl states that he has missed his son, Jonatán quickly makes up a lie that demonstrates a macho bravura, “Estaba… en una expedición de caza. Cuando no combato a nuestros enemigos, me dedico al ejercicio de la caza. No como otros… desde luego” (38).
If we recall, at the beginning of scene six, Jonatán reveals to his sister that he has been hiding in his room for months because he could not stand to hear David’s music. The ellipsis after his first utterance also alludes to a performative pause and suggests that he is making up his story as he tells his father. From the onset of his dialogue with his father Saúl, Jonatán takes advantage of every opportunity to insult and challenge David’s masculinity directly or indirectly. His last sentence denotes his superiority over others, meaning men, who do not demonstrate what he alludes to as a “masculine sport” such as hunting. Unfortunately, Saúl does not demonstrate any interest in his son’s, albeit made up, adventures or hurled insults towards others, and instead focuses solely on David and his talents as a musician:

**Saul:** Tenemos con nosotros un artista, Jonatán.
**Jonatán:** (Frío sin mirar a David) He conocido a varios.
**Saul:** Pero éste es un ejecutante extraordinario de cítara.
**Jonatán:** (A nadie en particular.) Ah, era ésa la música enfermiza. que oí por horas en el palacio. (A SAÚL.) Y bien, ¿salvará a tu reino una cítara cuando vuelvan a atacar los filisteos? (38).

Saúl fails to recognize his son’s feigning to pass indifference with what comes across to the audience as an indignant attitude towards the court’s new musician, David. Saúl continues to acclaim David’s prowess over the sitar while his son continues to dismiss and continues his disparaging remarks towards David and his talents. The sitarist however understands Jonatán’s commentary as reproachful and reacts, “David: *(Dando un brusco arpeggio en la cítara y*
dejándola a los pies de Saúl.) Sé manejar la honda” (38).\(^{17}\) Not to be outdone by Jonatán’s actions and malicious words, David immediately seeks a duel. Just as Saul had armed David in Samuel 1 chapter 17 with weapons, Jonatán repeated the same actions:

Jonatán saca rápidamente espadas de dos oficiales que flanquean el trono y arroja una a los pies de DAVID mineras esgrime la otra. David agarra la espada que ha ido a caer a sus pies y se levanta (38).

David verbally acknowledges his inability to use the swords; nevertheless, he accepts the challenge Jonatán has imposed, “David: No me importa saber o no. ¡Pero en guardia!” (38). Jonatán successfully disarms David of the sword and in doing so challenged David’s masculinity through the loss of the phallic symbol. For him that is not enough. He continues to badger the sitarist and taunt him with schoolboy tactics by shouting out, and using the pejorative suffix “musiquero”, “Jonatán: Usa tu honda ahora, musiquero intruso” (39). These acts underscore Jonatán’s consistent questioning of David’s masculinity. David physically reacts and attacks Jonatán, “David: ciego de rabia, se abalanza sobre Jonatán, le hace soltar la espada y forcejean” (38). It is not until after Saúl’s attenuated attempt at reprimanding his son and his prized musician that the stage directions describe a destabilizing moment after the fight, “Jonatán y David, quienes habían luchado

\(^{17}\) In the Biblical story, it was “la honda” or the slingshot that David utilized to kill Goliath in Samuel 1:17 vs. 40. Although in Samuel Chapter 17, Saul had armed David, “And Saul armed David with his armor, and he put a helmet of brass upon his head; also he armed him with a coat of mail” vs. 38. David, a sheep herder had chosen what a more rudimentary weapon, “And David girded his sword upon his armor, and he assayed to go; for he had not proved it. And David said unto Saul, I cannot go with these; for I have not proved them. And David put them off him (39)” “And he took his staff in his hand, and chose him five smooth stones out of the brook, and put them in a shepherd’s bag which he had, even in a scrip; and his sling was in his hand: and he drew near to the Philistine.” (King James Bible 40).
abrazados han experimentado algo perturbador. Al separarlos, se miran asombrados, como si se viesen por vez primera, con un súbito deslumbramiento" (39). The rivalry Jonatán felt towards David led them both to a display of physical acts of violence. Shortly after they were separated they seemed to have at some point transgressed the feeling of aggression into a perturbation which incites an unprecedented feeling. Understanding these feelings hinges on the reader's / director's interpretation of the words “asombrados” and “deslumbramiento”. Considering the two words can take on several different meanings depending on the text, my queer reading of the play text understands “asombrado” to mean grand admiration while “deslumbramiento” would then imply an altered perception as a result of a passion. This newfound admiration and altered spectral perception of each other is in congruence with not only the queer moment of this scene but the following acts.

For example, the closing scene, “Saúl: (Persuasivo.) Jonatán, David, abrazaos, hijos míos. No perturbéis, por favor, la alegría que reina en el corazón de vuestro rey”, exposes yet again, the king’s newfound contentment motivated by David’s talent and his lack of recognition of the rival’s peculiar previously shared moment (39). In the final scene, David and Jonatán heed the king’s request:

David y Jonatán lentamente avanzan uno hacia el otro. Al encontrarse, se abrazan, se abrazan estrechamente, demasiado estrecha y tiernamente, quizá. Las luces de la escena bajan con rapidez dejando iluminación brillante sólo en las dos figuras abrazadas de Jonatán y David (39)
The audience is left with a complete focalization on the two rivals in what the playwright describes as a tender embrace. The audience has no other recourse than to have this moment between David and Jonatán become the center of their attention. This is accomplished through lighting. The stage lighting is quickly shut off with the exception of a bright light whose function is to solely illuminate the two men holding each other tenderly. The following scene further expounds on their last encounter:

David: ¿De qué te ríes, Mikol? ¿Es que te causa risa la canción de amor que ejecutaba?
Mikol: No, David. Sabes que tu música llega siempre a mi corazón. Es que observo a Jonatán en la piscina. Realiza unas juguetonas piruetas, casi como si bailara en el agua, (Ríe.) (40).

Mikol’s description of her brother’s pirouettes in the water does not denote a sibling context; that is, she is not making light of her brother’s water play, but more so a laugh that indicates a joyous pleasure. Referring back to the stage directions which precede this scene, Mikol is looking out, “Mikol, recostada en marco de ventana (por donde entran torrentes de sol), mirando a medias hacia fuera, Mikol sonríe. Después de establecerse la escena, la sonrisa de Mikol se convierte en risa fresca y cantarina” (40). Her laugh is described as one which is soft and agreeable to the ear. Her laughter then is not uncontrollable as a result of being present at a comedic event which could cause laughter.

It is instead a jubilant laugh which expresses delight and wonderment at her brother’s physique. Her pleasure is shared with David who also takes enjoyment in Jonatán’s body and his aquatic abilities. Both Mikol and David express feeling of admiration for Jonatán’s physicality which quickly surpasses
an appreciation for it and morphs, as both of their laughter ceases, into a more serious adulation:

Mikol: ¿Lo ves?
David: Sí (Se une al regocijo de Mikol y rie) Tiene la agilidad de un pez.
Mikol: (Dejando de reír.) Ya sale ¡Es hermoso su cuerpo!
David: (Quién ya no rie.) Lo es. Como una copa sagrada.
Mikol: Como un dios de las aguas (40).

The expressions and adjectivization utilized by both characters evoke an excessive edenic conceptualization of the swimmer’s body. The overindulgence of descriptors utilized for Jonatán seemed presumptuous for the critic Matías Montes-Huidobro. He finds that:

Además, realmente eso de "una copara sagrada y "un dios de las aguas" me parece un poco cursi (creo que en inglés se dice "tacky") y el discurso gay tiende algunas veces a ella, como ocurre también con el heterosexual en la poesía erótica, frecuente también en la poesía afrocubana con respecto al cuerpo femenino (E-mail).

Montes-Huidobro interprets the excessive use and choice of adjectives as a tendency which pertains to a gay discourse. The adjectivization stands out of the play text because of its exuberance. It is important to highlight that this is the only instance in David y Jonatán where the characters verbally exude an apparent joyfulness and wonderment over one another’s physical appearance. This scene also comes immediately after the tender embrace between David and

---

18 In his 1983 article, he found Marqués’ choice of words to be in poor taste. However, in a recent communication with him, he added that this stylization could also be a technique purposefully executed by René Marqués in order to demonstrate irony, “Quizás fuera un tratamiento irónico de Marqués pensando en la sociedad puertorriqueña” (E-mail). The critic, nevertheless, quickly reverts to the position he stated in his article and concludes, after taking the possibility of irony into consideration, “pero en cualquier caso no le salió bien” (E-mail).
Jonatán. The perturbed feelings they both earlier experienced at that moment has evolved within a short period of time and had revealed itself to be an explicit physical attraction. This scene serves both as a response to the perturbation they once mutually felt and also provides for a continuance for the incestuous sibling attraction.

Approaching this scene under a queer lens, the over dramatization of the eroticism of Jonatán’s body performs an explicit desire on Mikol and David’s part for a body which as they state God will not let them have. David affirms, in one of his last adulations, “Como estatua de oro que Yahvé…no nos permite tocar” (41). Embedded within the adulation there is a recognition that the attraction both Mikol and David feel for Jonatán is not permissible by their God. This scene is not only verbal but physical. As they praise Jonatán’s body, David hugs Mikol from behind, “Durante la breve ‘letanía’ David ha ido abrazando por la espalda a Mikol sin tener conciencia de ello” (41). The consonance between the verbal and the physicality in this scene resonates with the previous embrace David experienced with Jonatán. David’s approach to Mikol is not passionate and does not evoke a physical attraction that is directed towards her. As he embraces her, they are continuously making explicit physical acclamations of Jonatán’s body. I read this scene as David’s delight in the erotics of Jonatán’ body taking over his physical self; that is the pleasure he derives from exalting Jonatán body is physically displaced onto Mikol. Her body then serves, momentarily, as physical replacement for Jonatán.
The adulatory comments made about Jonatán’s body take place while he is not visible to the audience. The spectator is then left with imagining and recreating the visual scene, throughout the duration of Mikol and David’s glorified comments.

The three characters are now on stage and in the spectator’s sight,

Entra Jonatán desnudo, chorreando agua, con un largo pedazo de tela que le servirá de “toalla”. Al entrar, está secándose, totalmente inconsciente de su desnudez. (41).

Marqués explains Jonatán’s relaxed attitude towards his nudity because he enacts the performance in the same unaware fashion that David embraced Mikol from behind. At the end of the stage directions he explains that Jonatán is not only unaware of his actions but euphoric of his naked self and its contact with nature, “En uno u otro caso, Jonatán viene feliz, casi eufórico ante su reciente contacto con la naturaleza” (41). This is a destabilizing statement because the use of the word naturaleza, in this scene, has two possible meanings. On one level, “naturaleza” can refer to nature, specifically water; but, it can also refer to David, another man. Jonatán’s euphoric state is queered because of the destabilization the multiple meanings of the word naturaleza creates in the context I find his particular stage direction interesting because René Marqués simultaneously creates a direct dialogue and criticism with the audience and the actor:

(Si el público a estas alturas es puritano y el actor ¡a estas alturas! Es muy pudoroso, puede éste manejar la “toalla” de modo que oculte en lo posible lo que de modo eufemístico llamaríamos “sus partes”. En el último caso, puede el actor, después de secarse,
Reminding the reader that this play was written in 1970, the act of being nude on stage was not common place. In fact, to understand the magnitude of the defiance René Marqués was demonstrating, a brief summary of a recent censorship of a play in Puerto Rico would shed light on the revolutionary steps Marqués demonstrated in these daring stage directions.

It was only seven years ago, on August 1, 2003 that Robert Schrock’s long standing off-Broadway musical revue “Naked Boys Singing”, was censored from Puerto Rico’s most prestigious theater venue, Teatro Tapia, in Old San Juan. Although, an agreement was reached whereby the musical was going to be staged, it was overturned twice because of its nudity ("Va la obra ‘Chicos cantando y desnudos’ en el Tapia").

This act of censorship took place thirty five years after David y Jonatán was published. This repressive act committed, only five seven years ago, in the same venue where René Marqués had staged his plays, elucidates the conservative nature of the censors and their longstanding and current powerful hold over the arts. Also, when I asked José Lacomba why he thought the play was not staged he stated that, “También la cuestión de lo desnudo. En esa época era prohibido y no se podía hacer. Hoy en día no saben que quitarse. Me parece que eso es otro factor” (Personal Interview). In light of the acts of censorship, I read these stage directions as a performative act of defiance which aimed at destabilizing society’s conception of nudity as taboo.
This performative act is also interesting because of the vocabulary choice the playwright chooses to describe the actor’s male genitalia. He is cognizant of his action as when he makes the selection “sus partes”, he visually encloses the phrase within quotes, which denote a performative euphemism vis à vis an implied imagined act of body language from the playwright. He also creates a tongue in cheek statement by directly communicating he is using a euphemism. I read this euphemism ironically since it does not evoke a more “pleasant” name for male genitalia; in fact it elicits a more derogatory explicit connotation. The placement of “sus partes” within the stage directions is also central to my ironic reading. The statement comes after the interjection, “¡Si, a estas alturas!” (41). I interpret this exclamation as a sign of playwright’s exasperation which underscores his frustration with the nude body’s prohibitory condition on stage. I find the execution of this performative act to be a revelatory destabilization of Marqués’ trajectory as a playwright as well as Puerto Rican society’s stance on nudity. This is one instance whereby the performative aspect of the play text is not solely relegated to the staging but dependent upon the physical text.

In the same directions where Marqués describes Jonatán’s nudity and the fashion in which it should be portrayed, he calls for a change in mood from David and Mikol. David and Mikol had, up until this moment, been rejoicing with excitement the magnificence of Jonatán’s body. Simultaneously Jonatán also demonstrates contentment, although his happiness is not related to the commentaries since he has not yet been aware of their voyeuristic presence. The stage directions call for David and Mikol’s contentment to change into weak
smiles that eventually disappear, “En contraste, Mikol y David, quienes antes reían, ahora le observan con sonrisas tenues que van despareciendo” (41). Immediately after, Marqués poses a question, about the mood changes among the characters, to the reader and partially answers it with another interrogative, “¿Por qué? ¿Quizá la misma desnudez que parecía natural vista desde lejos en una piscina, resulta ahora perturbadora dentro del ámbito civilizado” de palacio?” (41). Once again, Marqués utilizes the Word “perturbadora” in order to describe the change in mood and what the characters are currently feeling. Jonatán’s naked body within the palace produces an emotion filled with perturbation. This subsequent feeling is in contrast with the earlier expressions filled with laughs of delight and joy. Part of the excitement and pleasure previously experienced by David y Mikol resides in the scopophilic act. Jonatán is the “object of sexual stimulation through sight” (Mulvey 1448). Marqués proposes Jonatán’s exit from the pool, which he equates with being in nature, and his ensuing entry into the palace, which he refers to as a civilized place, as possible reason for a shift in mood. I interpret this possibility as significant of the importance of the location of the performance of a naked body within society. Jonatán’s body and his performance were deemed at a distance as a site of pleasure whereas his body within the confines in the quotidian environment alters the feelings of David and Mikol into that of an unsettling, destabilizing emotion. Marqués poses this rationale for David and Mikol’s altered state only as a possibility since he leaves the decision up to actors and censors, “(Actores y censores llegarán a conclusions propias, no necesariamente coincidentes.) (41). The stage directions
also queer public and private spaces by challenging the binary of these spaces. The expectations of what is performed in the public and private are inverted. In public, where one would expect intimacy to be repressed, is the space where the characters are completely open and comfortable sharing a private moment. Reading the nude scene through the spatial destabilization, reveals how space and the utilization of that space shapes the play; in that, the destabilization of the nude scene is mirrored in the queered space.

**Coming Out… Momentarily:**

In scene eight, the secret of David’s succession as king, that was thought to have been reserved between David, Samuel and the audience, is no longer covert. Saúl openly references the rumors he has heard of David’s new role, which will usurp his, at a dinner with Jonatán, Mikol and Samuel. “Saúl: (Levantándose.) David, mi escudero, no está aquí… porque me teme. (A Samuel.) Y, temiéndome, se ha refugiado en tu casa” (46). In this last statement, “tu” is emphasized with italics. Saúl openly informs Samuel that he is aware of Samuel’s interference in the matter. The voices heard, in off, confirm David’s sequential new role, “Se oyen gritos de ‘Saúl mató solo mil, David diez mil’. (Se repite tres veces.) ‘David será rey, Yahvé le ha ungido. ¡David! David!’” (46). The voices in off are heard by Saúl as he declares, “Y lo que dicen, según oigo, es que David será rey” (46). Saúl is not pleased by this information and banishes his once prized musician from the king’s palace, seeking his immediate death:

**Saúl:** ¡Espera! Conoces la casa de Samuel. En ella se oculta David. Tráelo ante mí, vivo… o muerto.
Oficial: ¿David? ¡Pero es tu escudero!

At the end of these statements Jonatán informs his father that he feels ill and prefers to be excused from the table, “Saúl: ¿No te sientas, Jonatán? Jonatán: Padre... Si me lo permites, excúsame. No podría cenar” (47-48). His illness is quickly understood both by the audience member and Saúl as a malady of the heart:

Jonatán: Me siento... mal. Prefiero retirarme a mis habitaciones, (Hace ademán de salir.)
Saúl: Estás seguro, hijo mío, de que vas a retirarte a tus habitaciones? (Se levanta.) ¿O vas a llevar un mensaje a tu amado David? [...] 
Saúl: ¡Calla tú! (Tomando una lanza.) Pues bien, Jonatán, si es cosa de llevar un mensaje... Éste es mi mensaje para David. (Lanza vigorosamente el arma contra Jonatán.) (48).

This brief scene concisely exposes Saúl's knowledge of his son and David's relationship. Saúl uses the adjective “amado” to refer to David as Jonatán's beloved friend and imply a homosexual tie between the two. The word choice leaves the door ajar for an interpretation which would connote a homosocial relationship between both men. In addition, the Biblical relationship between them, as previously mentioned, alluded to a homosexual relationship. Scene eight then, in effect, provides the opportunity for Saúl to reveal his awareness of the hidden relationship which has surrounded him until this point.
Reunions and Terminating Avowals

Saúl was correct in thinking Jonatán would inform David of his father's death threats. Scene XIX’s stage direction depict a tender scene between David and Jonatán. The scene takes place in nature where there both characters feel comfortable in demonstrating affection for each other, “Aparecen David, sentado en una piedra, y Jonatán, a sus pies, con la cabeza reclinada sobre las rodillas de David” (49). Once again, the locations of these acts affect the ease with which they are performed. Both David and Jonatán are in nature and freely touching each other without having felt a “perturbed” feeling. Whereas previously in scene seven, Jonatán’s naked body in the palace caused a disquieting feeling amongst David and Mikol.

In this scene Jonatán and David are alone in nature and begin to profess their love to each other that denotes a more than casual affection.

David: (Levantándose.) Jonatán, Jonatán, desecha, te ruego, esos pensamientos sombríos. Somos jóvenes, y el amor anida en nuestros corazones.
Jonatán: Cierto, David. Sabes que te amo tanto como a mi propia vida. Pero el odio nos acecha, nos rodea, y el cerco se estrecha más y más. Es un mundo de odio y sangre, donde no cabe el amor (50).

In previous scenes the possibility of a romantic relationship between David and Jonatán was alluded but in this penultimate scene, their feelings towards each other are expressed openly. Their affection towards each other seemed to have been solely relegated to a physical attraction amongst them. It is not until this second to last scene, where proclamations of strong love which is invincible to
political powers is expressed, “David: Nuestro amor puede más que el odio y que
la sangre. Recuerda cómo por amor a mí y a riesgo de tu vida, me has salvado
de la ira de Saúl” (50).

Their romantic relationship takes a downward spiral when Jonatán
encounters his father, Saúl, who had requested his squire take his life. This
incites Jonatán to avenge his father’s death. The last and tenth scene is
reminiscent of David and Jontatán’s duel at their first encounter. Just as before
Jonatán taunted David into fighting him again. Whereas before David accepted
the challenge, this time David attempts to dodge such an encounter by
empathizing with Saúl’s death and professing his undying love and affection for
David.

Jonatán: ¡En guardia!
David: En guardia estoy, pero no contra ti. (Sin alzar su espada.)
No, Jonatán, no. Mi corazón está sangrando por Saúl. Dame tiempo de curar la herida. Te lo pido. No puedo razonar. Todo es dolor en mí. Sabes que te am... (53).

Jonatán does not let David finish his sentence and returns to his previous
behavior by accosting David and challenging David’s masculinity.

Jonatán: (Interrumpiéndole) ¡En guardia, he dicho, si es que quieres morir como un hombre y no como la despreciable alimaña que eres! (Avanza decididamente amenazador) hacia David.

David is not bothered and repeatedly calls for the struggle to stop,
“Cesemos”(54). Jonatán however continues his advances which finalize in his
death. His misstep over his father’s cape, which he robed himself with after his
father’s death, lead to David fatally wounding him. David’s feelings are
unwavering and he his horrified at his actions and realizes what he has accidentally done calls out to Jonatán, “¡Amor!” (54). Even after Jonatán’s death, David declares his unequivocal love for Jonatán, “¡Tú eras mi delicia; tu amor era para mí más precioso que el amor de todos los seres de la tierra! ¡Cómo han perecido las armas de combate! (Inclinándose a Jonatán y besándole la frente.) (54).

Reconceptualizing Puerto Rico as a Nation through a Queer Bond:

René Marqués’ works have been intrinsically tied to the question of nation, specifically Puerto Rico’s commonwealth state. The majority of his criticism has tied the themes of his works to the political; specifically, the concept of Puerto Rico’s independence of the United State’s control was a topic which Marqués found of utmost importance to convey in his literary production. David y Jonatán is not an exception to this rule. Although I have chosen to center my analysis on the queer instances of performativity throughout the play text, the question of a political power struggle and the way in which those that come into power are decided, come under a profound scrutiny.

As Ralph O. McLeod states, the play “deal[s] with the corruptive effect of power, be it power attained by struggle or power that is inherited” (33). I interpret the way in which Saúl and later David attained power to be analogous to what Marqués perceived as a colonial domination the United States holds over Puerto Rico. Saúl was named king by Samuel, an outsider, a prophet, who has the power to decide who will become ruler of the nation. Although Saúl was king, his
position as a figure of power was solely symbolic as Samuel was consistently making authoritative decisions, such as choosing David as the new king, without Saúl’s consultation. Interestingly, at the last dinner when Saúl reproaches Samuel for harboring David in his home, the prophet makes no acknowledgement of the fact. Instead, he chooses to ignore this fact and continue the dinner as if he had not heard the prior accusations. This could be interpreted as Puerto Rico’s cries falling on deaf ears. Marqués makes Samuel’s position as a political puppeteer explicit in the final stage directions which describe Samuel’s last gesture, “Sonríe de modo enigmático, mirando el cadáver de Saúl a sus pies y sabiendo él con nosotros que detrás de cada ‘trono’ habrá siempre un ‘juez-sacerdote’” (55). The stage directions do not only depict Samuel’s last gesture on stage but also the recurring theme throughout the play text: the illusion of power which is relegated solely to the performative (as in the case of Saúl) versus the manifestation of authorial power (Samuel).

Approaching the text solely through its political aspect renders it another text within Marqués’ politically inspired literary production. However, David y Jonatán differs from his collection because of the inclusion of the intertextual homosexual relationship between David and Jonatán and the way in which the evolution of their relationship takes place via a series of queer performative instances which serve to both disquiet their previous feelings for each other as well as the audience’s prior knowledge of the relationship. I interpret the inclusion of homosexual love as a way of interweaving and highlighting the occurrence of
homosexuality through Biblical times as well as a love story which stands the test of time.

**Conclusion:**

René Marqués approached his play text *David y Jonatán* through a Biblical historical approach to portray what most critics have denominated as an allegory for Puerto Rico. Marqués’ technique of employing a Biblical story creates a chronological distance between the events it portrayed and its possible symbolization in Puerto Rico’s politics. This play text, however, does not explicitly have any direct references to Puerto Rico or its relationship to the United States. This facet allows for another possible, more universal meaning, whereby the interpretation does not automatically indicate the island but power struggles and the nature of politics on an international level.

My analysis of *David y Jonatán* offers an interpretation that is distanced from the political allegory that is traditionally associated with René Marqués’ literary production. Through the questioning and of masculinity and homosexual desire, the play text destabilizes the heteronormative interpretation of the Biblical story, *David y Jonatán* as well as Marqués’ literary production. Reading these moments through the stage directions revealed not only a direct relationship between the queer moments and the staging but also problematized the role of the audience.
Chapter 3: Queering History and Pop Culture.

El día que me quieras

Contextualizing El día que me quieras

The Venezuelan playwright José Ignacio Cabrujas Lofiego (1937-1995) approaches history not in Marqués’ ways, but incorporates the specificity of time and place, therefore unequivocally centering his play text in Caracas, Venezuela in the mid thirties. El día que me quieras, written in 1978 realistically depicts one day in the life of a middle class Venezuelan family in Caracas in 1935. Interestingly, the family’s composition is not what would customarily be considered as a “traditional” family. There are two sisters, María Luisa and Elvira Ancízar. Elvira is a thirty eight year-old, a single mother who has a daughter Matilde from her first and only marriage, which ended after her husband’s adultery. María Luisa is a year younger than her sister, and they also live together. The younger sister has been involved in a serious “romantic” relationship for ten years with a communist political activist, Pío Miranda. The other character in the play text is their brother Plácido Ancízar.

The action is centered on the arrival of the famed tango singer, Carlos Gardel and his encounter both with the people of Caracas, but mainly his interactions with the Ancízar family and María Luisa’s betrothed. At another level, much of the play’s dialogue about politics is started and performed by a highly politically charged Pío Miranda and the other characters’ reactions to the communist ideology he verbalizes throughout the play text.
Much like René Marqués’ *David y Jonatán*, *El día que me quieras*, has also been left out of the majority of academic criticism. The staging of the play has, however, been the recipient of criticism. One of Venezuela’s foremost theater critics, Edgar Antonio Moreno Uribe, articulates the warm reception of the play, in his online theater magazine *El espectáculo*, “Esa pieza, estrenada el 26 de enero de 1979 en la sala Alberto de Paz y Mateos, donde hizo 68 funciones y aplaudida por 11.896 espectadores”. *El día que me quieras* continues to be staged in Venezuela as well as internationally. It was restaged in 2005 in Venezuela by the famed Juan Carlos Gené and the theater group he helped start in 1983, “Grupo Actoral 80”. This same group and director presented their play in Miami’s Theater Festival in 2006 at The Miracle Theater. The Cuban playwright and director, Alberto Sarraín has also staged the play both in Miami (1990, 91, 00) and in Havana, Cuba (2008). His most recent production of the play took place on July 4, 2008 in Matanzas, Cuba. In an e-mail communication, the playwright informed me of the audience’s reaction to the play, “*El día que me quieras* fue un éxito extraordinario a tal punto que la ciudad se quedó hablando como los personajes de la obra” (E-mail).

*El día que me quieras* has been exclusively interpreted for its historical and political dimensions and its allegorizing properties for the nation of Venezuela. Leonardo Azparren Jiménez is one of the few critics who has analyzed the play. In his text, *Cabrujas en tres actos* (1983), he describes Cabruja’s play as, “una historia en la que audazmente unía dos elementos muy sensibles de la conciencia nacional en forma de personajes” (75). Francisco
Rojas Pojo also emphasizes the political and historical relevance of the play text in his book *Cabrujerías* (1995), by these descriptors, “Con estos símbolos se teatraliza la historia”, “Esta pieza tiene implicaciones políticas” (95-96). It is perhaps in his introduction, where his interpretation of *El día que me quieras* is most salient,

> En sus obras se produce el efecto de estar en concordancia con nuestra cultura venezolana-hispanoamericana, pues se reactualizan situaciones y se las parodia, lo que implica que el comportamiento arcaico es implícitamente cuestionando a pesar de que forma parte de esta estética y el signo de donde se extrae el mayor grado de humor (14).

These readings of *El día que me quieras*, are explainable, vis à vis the reflections of the playwright Juan Carlos Gené. In an interview by Carolina Espada, Gené aptly summarizes Cabrujas and his intrinsic relationship to his work and the region which he depicts:

> Pero Caracas y *El día que me quieras* son una misma cosa. Cabrujas y su obra son esta ciudad y ésta, su gente; el torrente inagotable de ironía poética que emana de su texto, y de sus criaturas, corre por sus calles, vela y duerme en sus casas, ríe de sí mismo en cada una de sus lloradas desgracias (Espada).

Although Gené’s comments are directed towards *El día que me quieras*, they are not solely referential of this particular play. His sentiment on the emphasis on the regional rings true of Cabrujas’ literary production. José Ignacio Cabrujas is known as Venezuela’s national playwright. The critic Leonardo Azparren Jiménez has written extensively on Venezuelan theater, and in *Cabrujas en tres actos*, he
informs the reader on the reasoning for the title Cabrujas has assumed among his critics,

Asumir las tendencias generales de los grupos, percibir la permanencia de un sentimiento, recrear las concepciones básicas de las personas, ser capaz, en suma de dar cuerpo a esas sombras colectivas, que lo que se suma, perciba y recree conmueva con la trascendencia del gesto efímero de la representación teatral de un personaje, conduce, en suma, a un drama nacional (19).

José Ignacio Cabruja’s relationship with the national is so intrinsically linked that it becomes increasingly difficult to disentangle him from the ties that have given him acclaim. When I asked Moreno-Uribe about the possibility of thinking the concept of destabilized “masculine” identities in El día que me quieras, he agreed that there are definitely some elements in the play text, however; after briefly acknowledging the possible interpretation, he quickly referred me back to the importance of the national and historical, “Pero creo que lo político tiene más peso que lo existencial. Creo yo, porque lo sexual o lo que se haga con el sexo no es importante, o es que Julio Cesar, Alejandro Magno y etcétera no podían existir sin sus veleidades?” (E-mail). From his response, it is evident that to approach El día que me quieras in a fashion which does not heed to the mainstream political and historical readings detracts from the significance of the play. I understand Moreno-Uribe’s position with respect to the play because of his political stance against the current government in Venezuela, “En estos tiempos el montaje de El día que me quieras es una bofetada al izquierdismo rampante y de alguna manera se convierte en un texto
antigobierno” (E-mail). Also, in his online magazine, *El espectador*, he talks about the tenth anniversary of Cabrujas’ death and Juan Carlos Gené’s production in honor of the deceased playwright. After summarizing the play, and its restaging, Moreno-Uribe exclaims “¡El país lo necesita!”. The critic’s political ideologies, as communicated to me via e-mail, emphasize the political aspect which is of importance for him.

For Moreno-Uribe, an interpretation which involves unstable identities is feasible and as he stated to me, “hay mucha tela de donde cortar” but he feels that focus is secondary to the political meaning of the play (E-mail). His statement is revelatory of *El día que me quieras* pigeon-holed state as a political allegory for Venezuela.

My reading does not propose to deny the intimate historical and political facets of the play text. It instead proposes a reading that is inclusive of the historical time frame with an emphasis on the destabilized “masculine identities” of the stereotypical Latin American male. I will start by first contextualizing the play’s first staging date followed by the time frame *El día que me quieras* encapsulates. The historical time frame is of importance since it marks significant historical and cultural moments in the play as well as its staging.

**II. Contextualizing Venezuela’s State in 1979**

Venezuela’s political history from the early to mid twentieth century was wrought by military dictatorships and transitory democracies which were usually overthrown. The year 1958 was significant in that the dictator Marcos Pérez
Jiménez was overthrown. The country was run by a civilian military junta for a year. Romulo Betancourt succeeded the interim government and governed Venezuela for the second time around from (1959-1964). Betancourt's rule was considered democratic and brought about positive changes for the country by establishing government programs that improved agriculture, health issues and literacy. These years are described by Halperín Donghi as “Venezuela demonstrate[ing] remarkable stability after the fragile democracy restored in 1958” (376). During this period of time, Venezuela broke ties with Cuba in 1961 and during the same time frame became one of the founding members of OPEC. The sixties saw an economic boom in the industries of iron ore and petroleum and a new president, Rafael Caldera Rodríguez who befriended and strengthened ties with the Soviet Union and the dictatorships in Latin America that Betancourt had previously refused to communicate to the public. The early seventies saw the rise of Carlos Andrés Pérez, who was backed by Betancourt in the presidential elections by, “Presenting the party’s candidate, […] as the son he never had” (Halperín 377). Pérez won the elections and demonstrated his politics were quite different from Betancourt’s,

As president, Pérez disappointed his mentor by seeking reconciliation with Cuba (still Betancourt’s bête noire) and by showing little restraint in the administration of Venezuela’s oil boom. The expansion of the state’s economic activities in the 1970’s involved not only further nationalization of it mineral wealth and public projects on the monumental scale of the steel works at Ciudad Guayana but also governmental favors conceded to equally ambitious private-sector projects in a climate of disordered improvisation that raised widespread suspicions of corruption (Halperín 377).
His actions in combination with a raised sense of affluence prevailed over the
domestic brews. The sense of corruption was certain with the preponderance of
political favors and their ever increasing price. Also this new sense of affluence in
the country brought about more unrestrained spending. Tulio Halperín Donghi
presents the “greatest price of affluence” as,

the inflation of people’s expectations of the government, resulting in
progressive expansion of the bureaucracy to numerous subsidies to
guarantee the profits of the entrepreneurial elite, and an increasing
expectation, on the part of Venezuelan society a whole, that the
government should guarantee the levels of consumption to which it
had become accustomed (377).

This amount of rampant spending set up a recipe for economic disaster, leaving
Venezuela to accrue “an external debt at the very moment when other oil
producing countries were flooding the international market with their excess
capital” (377). The economic downward spiral and the state of governmental
corruption that was intrinsically linked to the politics of the late sixties and
seventies left Venezuela in a state of political and socioeconomic disarray.

**Venezuela and 1935 – The end of an era**

*El día que me quieras* takes place in the year 1935. The year is not
accidental as it has significant political historical and cultural historical
implications. From 1830 to 1935, Venezuela was ruled under various caudillos.
General Juan Vicente Gómez put an end to the uprising caudillos and ruled
under a vigorous dictatorship until his death in 1935. His death marks the end of
the caudillo era and the beginning of the return of civil liberties. Culturally
speaking, the famed tango singer, Carlos Gardel visited and performed in
Caracas April 25, 1935. His visit took place only a few months before Gómez’s death. It was almost two months later (June 24, 1935) that Gardel would die in a plane crash in Medellín, Colombia. The year encapsulates two memorable historical moments for Venezuela. Azparren categorizes the allusion to Juan Vicente Gómez as “ideológico” and Gardel’s visit as “sentimental”. Although both moments are significant in the nation’s history, Azparren reiterates the nostalgic importance of the tango singer’s visit and its effect for the collective memory of the Venezuelans,

Carlos Gardel, en efecto, desde que visitó Caracas comprometió sentimentalmente a una generación, a punto tal que aún hoy es uno de sus recuerdos históricos más activos, más allá de la jeringonza de quienes en 1935 y varias veces después sonaran una vida posible al margen de la vida real y presente (78).

In effect, Cabrujas makes use of two events within a historical moment in Venezuela, whose memories still resound for Venezuela.¹⁹

---

¹⁹ Hugo Achugar was present in Caracas when the play El día que me quieras was first staged. He recalls what the audience said with respect to the magnitude of Carlos Gardel’s visit, “Según mis propios recuerdos de cuando se estrenó la obra en Caracas, una de las cosas que se decían respecto de la visita de Gardel en 1935 era que solo en otra ocasión se había juntado tanta gente para recibir un visitante en Venezuela como había ocurrido con Gardel y había sido cuando la visita de Fidel Castro a Caracas” (E-mail).
III. Scenery/Camp/Queer

In this section, I will analyze under a queer lens the décor and the description of the living room in which the action takes place, two important aspects of the play. I am interested in exploring how the set description frames the subsequent destabilizations which will be analyzed. The description of the scenery falls into a slippery slope between two muddled terms, “camp” and “kitsch”. The debate and definitions of camp and kitsch have had a lengthy historical trajectory which has left some critics exasperated. Laurence Senelick evokes this sentiment in his article, “The Queer Root of Theater”: “I’m not eager to join the increasingly tiresome debate over what is meant by camp. As the Supreme Court Justice said of pornography, I know it when I see it” (25). Matei Calinescu’s text *Five Faces of Modernity* dedicates an entire chapter to “Kitsch.” The author provides various definitions for the term:

> Whatever its origin, kitsch was and still is a strongly derogatory word, and as such lends itself to the widest range of subjective uses (235). Kitsch may be conveniently defined as a specifically aesthetic form of lying (229). Generally, kitsch dismisses the claims or pretensions of quality of anything that tries to be ‘artistic’ without genuinely doing so (235).

Calinescu’s definitions of kitsch become opaque with his following definition of camp, which he states is based on Susan Sontag’s *Notes on Camp*: “Camp cultivates bad taste - usually the bad taste of yesterday - as a form of superior refinement. It is as if bad taste, consciously acknowledged and pursued, actually could outdo itself and become its own clear-cut opposite” (235). After his definition on camp, Calinescu states, “Externally however, camp is often hard,
indeed impossible, to distinguish from kitsch” (230). One of the first definitions of Camp as an academic term is Sontag’s in her 1964 essay “Notes on ‘Camp’”. She defines camp as a sensibility. Moe Meyer cites Gregory Bredbeck’s essay which criticizes Sontag’s lack of concrete definition when defining camp. Bredbeck:

has tried to dismantle Sontag’s defining Camp as a sensibility: ‘a ‘sensibility,’ like that Regency term ... is something understood perfectly until articulated. Sontag’s essay demonstrates this slipperiness through its recourse to the most basic theoretical strategy derived from Aristotle, division and classification (Meyer 8).

Moe Meyer also attests to the difficulty associated in defining camp, in the introduction to the compilation of essays, The Politics and Poetics of Camp by stating, “I will attempt the sacrilegious: to produce a definition of Camp” (9). Meyer’s definition of Camp is accomplished vis à vis queer performativity:

In the sense that queer identity is performative, it is by the deployment of specific signifying codes that social visibility is produced. [...] Thus I define Camp as the total body of performative practices and strategies used to enact a queer identity, with enactment defined as the production of social visibility (5).

Meyer’s definition eliminates the slipperiness of the term’s sensibility and replaces it with a queer “doing” or a “queer strategy”. In this way, camp exposes queer performativity by underscoring the construction of an “original”.

One of the theatrical elements that frames El día que me quieras is its Camp stage setting. The middle class Ancízar family is not aware of their “inadequate taste” precisely because they are in the moment and sufficient time

---

20 Meyer’s definition of queer is in agreement with the way in which I employ and define the term throughout the analysis.
has not lapsed in order for them to be able to reflect on the “bad taste of yesterday”. The Ancizar’s living room and patio is reflective of this bad taste. The spaces are decorated with a specific aesthetic in mind: a Junghans clock, which was mass produced, gold vases, ceramic butterflies, with Arabic and fantasy overtones. The description of scenery provided is found in the opening lines of the play text:

La sala y el patio de las Ancizar a las doce del día. Un reloj Junghans suena y es la única exactitud de lugar. El resto es árabe y fantasioso; jarrones dorados, mariposas cerámicas, pastorcillos pálidos, lotos, bambúes y delicadezas. María Luisa sentada en un sofá viénés (19).

The living room fits the model of camp. Since, however, the analysis is not of a literary passage or painting but rather a play text, the stage setting takes on a performative dimension rather than simply a realistic depiction of the décor of the times. Moreover, the stage design establishes an active dialogue with the actor’s performance.

Moe Meyer’s queer concept of the camp aesthetic allows me to read Cabrujas’ play text in a different light. The time frame in which the play premiered, the seventies, makes visible the “bad taste”, but it also makes the queer visible. The stage and all of its props parody the middle class family of the thirties. The play’s staging in the late 1970s is what gives visibility to the “bad taste” of the 1930s. Thus, the scenery is a performative strategy that “consciously [has] extravagant style [which represents] modes of dissociation from the conventional heterosexist matrix” (Manzor 264). The mise en scène
highlights, emphasizes and situates the queer performative elements of the characters and the spectator's reception of their performance.

**IV. Gardel’s Destabilizing Visit**

It is specifically around Carlos Gardel’s visit that I will elucidate the queer performativities of gender destabilization that occurs among the male characters. Within this section the male characters will firstly be studied individually. Subsequently, the masculinities are destabilized through their interactions. I examine the destabilizations through the following relationships: Carlos Gardel and Plácido, María Luisa’s uncle, as well as Pío and Carlos Gardel.

María Luisa and Elvira’s brother Plácido, who lives with them, enters the stage in the first scene, “¡Llegó al Majestic!” (28). His excitement of Gardel’s visit is shared exclusively with his niece Matilde and his sister Elvira. Pío, the only other male who is present, does not share this emotion, at this point, in the slightest. This excitement is not only shared but understood and relished in the same way by Matilde and Elvira. They closely engage Plácido’s notification of Carlos Gardel’s visit by requesting that Plácido inform them of the specific details of the famed tango singer’s arrival:

**Plácido:** El pueblo, sin ninguna intención malsana. Y eso era lo que el doctor Fortoul intentaba explicar en aquel alboroto.

**Matilde:** ¿Cómo qué Plácido? ¿Cómo un día de la Independencia?

**Plácido:** No.

**Matilde:** ¿Cómo un carnaval de odaliscas?

**Plácido:** No. Como algo que nunca se vio. Como si te dijera que nunca supe el color de las alfombras del Majestic hasta esta tarde. Entramos el señor Pimentel y yo, en representación de la empresa y la policía no quería dejarnos pasar. Y Pimentel le dice al
In the previous dialogue, Plácido’s description of the effect of Gardel’s visit in the city of Caracas is not answered with a short reply to his sister and niece. He rejects both of Matilde’s suggestions whereas he could have simply agreed that the commotion of Gardel’s visit was similar to the crowds of Independence Day or a carnival. Instead, he describes Gardel and his visit as something that he had never seen before. In order to describe the impact of Gardel’s presence in the hotel, Plácido personalizes it by accounting for the significance it has had on his life. He accomplishes this by claiming that it is as if he had known the colors of the carpets in the Hotel Majestic up until Gardel’s visit; that is, almost as if the singer’s visit had allowed him to see things he had never seen before let alone pay attention to them. There is an allusion to an awakening within him that would not have been able to come to fruition had it not been for Carlos Gardel’s presence.

The previous scene could be understood as a simple excitement by a person who is thrilled to have a famous musician, who is at the peak of his career, visit their hometown. Plácido’s excitement and emotion, however, reach new heights as he continues his account of events at the hotel earlier in the day. After Plácido’s brief exit off the stage in exasperation upon finding out his sister Elvira has rejected the much sought after tickets he procured to see Gardel, “(Insiste, antes de salir) María Luisa… ¡Es en la sexta fila! ¡Te la conseguí en la sexta fila… ¡Te la conseguí en la sexta fila…! María Luisa, tienes que ir…! (Sale Plácido), he returns to the stage because of an allure (29). The stage directions
point out that Plácido’s return to the stage is incited by Gardel’s voice on the gramophone Matilde put on, *Matilde organiza el gramófono y se esucha, “Sus ojos se cerraron” […] ‘Como perros de presa…’, indica el regreso de Plácido Ancizar atraído por la voz de Gardel. Se sienta junto a su sobrina y comenta*” (33 *my emphasis*). Plácido’s return is then not just incited but contingent on an attraction that he has specifically to Gardel’s voice.

He and his niece immediately impart in conversation on the same topic they left off before his exit, Gardel’s visit to Caracas. In the midst of his conversation with her, Plácido enters a mode of confession as he divulges to Matilde an intimate emotion he experienced towards the singer. This mode is performed by a gesture he makes as he is about to inform Matilde of what he performs as a secret:

*Matilde*: ¿Qué hacía, Plácido…?

*(Con ademán de secreto)*

*Plácido*: Hablé con él Matilde…

*Matilde*: ¿Dónde?

*Plácido*: En la cocina del Majestic… El señor Pimentel y yo, entramos, y él se me queda mirando y me dice… ‘que rara es la gente acá…’ (33).

Plácido’s secrecy evokes Judith Butler’s concept of punitive consequences when performing a gender which purports itself to be “incorrect” for the sex which performs it. In *Gender Trouble*, Butler prefaces her concept of “punitive consequences” by explicating that, “because gender is a project which has cultural survival as its end, the term strategy better suggests the situation of duress under which gender performance always and variously occurs” (190). Gender is then a “stylized repetition of acts” which bears a constant regulatory
surveillance. Reading the character Plácido’s reaction, through his attempt to
dissimulate his excitement, is in consonance with Butler’s concept of regulated
gender. With the gesture of secrecy there is an awareness, at some level, that
his actions are not able to be performed openly, for, “Discrete genders are part of
what ‘humanizes’ individuals within contemporary culture; indeed, we regularly
punish those who fail to do their gender right” (“Gender Trouble” 190).

This mode of confession continues throughout his conversation with
Matilde about his encounter with Carlos Gardel. Matilde abruptly switches the
conversation from Plácido’s dialogue with Gardel onto the singer’s physical
appearance:

**Plácido:** Entonces yo le digo... mire, Gardel, aquí el señor Pimentel como empresario y este servidor, queremos, preguntarle si se siente cómodo...
**Matilde:** ¿Es alto verdad Plácido?
**Plácido:** Matilde... yo lo vi y me parpadeó la virilidad... Es alto, como en las películas y tiene esa luz que parece atravesarlo... y en lugar de hablar, accede, se inclina, se extiende (34).

Once again, Plácido finds the need to personalize and expound upon a question
that could have been responded to with a simple “yes” or “no”. His
personalization involves an intimate description of the visual effect Gardel's
physique impinged upon him. In employing the phrase, “me parpadeó la
virilidad”, Plácido states that his virility was shaken within him by Carlos Gardel's
physical appeal. His shaken virility can be interpreted as a gender awakening
whereby it surged feelings of masculinity or physiologic, whereby his physical
anatomy is sexually excited. In either case, Plácido is verbally direct about his
sentiment of physical attraction towards Carlos Gardel which in turn is intertwined
throughout the play text with the overall excitement in the Ancizar house and Caracas over Gardel’s much anticipated visit. This is especially prevalent as Matilde, Elvira and Plácido are about to leave from their house to the concert, as they hear the fireworks that announce Gardel’s presence in Caracas:

(En la calle se escuchan los cohetes municipales que anuncian la llegada de Carlos Gardel y el consiguiente júbilo de la población)

Matilde: (Eufórica) ¡Cohetes, Plácido ... vamos!

Plácido: Que nadie diga que no fuimos agradecidos, que no supimos reconocer la gloria de un hombre. La ciudad está de fiesta (44).

The stage directions allude to an overall excitement in the city of Caracas, which can easily overshadow Plácido’s performative disruption of a stabilized heterosexuality. As in the preceding queer moments, Plácido’s replies on the subject of Carlos Gardel consistently reveal an attraction towards him.

Whereas previous analysis of Plácido’s performative secrecy may connote a destabilized sexuality away from heteronormativity, the scene which references Plácido’s virility allows one to see a performance of queer masculinity. The focus here is not on classifying Plácido’s sexuality but rather honing in on the destabilizing effect, brought forth by his awakened virility in front of Gardel: this does not necessarily imply he is homosexual, rather virility can be understood in different ways thus destabilizing heteronormative -gender roles.21

21 The stage performance of this scene could heighten Plácido’s performativity of a discrete gender. The Cuban playwright Alberto Sarraín recently staged the play in Cuba discussed, in part, one of the poetic licenses he utilized in order to project a more visually gendered character, “Tengo que confesarte que aproveché cierto afeminamiento natural del actor que hacía Plácido para elaborar un personaje más comprometido en la línea ‘gay’” (Personal e-mail communication). Where Sarraín chose to have the character Plácido perform a “feminized” role, another director could decide to go in a different direction with the character, with respect to their performativity of gender.
**Pío Miranda**

Much like Plácido’s possible queering of gender and queer sexuality that permeates throughout the play text, Pío Miranda’s queer moments can also be eclipsed by his own expression of highly politically charged views. Pío Miranda’s communist political stance reverberates incessantly throughout the play to the point where he not only becomes a caricature to the spectators but also within the play itself. Towards the end of Act Two, Plácido takes on the role of Pío and decides to demonstrate all of the political knowledge he has gained through Pío. Plácido takes charge and decides to impart the role of Pío, while simultaneously encouraging Pío to take back his role as teacher of communist beliefs:

**Plácido:** Tú vas por la calle, ¿verdad, Pío?, y se te antoja... qué sé yo...queso... chuleta, capricho... y entran en el mercado, de lo más formal... y pides: dame, dame, dame... ¿Y por qué te voy a dar? Porque soy un hombre y pertenezco al género humano... y tengo hambre... Toma, toma, toma ... ¿No es así, Pío? Me lo aprendí de memoria... palabra que me lo aprendí de memoria... Anda, Pío... pregunta... para que todos los oigan... (70).

At first, Pío declines to participate in the game but quickly assents with discernible newfound reservation. Throughout the first act, Pío takes every opportunity to expound upon his communist beliefs. His change in attitude and lack of expressiveness on the subject surged as Elvira proved Pío to be a “fake” who has lied about his connection with the Nobel Prize winning, Romain Rolland and his future plans with her sister in Russia. His nervousness however does not impede him from continuing on with the game, which illustrates not in depth thought on communist beliefs but rather propaganda:
Plácido: A ver… ¿Qué notamos al examinar la sociedad actual?…
Pío, pregunta… ¿Qué notamos…?
Pío: (Inquieto) No…
María Luisa: Anda, Pío … pregunta… Tú primero y nosotros después. ¿Qué notamos al examinar…?
Pío: … (Abrumado) ¿… la sociedad actual?
Plácido: Respuesta…
María Luisa y Plácido: … Una profunda desigualdad entre los hombres (71).

Throughout the play text, Pío reveals himself as an advocate of communist beliefs and his dissatisfaction with world’s politics. It is precisely in Elvira’s confrontation with Pío that his queer moments are revealed. The performance of the communist radical proves to be a masquerade for memories and feelings, which he is uncomfortable expressing. Pío finds the need to confess his past and his actions to Elvira, his girlfriend’s sister. In a confessional mode which he prefaces by stating he will never speak of it again, he declares to her his reasoning for being a communist. His statements are full of emotion, exclamations and vulgarities. This speech act is at the polar end of his previous dialogues and demeanor throughout the play. In fact, it is the first time that Pío loses the composure he has maintained, up until now.

He reveals to Elvira the particulars of his mother’s suicide, “¿Sabes cómo mierda se ahorcó? Se subió a la pila de libros, y ni siquiera, maldita sea, me dejó una carta explicativa” (38). He proceeds to confess to her that his communist belief is not based on what others presume and on what he has led them to believe: “¡Yo te podría decir que soy comunista por la cojonudez del Manifiesto,

22 For a more historical approach of Pío Miranda refer to Azparren’s Cabrujas en tres actos and Kristen Nigro’s “Pop Culture and Image-Making in Two Latin American Plays”. Critics such as Leonardo Azparren Jiménez and Francisco Rojas Pozo have focused on Miranda’s socio-political historical importance in El día que me quieras.
por el hígado de Marx y la cabeza de Frederico Engels! (38). His belief in communism is attributed to the motive for his mother’s self imposed strangulation. He discloses his mother’s premature death was incited by a mistake committed by the government which left her without a pension, “¡Porque redujeron el presupuesto del Ministerio de Sanidad, y hubo un error en la lista de pensionados!” (38). It is important to note that Pío opened the dialogue by stating he was going to explicate the reasons for his beliefs in communism.

However, his divulgence is not limited to that sole event. He goes on to reveal, his sexual past which he finds disturbing. His mother’s suicide prompted him to enter into a religious seminary, where he proceeded to masturbate repeatedly every night to the image of Saint Rita, “¡Ingresé en el seminario arquidiocesano y comencé a masturbarme todas las noches! ¡Y me declararon loco y atormentado!” (38). The description of his nightly sexual solo encounters and his subsequent verbal punishment signals the audience towards an aspect of his sexuality which is understood as abnormal by not only the religious cult he pertained to but also to him. He acknowledges the source of his sexual excitement is out of the “norm”. Interestingly, it is this incident and not his mother’s suicide which provokes in him the “Nietzschean” metaphor “God is dead”, ¿cómo mierda creo en Dios, si me provocaba la imagen de Santa Rita? ¿No comprendes que me expulsaron de la vida?” (38-39). I understand Pío’s confession as elucidating a possible queer identity, because of the way he destabilizes the notion of his sexual identity by admitting to a sexual fantasy which supersedes the hetero/homo binary. Alberto Sarraín’s interpretation of
Pío’s disclosure demonstrates an attempt to classify Pío’s sexuality and its difficulty of placing it within the confines of the hetero/homo binary:

También pudiéramos decir que Pío es homosexual por lo mismo, por la falta de información que hace probable casi cualquier sentido en su sexualidad. Ahora, en el seminario se masturbaba con la imagen de Santa Rita y no con la de San Sebastián o San Juan. Este hecho nos habla de una actividad masturbatoria perniciosa (E-mail).

Because the director is a psychologist by training, he gives an explanation to the way the audience would see him. Sarraín chose to present the character as perturbed,

Yo preferí tratar a Pío como un hombre perturbado en todas las áreas de su personalidad y su historia personal. Ello permitía integrar la sexualidad a la perturbación como sucede en las diferentes entidades psicopatológicas (E-mail).

In analyzing Sarraín’s decision, I understand the impossibility of categorizing Pío’s sexuality and choosing to perform him as a “perturbed” figure as a queer possibility, because to be perturbed is to be “uneasy”, “to throw into great confusion” which I would more closely associate with a destabilization of identity. Sarraín however, explicates that his choice was related to a psychopathologic reasoning; that is, he preferred to understand Pío’s sexuality vis à vis mental disease. This selection is illustrative of the present need to categorize gender and or sexuality, and the stigma attached to not fitting in either mold.

María Luisa, Pío’s girlfriend of 10 years, also finds the need to confess and much like Pío, confides in her sister Elvira, her sexual past. To clarify, María Luisa does not confess to her sister in the same fashion that her boyfriend did;
that is, she is not consciously aware of what she is about to divulge to her sister. Pío, however, was very direct and distinctly aware of what he was about to reveal. After Pío leaves, María Luisa and Elvira discuss the topic of the Ukraine, María Luisa’s destination with Pío after Gardel’s concert. It is within the dialogue that María Luisa, who is thirty five years old, informs her sister that within their ten year courtship, she has never seen her boyfriend naked,

**María Luisa**: Nos conocemos demasiado… ¿entiendes? Nunca lo he visto desnudo, pero es como si lo hubiera visto. Y si quiero saber algo, él me lo explica. Nos hemos sentado tantas veces en ese sofá… y ha habido tantos silencios después de sus palabras… tanta costumbre (45).

María Luisa immediately reinforces the topic of the lack of a sexual relationship in her ten year relationship by bringing up the topic again, immediately after her first disclosure,

Pero está avergonzado del almuerzo, diciéndome que no quiere molestar… No me ha tocado nunca. ¿Podrás creer que no me ha tocado nunca? En realidad no recordamos nada. Vivimos para un día donde habrá justicia y se repartirá el mundo (46).

The lack of sexual activity between the two adults can be attributed to the socio-cultural historical markers of Latin America.

Los países de Latinoamérica en la primera mitad del siglo XX, tenían una moral muy influenciada por la iglesia católica, el culto a la virginidad, la pureza de la mujer etc. […] Visto así, el asunto quedaría de la siguiente manera: María Luisa es una mujer de su época que acepta la pasividad sexual de Pío como una consideración, un respeto por su cualidad de virgen (Sarraín e-mail).
I, however, do not interpret María Luisa’s mention and subsequent reiteration of the subject matter as a fact she praises in Pío’s character. She does not bring up the topic in order to exalt the respect Pío has had over her person but rather inserts the subject where the focus resides elsewhere. In her question to Elvira, it is almost as if she herself is in disbelief of his actions, or lack of action. Furthermore, following the line of the moral, brought up by Sarraín, in Latin America at the time, her move to a different country with her boyfriend, stripped of the title of marriage, would not be something María Luisa would subscribe to if she appealed to the moral code of the time. Another critic, Edgar Moreno-Uribe attributes not only the lack of sexual activity between Elvira and Pío as a possible signifier of homosexuality but also the actor, Fausto Verdial and his sexuality, who portrayed the character of Pío Miranda: “La homosexualidad de Fausto Verdial no era un secreto y por eso encarna a Pío Miranda, que en el fondo puede ser maricón de closet, que se pasa diez años sin tocarle ni un pelo a su novia” (E-mail).

María Luisa continues to demonstrate a desire to maintain her relationship with Pío by attesting that, at all costs, she will follow him and his ideological beliefs. Pío, on the other hand, does not exhibit the same desire and determination as his long term girlfriend. Although he upholds his plans to take María Luisa with him to the Ukraine and enforces the arrangement to everyone, he shares another side to Elvira during his confession:

**Pío**: Elvira, por hablarte de un lugar lejano, y pienso que allí debe existir otro como yo, en alguna calle de Sidney, un fabricante errático, un vendedor de soluciones, un australiano falsificador” (37 my emphasis).
Pío expresses the idea of finding “someone” else who has the same political sentiments as him. Cabrujas could have easily employed the feminine in this instance to refer to “otra” which, linguistically speaking, would refer to another woman with the same ideological conception as him. In the same breadth he also discusses María Luisa’s desire for marriage with him which contrasts with his lack of interest:

¡Nadie se interesa por mis explicaciones, y yo pido perdón por ser testigo de esa tontería…! Así pasó con María Luisa… ¿Qué hacemos, Pío? ¿Qué hacemos, Pío? (40).

Instead of confronting the issue, he opted to concoct a story about Romain Rolland whereby he would facilitate the plan of moving to Ukraine to work on the land by cultivating red beets. Once again, the audience is left with a conundrum over Pío Miranda’s actions or lack thereof.

**Gardel**

Carlos Gardel's biography has long been contested. The disputes emerge from his original birthplace which has been said to be: France, Uruguay and Argentina, to his birth name and sexuality. Gardel added to the uncertainty of his nationality by providing evasive answers, when questioned on his origins, which aided the secrecy and mystery embedded on his origins. One of his most well known replies is, “Nací en Buenos Aires, Argentina, a los 2 años y medio de edad”. The play text *El día que me queiras* incorporates both the rumored
homosexuality and the unfixed national identity of the singer within the text.  

Cabrujas incorporates the two aforementioned nuanced aspects of Gardel’s identity (sexual and national) in the play text. The playwright presents the variation in the singer’s past vis-à-vis the dialogue between the other characters in the play as well as by Gardel himself.

Upon Plácido’s entrance on stage, he informs his sisters, niece and Pío of Gardel’s arrival to the Hotel Majestic. Plácido acquaints his niece with all the meticulous details of the chaos surrounding Gardel’s advent, “¡Once maletas de equipaje y todavía no han podido subirlas a la habitación!”, but forgets to talk directly about Carlos Gardel. (28). When Matilde asks of the famed tango singer’s whereabouts, “¿Y Gardel? Plácido answers, “En un baño, a la izquierda con Lepera…” (28). Plácido makes a direct reference to Alfredo Le Pera, who collaborated with the tango singer on composing the much celebrated songs the tango singer is legendary for and assisting with the movie scripts in which Gardel acted. Much like Gardel, Le Pera also has a questionable sexual past which has been linked to his artistic partner. Edgar Moreno-Uribe succinctly summarizes the other rumored aspect of Gardel and Le Pera’s relationship, “De Gardel se ha dicho que lo era y que su músico era el amante de turno y que el accidente trágico en Medellín fue provocado por una pelea a tiros dentro del avión” (E-mail).  

The sexual gossip that still surrounds both men is widely known. I

---

23 See Magali Saikin who summarizes Gardel’s rumored homosexual encounters by conversing with many of Carlos Gardel’s most important biographers in her text: *Tango y género: Identidades y roles sexuales en el tango argentino.*

24 Isabel del Valle, who was Gardel’s supposed girlfriend, also commented on Gardel’s death in an interview: “Vivir de la voz lo angustiaba por la inseguridad, porque no se olvide usted que entonces no existía el sonido. Y fíjese que hasta comentan que por eso de la voz tuvo un incidente con Le Pera. No sé, yo le repito lo que me contó Aguilar, que fue el único sobreviviente
interpret the inclusion of this detail as an act which attempts to look at historical moments with an inclusion of what Kristen Nigro pinpoints in her article, “Pop Culture and Image-Making in Two Latin American Plays” as “pop culture”. The relationship between Gardel and Le Pera is further alluded to later when Plácido returns to the stage for a second time. Whereas, previously, Plácido only stated that Gardel was in a bathroom with Le Pera, Matilde expands on that information and recasts her uncle’s previous statement by adding that Gardel had locked himself in the bathroom,

**Plácido:** Está aquí, Matilde…
**Matilde:** ¿Habrá salido del baño verdad?
**Plácido:** ¿De cuál baño?
**Matilde:** ¿No dijiste se había encerrado en un bañó en el vestíbulo del Majestic?
**Plácido:** Sí. Pero después salió…
**Matilde:** ¿Y qué hacía allí? ¿Orinaba?
**Placido:** “y mientras en la calle, en loca algarabía, el carnaval de mundo gozaba y se reía…”
**Matilde:** ¿Qué hacía, Plácido? (33).

Matilde questions Plácido about Gardel’s whereabouts for the second time. Although Plácido had, during his first stage appearance, divulged other many details of Gardel’s visit, Matilde chooses to focus on the bathroom scenario. Plácido did not seem to remember the detail until Matilde reminded him that he told her Gardel had gone to the bathroom. After the clarification, Plácido gives a brief response which is followed by an ellipsis. This ellipsis signals to the play de Medellín, aunque murió después. Aguilar decía que Le Pera -que era el productor- lo hizo cantar a Carlos en un estadio al aire libre y, claro, sin sonido el público que no escuchaba bien hizo sentir sus protestas ... Eso a Carlos lo dejó muy mal de ánimo y decidió separarse de Le Pera. Yo le repito lo que escuché de boca de Aguilar... Que Le Pera y Carlos discutieron en el avión y que sacó un arma y le disparó un balazo que, en vez de pegarle a Carlos le dio en la nuca al piloto, un tal Samper, y así el avión quedó sin gobierno... Yo no lo puedo asegurar, pero me lo dijo a mí, Aguilar, que fue el único que sobrevivió…” (Ardizzone).
text’s readers either an omission or an unfinished thought. The former possibility appears to be the circumstance. Plácido answers the question briefly but alludes to another thought that comes to mind but would rather keep from others; that is, the ellipsis is used to also mislead the reader and signals the actor to performatively act this way as well. This ellipsis may also allude that perhaps Gardel was having a sexual encounter with Le Pera in the bathroom. Plácido is performatively re-enacting the veiled history of Gardel’s sexuality. Plácido does not answer the question but instead avoids Matilde’s insistence by giving her a description of the public’s reaction to Gardel’s visit by responding with lyrics to the famous tango song, sung by Gardel and written by Lepera, “Sus ojos se cerraron”. Matilde asks her uncle, yet again a third time, for clarification of Gardel’s doings in the bathroom but Plácido does not answer. Instead, he chooses to talk about his personal experience with Gardel.

The performance of the destabilizing acts of sexuality and gender enter into a direct relationship with the audience in the “second time”.25 I am specifically referring to the Venezuelan audience’s reaction to Grupo Actoral’s 2005 performance of El día que me quieras. In the second time, Matilde, as well as the Ancízar family, graciously welcomes Carlos Gardel into the home. Matilde offers Gardel a type of flower which symbolizes fertility, “Matilde: Y en nombre de estos recuerdos, nos permitimos ofrecerte esta espiga, símbolo de la fertilidad de nuestro suelo” (61). Interestingly, there is an audible laughter as Matilde’s gift is held briefly by Gardel takes the symbol and almost instantly responds by returning the gift, “Gardel: (Recibe la espiga y la besa) Y yo la

25 José Igancio Cabrujas chose to divide his plays in “tiempos” or “time” instead of acts.
recibo y la beso y la devuelvo a la tierra y prohíbo que se toque, porque será una manera de permanecer en esta casa" (61). The laughter becomes outright and even hand claps are heard from the spectators. I interpret the audience’s laughter as a coded sign which indicates an understanding not solely of what is said, but also what is performed. The act of returning the fertility symbol and the rapidity with which Gardel did it, incited laughter among the audience members. The laughter reveals the spectator’s collective consciousness of the tango singer’s sexually rumored past and the actor who interprets Gardel’s performance of those rumors.

Much like Gardel’s biography, with respect to his sexual past, Cabrujas alludes to a possible homosexuality but does only that, leaving a hint which maintains Gardel’s sexual identity as a possibility. Cabrujas also dialogues with Gardel’s much contested nationality throughout the play text. The characters, with the exception of Pío, are very conversant with Carlos Gardel’s past and in fact revel in the knowledge they have of his ancestry and national present. As Elvira, María Luisa and Matilde discuss the night’s entertainment, Gardel’s concert, they immediately transition into Gardel’s past and rectifying it:

**María Luisa:** Tiene un brillo increíble, como si el sol se reflejara en su cabeza. Un brillo peruano de mediodía en Lima. Quién sabe si la historia del Uruguay es cierta.

**Elvira:** Esta noche se despejarán las incógnitas (53).

María Luisa comments, admiringly, on the shiny quality of Gardel’s hair and shortly after questions Gardel’s roots as an Uruguayan. María Luisa subscribes to the view where some believe Gardel was born in Tacuarembó,
Elvira rejoices in uncovering the truth about Gardel’s identity and proclaims his identity with confidence, as if she were reading his official biography:

_Elvira:_ ¡Y resplandecerá la verdad! Fue engendrado en Tolouse, sin partida de nacimiento posterior, de padre francés sospechoso y madre argentina decentísima. A los tres años, por un azar del destino, llegó a Montevideo, y a los cinco, buscando mejores horizontes, se residenció en Buenos Aires, donde le conocieron por el apodo de El Morocho (53).

Despite Elvira’s performatively convincing biographical report, María still questions his background and wonders, “_María Luisa:_ ¿Y no será india la madre? / _Elvira:_ Blanca y rubia como la duquesa de Alba. Ese hombre no nos pertenece” (53).

Gardel brings up the topic of his mother to María Luisa. The conversation is quickly changed, but Gardel’s “roots” are constantly maintained in question. María Luisa’s doubt lingers even as Gardel visits her family in their home. While in the Ancízar home, Gardel brings up the topic of his mother while María Luisa jumps at the opportunity to question the singer on his familial background:

_Gardel:_ Mi madre dice que las servilletas deben duplicar el número de los invitados. ¿No es increíble mi madre?”

_María Luisa:_ ¿Es argentina?

_Gardel:_ No lo sé. ¿Podrá creer que no lo sé? (56).

As was previously mentioned, Gardel was known for evading questions that would cement his birthplace and by extension his nationality. True to form,

---

26 The question of Gardel’s national identity is remains in dispute. BBC News recently published an article, “Argentina and Uruguay’s Tango Row” on the heated discussion whereby judicial processes are currently being undertaken to declare Gardel’s true birthplace which the public has correlated with his “true” national identity.
Gardel en _El día que me quieras_ also dodges answering questions that would reveal his “true” nationality by admitting ignorance to a seemingly simplistic question.

The tango singer also maintains a veil of uncertainty around his identity audibly perceptible in the fluctuation of his language choice. At times, during the play, Gardel begins to speak with the Ancízar family in French, who have throughout the play, only spoken to each other in Spanish, but immediately corrects himself,

_Gardel:_ Me decía el buen Rolland bajo un alero en Montparnasse: _cher_ Gardel… (_Corrige_) querido Gardel, llevamos dos mil años confiando en el futuro” (56).

_Gardel:_ (A Pío) ¡Si ya nos conocemos! ¡Tiene media hora hablándome de usted! (_Estrecha vigorosamente la mano de Pío_) Gardel… _enchanté (_Corrige_) Dios mío… Babel y los idiomas… ¡Encantado! (58).

What could be considered a mistake that can be attributed to Gardel’s ability to speak French and Spanish becomes remote when considering the context. Speaking in French, albeit a word, in this context whereby his national roots are constantly questioned, allows for Gardel to perform a French identity, one of his much contested identities. The destabilization of Gardel’s national identity is also maintained by the various different names and or variations utilized by the other characters to refer to Carlos Gardel both in French “Charles Romuald” and Spanish “Carlos Romualdo”. The stage corrections immediately call for a language correction and an instant switch to Spanish. This language
performance allows for a Gardel's identity and the possibility of a French identity is enabled.

Conclusion

As has been noted by the critics, specifically Leonardo Azparren and Kristen Nigro, José Igancio Cabruja's play text *El día que me quieras* incorporates Venezuela's national political history, such as Gomez's dictatorship with the country's popular history as is exemplified by Carlos Gardel's memorable visit to Caracas. In my analysis, I have offered another intertextual reference which has been removed from the criticism up until now. From the scenery as delineated in the stage directions, which set the mise en scène to have a kitsch feel which, when interpreted vis-à-vis the the performatives that transpire within the play, take on a camp sensibility; that is, it becomes apparent to the audience that the visual is camp while maintaining a kitsch repertoire among the characters. The scenery sets the stage for the destabilized identities performed primarily by the male characters.

The queer identities are exposed in relation to Carlos Gardel. Kristen Nigro was right to point out the pop culture element of Carlos Gardel's visit in her 1989 article “Pop Culture and Image-Making Plays in Two Latin American Plays”. Gardel's highly questioned sexuality remains sidelined in her study as she refers to Gardel, his inclusion in the play text and his function within the text strictly in a heterosexual normative fashion by her following interpretation: “Thus the tango star works as an effective shorthand, as a way of immediately evoking a wide and rich gamut of associations and images about what it is to be talented,
to be handsome, to be rich- in short, to be the perfect masculine specimen” (43).
While I do agree with Nigro, I do so partially because it is exactly this concept of Gardel as a “perfect masculine specimen” that many have safeguarded in their memories that is being destabilized throughout the play along with the development of the other male characters and their relationship with him. In summation, through the play text’s use of theatricality, gender, heteronormative relationships, and history, it destabilizes and disrupts those categories and also challenges their construction.
Chapter 4: Redressing Transvestism in a Queer Cloak

Ánimas: Juramos solemnemente retirar la maldición pero a una condición: La Raulito repelente queda fuera de las sombras: en nuestro reino no entran más que hombres y mujeres, ¡las mujeres con bigotes se quedan en la tranquera! (Cachafaz)

Fifi: L’illusion sera toujours/ le plus natural de vices (Les Escaliers du Sacré-Coeur).

I. Copi, His Work, and Crossed Boundaries

Raúl Natalio Roque Damonte Botana is better known internationally under his nom de plume, Copi, a name which was supposedly assigned to him by his mother, in his infancy. Much like the origins of his pseudonym, many of the details of his life are left unresolved; that is, locating certain elements of his biography becomes indiscernible. Copi’s nationality has posed an identity placement dilemma whereby academics and biographers are left with a twofold task of deciding not only his nationality but the nationality of his literary production. The ambiguity surrounding Copi’s nationality leaves another plane of interpretation when analyzing his literary production because in many of his

27 Jason Weiss accounts for various possibilities associated with the origin of his more widely recognized nick name: “It was his grandmother who gave him the nickname Copi as a child, though accounts vary as to its significance: according to the French press, his name meant ‘little chicken,’ not surprising given his wiry physique (and a little chicken was a frequent secondary character in his best-known comic strip); his brother Jorge says it referred to the tuft of hair (copo, also snowflake) that stuck up on top of his head, and it may have indicated as well, the paleness of his complexion (Weiss 108). Jason Weiss also refers his readers to, Mathieu Lindon and Marion Scali’s memorial article ‘Copi: On a perdu l’original,’ (249). Weiss also discusses
works, such as *Cachafaz*, the crux of this chapter, the topic of nationality and politics is intrinsically interwoven.

Copi was born in Buenos Aires in 1939 and in 1945, endured with his family their first exile to Uruguay with an intermittent stay in Paris, followed by their return to Argentina in 1955. In an interview, Copi discusses his imposed stay in Uruguay as well as his matriarchal lineage:

> Yo crecí en el Uruguay. De hecho, mi madre y su familia son en su mayor parte uruguayos. Tenía la costumbre de pasar las vacaciones en el Uruguay y pasábamos allí al menos la mitad del año. En 1945, cuando tenía seis años, nos quedamos en unas vacaciones casi eternas en ese país, si se exceptúa los dos años pasados en París. Volví a Buenos Aires poco antes de los dieciséis (Tcherkaski 114).

Most of Copi’s early adolescence was spent in Uruguay and later in Argentina. The exiles the Botana family underwent were chiefly necessary due his father’s political ties with Juan Domingo Perón and his eventual political and ideological disconnect with the future president:28

> Su padre, Raúl Damonte Taborda, tuvo una prominente y controvertida actuación política; también era pintor de talento. Los Damonte se exiliaron en el Uruguay tras el ascenso de Perón, con el que Raúl Damonte rompió relaciones después de haber sido su hombre de confianza” (Aira, 11).

---

28 For more of the Botana family’s political relationships, Cesar Aira suggests reading *Memorias: Tras los dientes del perro* which Aira states is, “un buen relato, aunque parcial” of Botana family’s trials and tribulations with politics (11).
Seven years after Copi’s return to Argentina, at twenty three years of age, he made his final exilic move to Paris in 1962, where he resided until his death, December 11, 1987.

Copi’s series of exiles and his subsequent permanent stay in Paris leads to the difficulty that critics encounter in establishing his nationality and that of his literary production. The playwright’s subsequent stays in different countries for different periods of time, his ancestral lineage comprises one element that contributes to the difficulty of confining Copi and his literary repertoire to one country. Others have decided to impose a sole national identity to the author, while I interpret the combination of his biographical past as an element that cannot definitely correlate a national identity for the person or his works. As we will further analyze, his production cannot be confined by a sole national identity. Yet another illustration of the complex nature of Copi’s national identity is the further complication of his language choice and his production. The language that the cartoonist-turned-author-and-playwright chose to write the majority of his works is not Spanish, his mother tongue, but rather French, the language he acquired early on in his adolescence during his travels to France.29 Copi explains how he came to acquire the French language and how he relates the choice to

29 “Copi returned to Paris on vacation in 1962 to see theater and ended up staying; [...] Back home, his father was no longer able to send him money, having sought asylum in the Uruguayan embassy, so to make ends meet Copi sold drawings on the Pont des Arts and at cafés in Saint-Germain-des-Prés and Montparnasse. Soon he was publishing his drawings in magazines, and in 1964, Le Noubel Observateur asked him to contribute a weekly comic strip, Where for the next ten years his trademark, la Femme aisse (the seated woman), appeared (Weiss 109). “As a cartoonist, by which he first gained renown in Paris and kept a loyal following for two and a half decades, his economy of style matched subtle timing with a deep capacity for empathy and outrage to produce a unique brand of humor” (Weiss 108) His fame as a cartoonist grew quickly, and his drawings began to appear in Charlie Hedbo, Hara Kiri, and Linus (Italy). In the late 1970’s he invented the character Libértett’ for Libération. In later years, he drew for magazines as varied as Gai pied and Paris Match (“Latin American Writers on Gay and Lesbian Themes” (Foster 117).
his familial ties: “En realidad, llegué a París siendo un niño, tenía once años. Y mi padre y madre habían vivido aquí bastante tiempo, en otra época” (Tcherkaski 113). Copi’s biographical details have provided critics with a “basis” of their categorization both for him and his work. As will be exemplified, the sole use of the author’s biographical data proves inadequate respect to the categorization of this particular author’s repertoire of literary texts.

Copi’s choice in language is another component that adds an additional layer to both Copi’s nationality as well as the critics categorization of his nationality. The critic, David William Foster illustrates the importance of French in Copi’s literary production, “Copi’s entire oeuvre (eight novels, ten cartoon albums, ten plays) was written in French, although published Spanish versions (presumably executed by the author) exist for some of them” (“Latin American Writers on Gay and Lesbian Themes” 116). Although Foster details the language of Copi’s works, the critic ultimately classifies all of the authors in his Latin American Writers on Gay and Lesbian Themes: A Bio-Critical Sourcebook with a country. The attention-grabbing moment is Foster’s acknowledgement of French as the main language of creation; however, he is included in a collection of Latin American authors. The decision was based on Copi’s birth country, Argentina.

Foster elected Argentina as the sole country associated with Copi, “Copi (Pseud. of Raúl Damonte; Argentina; 1941-1987)” (116). The prolific Cuban author Severo Sarduy is also included in Foster’s text. Sarduy, much like Copi, spent the majority of his life in exile in France. However, Foster’s classification of
Severo Sarduy’s nationality differs. Foster includes both Cuba and France in the title that references the author, “Sarduy, Severo (Cuba; 1937-France 1993)” (414). Why not include France for Copi? One possible reason for this selection is, as Foster states, Severo Sarduy, “was born in Camagüey and died in Paris, a French citizen” (Foster 414); that is Sarduy became an official French citizen. Copi on the other hand, did not alter his citizenship and rather maintained his Argentinean citizenship. As such, we can deduce that although Copi spent the majority of his life in Paris, his national identity is not associated with France because Foster’s categorizing is based solely on official citizenship.

Interestingly, Copi’s literary production is not well known in the playwright’s official country of citizenship, Argentina. The reasoning could be summarized by the reception of his work in his native country. His play text Eva Perón caused such an upheaval in Paris, that it “scandalized French critics and caused masses to be held in Buenos Aires; one night, a far-right commando stormed the Left Bank theater and burned down the set (Weiss 111). With the release of the play, Eva Perón, “All of Copi’s works would remain banned in Argentina until 1984, after the return of constitutional democracy” (“Latin American Writers on Gay and Lesbian Themes” 116-17). To completely attribute Copi’s unknown status as an artist, in the capacity of a playwright, actor or novelist, solely to the ban imposed on his production would result in a reductive

---

30 Eva Perón (1969), a not entirely unsympathetic but highly surrealistic version of the final hours of the woman whose husband had chased Copi’s family into exile, provoked violent reaction in Argentina, where Copi’s brother’s had to go into hiding and where Copi himself was denounced in the newspapers as a ‘degenerate.’ The Paris production, directed by Alfredo Arias and starring Facundo Bo, playing Evita in drag, was interrupted by a gang of right-wing thugs, who proceeded to break all the sets and pour red paint on the cast members” (“Latin American Writers on Gay and Lesbian Themes” 117).
argument. *Eva Perón* was not the only work which irritated the critics of his native Argentina. As Weiss has pointed out, “[a] short play in 1978, *La Coupe du Monde*, a satire of machismo and nationalism set during the World Cup soccer championship in Buenos Aires, led an Argentine daily to remark, ‘Once again Copi denigrates his homeland’” (Weiss 116-17). Copi’s lesser known status in his native Argentina was the subject of an article in Buenos Aires’ *Rolling Stone Magazine*. The article, “Absurdo, crueldad y desmesura” published in the new millennium relates Copi’s unknown status in Argentina, based on three particulars: his exile, his chosen language for artistic production and the “repulsive” themes that are associated with his literary production: “Diversos factores (su radicación en Francia, su elección de la lengua de ese país y, sobre todo, lo revulsivo de sus historias) contribuyeron a que Copi fuera víctima del deporte tan argentino del ninguneo”. The article sheds light on the “revulsive” aspects of Copi’s works which led to his anonymity of his literary production in Argentina. The article does not clarify what Cesar Aira, who based his text *Copi* on a seminar entitled, “Como leer a Copi” which he headed in Buenos Aires at the Centro Cultural Ricardo Rojas, elucidates as Copi’s unknown status in Argentina in the introduction to his text.31 Aira explains, in his introduction, the

---

31 The *Rolling Stone* article previously mentioned acknowledges Cesar Aira as being one of the forerunners in Argentina who has started to shed light on Copi’s literary production, “Gracias al entusiasmo de algunos teatreros y en especial a la revalorización que César Aira hizo de su obra a comienzos de los 90, el planeta Copi empieza a sernos menos extraño” (Rolling Stone Buenos Aires).
choice of chronological organization with the combination of extensive details on Copi’s literary work was based on Copi’s works’ anonymity in Argentina.32

La siguiente es la transcripción de cuatro conferencias pronunciadas en la Universidad de Buenos Aires el mes de junio de 1988, como parte de un ciclo sobre distintos autores, titulado “Como leer a …”. Dado que la obra de Copi es poco conocida en la Argentina, opté por presentarla, en sucesión más o menos cronológica, contando y describiendo sus novelas y piezas teatrales, algunas con todo detalle (Aira 1).

Jorge Dubatti, a well known Argentinean novelist, also confirms Copi’s unfamiliar status within the context of Argentinean literature, but unlike Aira, he exposes a possible rationale behind Copi’s literary exclusion, in his birthplace, as a deliberate action.33

On the back cover of *Cachafaz / La sombra de Wenceslao*, Dubatti makes a connection between the national theater and the obscure status of Copi’s theater in Argentina:

La dramaturgia de Copi arranca de raíz todas las afirmaciones corrientes en torno de la definición de un teatro nacional. No en vano las historias del espectáculo argentino se empeñan todavía hoy en ignorarlo, como a tantos otros teatristas cosmopolitas o expulsados por el exilio. De allí el lugar esencial de Copi, la necesidad de su inclusión en el relato del teatro nacional.

Dubatti’s, connection evolves into an argument for Copi’s Argentine roots, located within the playwright’s work, which he adduces should subsequently

---

32 *Copi* by Cesar Aira is in its second reprint in 2003, and the ensuing quote is taken directly from the second edition.

33 It should also be noted that Copi’s anonymity within his native country and Latin America also crossed over to France shortly after his death, “Despite his relative success, most of Copi’s books are out of print in France a decade after his death” (Weiss 249).
achieve recognition within Argentinean national theater, “La instalación definitiva de Copi en París cuando apenas tenía 22 años es, contra lo que puede suponerse, el argumento más contundente a favor de su argentinidad”. Dubatti unequivocally circumscribes Copi, solely as an Argentinean playwright who writes Argentinean Theater in another language while in exile. The critic rhetorically asks the following questions:

¿Teatro argentino, escrito en Francia? ¿Teatro argentino, en francés? ¿Teatro argentino, desde las convenciones y el imaginario de la postvanguardia francesa? ¿Se puede reescribir la gauchesca, revisar el mito de Evita, reinterpretar la simbólica del tango y demoler el Mundial Fútbol ’78 y la dictadura, desde París? ¿Son argentinos la ferocidad, el absurdo, la violencia, el deseo, el desenmascaramiento, el canibalismo de las piezas teatrales de Copi?

He responds to all of these questions with the following matter of fact reply, “Por supuesto”. Dubatti’s answer and explicit claim of Copi’s work as being Argentinean is contested and questioned by none other than Copi; that is the playwright unknowingly replies directly to questions in interviews, conducted years earlier, about his nationality and writing which puts into question Dubatti’s unequivocal statement.

José Tcherkaski’s text titled, *Habla Copi: Homosexualidad y creación*, is based on interviews that Tcherkaski and other critics had with Copi as well as those who worked very closely with him in the artistic realm. Throughout the compilation of interviews, the question of nationality and what the interviewers present as a seemingly incongruent relationship with the French language choice is revisited. Copi’s answer to Raquel Linenberg’s question: “Sos un argentino
que escribe en francés. ¿Cómo vivís esta situación en relación con los editores y el público? ¿Cómo la sentís?”, in the text, encapsulates the answers he had previously given the other interviewers throughout the collection:

**Copi:** Mi padre era lo que se llama un argentino de París. Es decir que hablo como los franceses, me visto como ellos y tengo probablemente los mismos puntos de vista respecto a las autopistas o al precio del pescado. Pero de todas maneras, no soy un francés, pertenezco a una categoría de extranjeros que los franceses consideran como tales durante dos generaciones. No soy francés ¿no es cierto? Pero soy un argentino de París. Es decir que desde que me puse a escribir mis excentricidades de lenguaje, que son las mismas que un argentino se permite con el español-que son una idea de la libertad con la cual uno puede trabajar una lengua sin estropearla-, fueron aceptadas por todo el mundo, de la misma manera que puede aceptarse un pintor que utiliza los colores de su país (113).

In his reply, Copi repetitively acknowledges his Argentinean heritage; however, his Argentinean background is recognized but it is also consistently affixed to a Parisian identity. He does not confine his identity as Foster did to his birth country.

Copi’s conceptualization of himself bearing an Argentinean identity, albeit attached to a Parisian identity, was an impossibility and which he expressed as a disinterest for him in another interview. Previously, he referred to himself and identified as “un argentino de París” when in an earlier interview, in the same collection of interviews, with Tcherkaski he wholly negated being Argentinean:

**Copi:** La Argentina no representa ningún problema; el problema argentino es como el problema homosexual; ustedes me quieren crear un problema. Porque yo no tengo problema de argentino, es un problema de ustedes. Porque no me criaron para ser argentino, porque yo no soy argentino. Mi abuela era española, mi abuelo, uruguayo; tengo un abuelo entrerriano, una bisabuela judía, dos
bisabuelas que eran indias. ¡Qué catzo me interesa ser argentino! (68).

The question of a problematic between Argentina and Copi resonate throughout the entirety of most of the collection of interviews. Throughout the interviews, Copi refuses to conflate his official Argentinean citizenship with the French nationality he chooses to associate with. His responses, in the collection of interviews in the book Habla Copi: Homosexualidad y creación, take on chameleon-like qualities. As the previous excerpt reveals, Copi vascilates between accepting and acknowledging his Argentinean roots to a complete rejection of his origins with a marked irritated overtone.

In a latter part of the interview Copi reiterates that he does not have a problem with Argentina rather it is the interviewers who impress upon him a possible hostility that they claim he maintains with his birthplace:

Soy un ciudadano argentino, tengo pasaporte argentino. Estoy perfectamente en regla. Lo que vos me pedís es que yo diga a la Argentina que tengo un problema. No tengo ningún problema con la Argentina. No tengo ni una reconciliación ni una pelea (68).

Copi however is astute in his responses where he is clear to signal that it is the interviewers who wish to impose upon him an unsettled relationship with his birth country as well as his sexuality as he previously mentioned in his response to Tcherkaski. Copi’s seemingly agitated response can be understood when analyzing his response in the context of the complete compilation of interviews.

In the earlier part of Tcherkaski’s interview with Copi, the interviewer incessantly asked about Copi’s homosexuality and drag. It is no wonder that this in an evident immense interest for him if we take into account the full title of the
text, *Habla Copi: Homosexualidad y creación.* In addition to Tcherkaski constructing a direct line of correlation between Copi’s birth country and his national he also takes upon himself to utilize the same logic with Copi’s sexuality and the artist’s creative contributions - even after Copi repeatedly and candidly rejects the notion. The following excerpts illustrate the attempt at the imposition Tcherkaski formulates:

**Tcherkaski:** -¿La condición de ser homosexual cambia la visión del mundo?
**Copi:** - No [se ríe]. Ser homosexual no es una condición forzosamente; es evidente que… sobre todo en estos últimos anos, en que los movimientos homosexuales han hecho casi explícita una protesta, una reivindicación del homosexual, casi paralela a la de la mujer, es evidente que casi se convierte en una condición. […] Soy un homosexual que no mezcla los sentimientos; el homosexual no es un homosentimental; la homosexualidad es una cosa, en realidad, sexual; está más cerca del deporte, del teatro […] (43).

The interviewer’s interest in the artist’s sexuality is maintained by his follow up questions: “¿Siempre fuiste homosexual?”, “¿Te hubiera gustado tener un hijo?” “¿Es un tema que te molesta, te irrita” “¿Te divierte, te angustia?” (43-45). Tcheraski’s questions alluded to the topic of creative production and its direct relation to Copi’s homosexuality. Copi’s responses to these questions were thoughtful and rejected any notion of being disgruntled with respect to his sexuality. He openly answers that he was not always a homosexual, “No; además, no soy un homosexual que tenga ese tipo de reparos; durante mi juventud era bisexual” (43). The subsequent questions the interviewer asks is almost an open invitation for Copi to state that he is bothered by not having
children even after Copi replied that at some point he has thought about it and it
is not his homosexuality that impedes it,

Por supuesto, he pensado en tener hijos desde hace mucho tiempo y no es el hecho de ser homosexual que me lo impida tener hijos” […] no tengo una frustración de paternidad, al contrario, pienso que los hijos de mis amigos (de mi edad) son muy amigos míos y de alguna manera más que sus padres; de cierto modo, en algún nivel argentino sería ‘la tía Marica’, eso existe… eso existe” (44).

After the questions which were directed solely at Copi’s homosexuality, the interviewer asks if there is in fact a link between the artist’s sexuality and his creative production, “Me interesa saber si tu mundo imaginario tiene algo que ver con tu mundo homosexual”. Copi responds, “Yo no tengo mundo homosexual ni tengo un mundo imaginario tampoco”. Tcherkaski then continues to bombard Copi and asks about Copi’s writing and its relationship to Copi’s homosexuality, “¿Y cuando escribis, imaginás, hay un mundo dentro tuyo? In this response, Copi, once again, refuses his writing to be relegated and associated solely with homosexuality,

Pero no es un mundo homosexual; vos habrás leído, conocerás de mí; son las cosas que tienen más o menos sexualidad, pero si vos leés La vida es un tango, es la historia de un heterosexual más macho que no se puede hablar arriba de la tierra. Yo no me ocupo sólo de los homosexuales, y una novela de antes, que escribí, no es más que de animales; no es de homosexuales ni de heterosexuales […] (51).

Copi makes an effort to de-essentialize his literary production from the sole label of homosexuality and his homosexuality by offering examples of his other works which do not necessarily deal with the topic but are rather at the other end of the
spectrum. He is not denying homosexuality within his production but rather offers examples of the range of his work which do not always specifically highlight homosexuality. Copi further tries to explain and disentangle the essentialist perspective Tcherkaski attributes with tenacity to Copi’s work:

Si hay dos homosexuales hay dos homosexuales; si los actores pueden actuar de homosexual también lo pueden hacer de heterosexual, pueden actuar de rata, pueden actuar de mujer también. No existe un mundo homosexual. Yo no tengo un mundo homosexual, nadie tiene un mundo homosexual (51-52).

Copi, who was also well known for portraying transvestite characters, delineates the concept whereby the performance of a transvestite character is an extension of his personal life. When asked if he would have liked to have been a woman he responds, “No, tampoco me hubiera gustado ser homosexual. Son tareas que entiendo, que comparto, que ayudo pero… reproducirse está bien” (47). He further clarifies the role of transvestism in his life:

Muchas veces en el teatro he hecho de travesti; muchas veces en el teatro me he disfrazado de rata, de tortuga, de Drácula; muchas veces he hecho de travesti, me encanta como traje de teatro, me encanta el traje de mujer, me encanta que me maquillen durante dos horas, me encanta moverme; además, tengo el placer de ser muy flaco, uso muy bien el vestido de mujer, tengo un cierto tipo de cosas que hacen que en el teatro sea un travesti muy bueno; me encanta en el teatro vestirme de mujer pero no se me pasaría por la cabeza vestirme de mujer en la vida. Jamás, porque ni las mujeres se visten de mujer, las mujeres andan vestidas de blue jean (49).

Tranvestism’s role, much like the other roles he performs such as Dracula and animals, for example, then is relegated by him solely to the theatrical performance; that is, these performances are circumscribed to the space of
theater. His last comment on the dress of women is significant in that it addresses the question of representation, specifically women’s attire.

What resonates from his response is his perception of women’s dress and its changes in its representation. His view on what it means to dress as a woman is based on the representation performed vis à vis the clothing employed by the gender of two different generations: the one he grew up with and the present. He states that presently, not even women dress like women any longer, but instead look like “marcianas”. Interestingly, Copi does not say that they look unfeminine or masculine for wearing blue jeans but rather like Martians. Copi’s describes the generational differences in dress by opposing the esthetics of what represented woman, for him, with the image of women in blue jeans to what he recalls used to wear in earlier times: “Antes las mujeres se vestían de negro, medias de seda, tenían una cierta coquetería, y ahora visten así” (50). He further goes on to once again separate the performativity of transvestism from his personal life, “¿A quién se le ocurre vestirse de mujer ahora? A los trasvestis, pero para hacer plata; yo no me visto así en la vida. Me visto como se viste un italiano, cómodo” (50). Copi’s view on transvestism embodies the representation of what he perceives as women’s clothing which is closely aligned with the ideals present in his adolescence, a generation ago.

The cloak, then, is not just clothing that women wear but clothing that is more traditionally associated with the opposite gender’s clothing. Blue jeans then do not fall into the traditional garb associated with women’s clothing. The clothing construct Copi ascribes to the opposite gender is one that clearly demarcates
distinct difference in gender constructs. Copi’s personal view of transvestism does not seem to challenge the gender binary but rather maintains both categories as distinctly separate in their representation. Copi, however, further challenges the concept of woman by further defining his concept, “Pero vestirse de mujer... es... porque ser mujer es solamente eso, es vestirse de mujer” (50). This statement challenges the essentialist views which are based solely on the biological premises while at the same time asks, “What is woman?” and responds “A representation”. It is here where one can posit a consonance between Marjorie Garber’s view on cross-dressing in Vested Interests Cross-Dressing and Cultural Anxiety and Copi’s statement:

For me, therefore, one of the most important aspects of cross-dressing is the way in which it offers a challenge to easy notions of binaries putting into question the categories of ‘female’ and ‘male,’ whether they are considered essential or constructed, biological and cultural (10).

Copi’s concept of travestism and its relationship to being a woman, hinges on Ben Sifuentes’, statement on the subject, in his book, “[...] transvestism is obsessed with producing an effect of ‘realness’ ” (4). That is, for Copi one could be a woman, if one captures what he perceives as its “real” representation, which for him seems to be based on clothing solely relegated to women at a specific historical moment.

Copi’s statements about his nationality, sexuality and transvestism illustrate not only his personal viewpoint on the topics but are also in alignment and at the center of the theories such as queer theory, performance theory, and performativity. The foundation of these theories is based on the destabilization of
“essences” and the revelation of constructed, albeit culturally constructed performances.

**Cachafaz – Style/Structure**

As Copi previously expressed, he enjoyed the theatrical performance of cross dressing so long as it was, in his personal case, solely relegated to the physical space of the theater. Taking into account Copi’s personal point of view of transvestism as a theatrical performance, it is no surprise that his last written play, *Cachafaz*, which was published posthumously in 1993, has a transvestite, Raulito/Raulita/la Raulita, as one of the main characters. *Cachafaz* is one of three texts Copi wrote in Spanish, *Un angel para la señora Lisca, La sombra de Wenceslao* and *Cachafaz* (Foster). Jason Weiss illustrates an interesting correlation between the works that Copi wrote in Spanish and the time frame in which they were written:

> The disaster of Argentine politics, especially the infamous decade under military rule, further marginalized him: most of his friends and family eventually left. And yet it was during that period, in the late 1970’s, that he wrote his only works in Spanish (117).

It is not by chance that *Cachafaz*, is published with *La sombra de Wenceslao*. The two play texts include what could be denominated as a “gauchesque style”, which I will later discuss, that is prevalent in the written style as in the case of

---

34 David William Foster provides a title in English, *The Rogue*.

35 There is a discrepancy with reference to the number of texts written in the Spanish language by Copi. David William Foster points out in *Latin American Writers on Gay and Lesbian Themes: A Bio-Critical Sourcebook* that there were three texts that were produced in Spanish while Jason Weiss asserts in *The Lights of Home* that there were only two texts produced in Spanish by Copi: *La sombra de Wenceslao* and *Cachafaz*. 
Cachafaz and in its thematic perceivable in both Cachafaz and La sombra de Wenceslao. Pablo Zunino summarizes La sombra de Wenceslao in his article, “El estilo de la ferocidad”:

Se trata de un drama rural en el que priman los personajes gauchescos, la doble vida propia de esos ámbitos (hay una familia oficial y otra bastarda), la tensión permanente entre el campo y la ciudad y muchas referencias a personajes populares de la radio y la canción.

Jason Weiss offers more details on the play text: “In 1978, he wrote the gauchesco style verse play L’Ombre de Wenceslao, performed at the La Rochelle festival for a public of Spanish cleaning ladies and their children” (117). Although this critic states, much like David Foster, the play’s original language as Spanish, he curiously refers to the title of the play in its French translation: L’Ombre de Wenceslao. Another interesting point is his reference to the play text as being written in gauchesque verse. Cachafaz is also reminiscent of gauchesque poetry both in content and style. The few criticisms that exist on the play have one common thread: Cachafaz’s semblance to Martín Fierro. The obvious difference is that they pertain to distinct literary genres. Cachafaz is a play text comprised of two acts, which are written in verse and echoes the epic poem by José Hernández’ Argentinean national classic, Martín Fierro. Cachafaz is written in rhyming verses and does ascribe to Martin Fierro’s regimented octosyllabic verse structure. Hernandez’s text is a poem and maintains verses that are replete with colloquialisms and imitations of spoken speech of the gaucho. This is achieved by making use of the language and colloquialisms employed by gauchos of the nineteenth century. Copi’s Cachafaz also integrates
the speech not of the gaucho but of the people that inhabit the immigrant lower class neighborhood of the “conventillo” in a twofold manner by including both the vocabulary and imitations of the pronunciation utilized by the lower class immigrants of the Rio de la Plata region. Some examples are: “morfar”, which is particular to Uruguay, and vocabulary such as but not limited to: “achura”, “macaco”, “mucama”, “quilombo”, “atorrante” and “che”.

The playwright also imitates the colloquial speech of the lower class by specifically aspirating the last letter(s) of words and making it visually discernable in some cases with an apostrophe that represents an aspirated “s” as in the following example, “Vamo’ a privarno’ de un fiambre”. In other cases, the apostrophe is employed when endings of words are eliminated; in those instances “para”, is pa’ el almuerzo una ensalada (39, 25). The following examples also strive to maintain the colloquial pronunciation that would otherwise get lost as it cannot be imitated solely with an omission of a letter or the addition of an apostrophe as the previous cases but rather, the words need to be respelled in order to maintain the pronunciation: nunca ha robao ni un cardo”, me ha prestao servicios varios” instead of nunca ha robado and prestado (20). 

As mentioned earlier, Martin Fierro imitated the speech of the gaucho. The following example from the Argentinean classic demonstrates the similarity in depictions of speech as in Cachafaz “Yo no soy cantor letrao” (3). The combination of the likeness in speech; that is, the imitation of the speech, and the lower classes that are represented, lend the play text to comparisons to Martin Fierro.
Another point of comparison to the national classic is the Río de la Plata Region where both texts take place. *Cachafaz* does not take place in the rural region of the Argentinean Pampas as in the case of *Martín Fierro*. In Copi’s play text, the stage directions call for it to take place in “un conventillo del medio mundo en Montevideo”. A “conventillo” can be translated as a tenement or slum in English. However, the tenement Copi is referring to is saturated with cultural and historical significance. It is not just any tenement but a specific one of “del medio mundo”. At the beginning of the twentieth century in Argentina and Uruguay, “conventillos” were the places whereby many immigrants and low income families lived. The conventillo Copi is referring to in fact has a specific location in the “real” world which is in Montevideo, Uruguay as he states in his directions. However, the “coventillo del medio mundo” is not part of the playwright’s creation but rather a specific reference to an actual local that existed. The Conventillo del Medio Mundo is in fact a tenement that actually existed up until 1978 on 1080 Cuareim Street in the Barrio Sur neighborhood of Montevideo, Uruguay. The tenements were also considered the hub of Afro-

---

36 In other parts of Latin America, conventillos are referred to as “casas chorizo”. For a more in depth study refer to Roberto de Gregorio’s text, *La casa criolla popularmente llamada la casa chorizo*. Juan Carlos Fontana reviews the play *Cachafaz*, in his article: “Copi frente a una sociedad que se devora a sí misma”, the critic interchanges the term conventillo for casa chorizo, “La acción de la pieza transcurre en un conventillo de la ciudad de Montevideo. Allí en esas casas chorizo, con una hilera interminable de piezas […]” (10).

37 Conventillos have been utilized as center stage for other playwrights from the Río de la Plata region such as the Argentinean Alberto Vaccarezza who published the play in 1925 *El conventillo de la Paloma* and *Tu cuna fue un conventillo* 1918.

38 Marvin A. Lewis quotes Ferreira in his text *Afro-Uruguayan Literature Post-Colonial Perspective*. “Ferreira calls [the demolition of the tenements] ‘el proceso de dispersión barrial violent y doloroso que sufrió la comunidad afrourugaya en la segunda mitad del siglo XX’ (15). Ferreir further clarifies the reasoning of the destruction of the conventillo de mediomundo, “A fines de 1978, durante la segunda época de la dictadura uruguaya, los conventillos de Reus al Sur, y
Uruguayan culture. This becomes a central piece of information that opens up the concept of location of space and furthers the understanding and importance of the two central characters, specifically, Cachafaz who is consistently referred to as “pardo”, or someone whose descent is constituted by a combination of black and white ancestry, by Raulito and the chorus of neighbors, “Porque por más que seás pardo reconocen tu raíz” (35). Raulito also refers to him as Negro, “¡Ay no Negro no te vayas!” (13). And, at other times, describes his skin color, “Pero es pobre, casi negro” (31). The protagonist has both a historical and cultural tie to the local. Although the location clearly is not the pampas, rural Argentina, the play text is set in this lower income class neighborhood that does find itself under similar plights such as the gaucho, Martín Fierro.

In terms of the content, the epic poem, Martín Fierro, denounces injustices imposed by governments and their corruption, and defends the social classes that have been oppressed while at the same time exalts “hombría”; that is, all that represents a valiant man who possesses the stereotypical macho qualities associated with the gaucho that also include his murders when he turns into a

---

39 The Barrio Sur Palermo, where the “conventillo” is the central focus, are the sites of Afro-Uruguayan culture that poets interpret as essential components of black ritual (Lewis 16).

40 If one refers to the dictionary Real Academia Española (RAE), pardo has two possibilities a color, “Del color de la tierra, o de la piel del oso común, intermedio entre blanco y negro, con tinte rojo amarillento, y más oscuro que el gris.” or Am. Se decía del mulato (nacido de negra y blanco o al contrario).”
killer or a gaucho matrero. *Cachafaz* also has thematic similarities with the renowned epic poem; that is, it echoes the topics but it approaches them queerly, which will later be closely studied by intricately incorporating topics such as transvestism, possible sex reassignment surgery, explicit sexual encounters.

Whereas *Martin Fierro* has been classified as an epic poem or as later was contested by Jorge Luis Borges as more of a novel in verse, the classification of *Cachafaz* into a literary genre has been heavily contested. When describing the play text, critics such as Jason Weiss and Pablo Zunino and Marcos Rosenzvaig simultaneously utilize “barbarous tragedy”, which now has become synonymous, as a subtitle to the original title. The play has been difficult to categorize, which is evidenced in the Rosenzvaig’s subtitle. Under which category can this play text be placed? Can it fit neatly into one kind of genre?

The critic Daniel Molina describes the difficulty associated with classifying the play text into any category and specifically makes reference to the subtitle, “Ya el acertado subtítulo, “Tragedia bárbara”, habla de la dificultad para clasificarla”. The juxtaposition of tragedy and barbarous evokes a sentiment of irony, presenting a difficulty in describing the work with respect to a specific genre. From the onset of his article, in the newspaper *Clarin*, “Cachafaz: un Arstófanes de la pampa bárbara”, Molina opens the article with a one word sentence, “Degeneradas”. The critic draws on the difficulty of classifying the play into a specific literary genre, “Degeneradas. Así son las obras de Copi. Obras sin

---

41 In Marcos Rosenzvaig’s text entitled: *Copi: simulacro de espejos*, he refers to the play text in a more specific manner, “Cachafaz ‘Tragedia bárbara en dos actos y en verso’” (82).
género o, mejor dicho, jugando entre los géneros”. Molina refers to the term “degenerada” with a literary specificity; that is, he utilizes the word only to refer to the impossibility of categorizing the play to a specific literary genre.

The term “género” in Spanish, has various meanings such as but not limited to: degenerate, gender and genre. Although Molina is strictly referring to literary genre, these other meanings are also at play when describing Copi and his literary production, specifically Cachafaz. The two main characters Raulito and Cachafaz commit degenerate acts because of their immoral actions such as a plethora of murders executed by Cachafaz and the subsequent acts of cannibalism by Cachafaz aided primarily by his partner Raulito/a. The protagonists can also be interpreted as degenerate not only because their actions which are representative of a lack of character or morals but also because their acts of murder and especially cannibalism, which will be further analyzed in this study, signal that they have reverted to an earlier stage of culture, development and evolution. Another aspect of the play text that can be considered a degenerate act by others is the open sexual relationship between the two protagonists. Also, both in English and Spanish, the prefix “de” also signifies disassociation or removal. Understanding género as gender “degenerada” takes yet another meaning, in the play text, with respect to Raulito/a’s gender. Thus far, I have employed both the masculine and feminine version of this character’s name. This is because, in the text both of the versions are employed and the character is also referred to both in the masculine by Cachafaz, for example, “Y no te me acerques, puto”, ¡mas no te me des de

42 For a more complete list of definitions please see Real academia española.
guapo porque aquí el puto sos vos!” (14, 9) as well as the feminine by Cachafaz: ¡Querida, tené cuidado! (32). Another of the many instances of the feminine appellative is performed by the Vigilante, “Escuchame, La Raulito” (20). Does Raultio/a have a fixed gender or is it a destabalized gender that can be affixed and removed? This debate will be further analyzed in the latter portion of this study. In sum, Molina’s description of the play text’s literary categorization of genres as “degenerada” also lends itself to an interpretation of the play text. With respect to the topic of categorization of the play text is still left in the air not just for Molina but for other critics as well.

In an article written a year later, Daniel Link also makes reference to the difficulty with respect to its genre affiliation in the Argentinean newspaper, Página 12, “Cachafaz es un compendio de todas las formas posibles: una ‘tragedia bárbara en dos actos y en verso’, efectivamente, pero también un texto de la gauchesca, una antología del tango, un sainete y también, un panfleto revolucionario”. On the one hand, Carlos Pacheco’s article in La Nación pigeon holes the play by describing Cachafaz as nothing more and nothing less than a sainete, “La pieza no es más que un sainete, muy similar a aquellos que, a comienzos del siglo último, no terminaban de despegar del género chico, escrito en verso y con algunos pasajes musicales”. To categorize Cachafaz solely as a sainete would be a mistake. The play text goes beyond the parameters of a sainete, by portraying more than superficial stereotypical characters in a brief comedic performance. 43 Cachafaz also spills over the parameters of the sainete

---

43 The sainete is a short dramatic piece presented originally between the acts of a larger production. It was given its definitive form by Ramón de la Cruz in the seventeenth century and its
criollo. The play text does highlight the space of the conventillo, the speech of its inhabitants but unlike the sainete criollo whereby, “social law was broken, order was eventually re-established and the crime punished according to the social code”, order is not reestablished (Zandstra 27). Pacheco, however, does utilize one adjective to describe the play utilized by him and another critic, “grotesco”. Juan Carlos Fontana’s article, “Copi frente a una sociedad que se devora a sí misma”, also utilizes the adjective “grotesco” when specifically referring to the play as well as points towards the difficulty of classifying the play text to a specific genre, “Si bien en su producción coinciden una multiplicidad de géneros, es tal vez en Cachafaz, Eva Perón y Una visita inoportuna, en las que aparece más claramente un neogrotesco rioplatense” (10).

Fontana cites the critic Luis Ordaz in order to clarify some of the literary terms, such as sainete and grotesco criollo, that have been assigned to Cachafaz:

Es bueno volver a citar a Ordaz, para aclarar algunas definiciones. ‘El sainete porteño refleja una realidad no muy agradable por cierto, pero que, en la mayoría de los casos, se enfoca de manera superficial y desde un punto de vista meramente bufonesco, gracioso. El jugueteo y el colorido, primordiales en el género intent since then has been to portray segments of reality in a humorous light, although its characters have become stereotypical in order to increase its comic content (Zandstra 27). Osvaldo Pelletieri defines the sainete as, “sainete es una obra predominantemente breve, con personajes típicos, en su mayoría caricaturescos- una parodia al costumbrismo-, de desarrollo entre jocoso y sentimental con un conflicto concreto, transparente, con una serie de detalles materiales que casi siempre desembocan en una crítica al context social inmediato y con un nivel de lengua peculiar de las clases populares (“Cien años de teatro argentino” 28).

44 The sainete-criollo was typically set in the conventillo […] or in the urban neighborhood. Set plots and personality types provided much of the humor, and even the costumes followed the formula so that the audience would recognize the character types (Gambaro 27).

45 Interestingly, Fontana’s article is found in the theater journal Picadero whereby the volume is entitled: “Sainete-Grotesco un Reencuentro con la tradición”.

popular, son bastardeados y desvirtuados por caretas estereotipadas para la burla y por escenas ridículamente payasescas. Con el grotesco criollo se ahonda, en las individualidades no tenidas en cuenta hasta entonces-se refiere- a los años 20- y, cavando en la careen, en las palabras, en los gestos (que pueden seguir siendo risibles por contrastes), quedan descubierto a las angustias, los padecimientos, las frustraciones y los fracasos que muestran en profundidad a un pobre ser indefenso, acosado y en conflicto, que, sin propónerselo alcanza el nivel de lo trágico, lo grotesco” (11).

*Cachafaz*, as Fontana has pointed out, shares characteristics of various dramatic genres such as the sainete, the sainete criollo and the grotesco criollo. In order to understand the neogrotesco, it is important to understand its foundation. The grotesco criollo, as Dianne Marie Zandstra has defined in her text *Embodying Resistance: Griselda Gambaro and the Grotesque*, has a more profound meaning that the sainete criollo because:

> El grotesco criollo constituye una visión degradada del sistema social, un indirecto enjuiciamiento de los pilares en cuales se apoya, los mitos de los que se alimenta y la forma en que se valida sobre el hombre (Zandstra 26).

Although the degradation of the system is a source of humor, this is ambivalent humor, since the debasement of the system grows out of the debasement of the individual. Societal structures diminish and reify the man until he is no longer able to function humanely with them. The hollowness of a social code held up to ridicule maybe laughable; the dehumanization of the victim is not (Zandstra 26).

The grotesco criollo is tied to works of Argentinean playwrights such as Armando Discépolo of the early twentieth century, particularly because the grotesco criollo is representative of the plights of that era and geography,
Around the time of the First World War, theaters were started by immigrant communities, unions, and social welfare organizations. Out of these experiences came grotesco criollo, a form that blended the short comic sainete orillero with the lack of sentimentality found in the plays of the naturalists (Brockett 429).

The grotesco criollo was more than just a blend of the two genres where the tragicomic takes center stage because it:

represents the internalization of the sainete, [...] the humor of the sainete is replaced by the tragicomic quality of grotesco criollo where the failure and defeat of its characters strongly alludes to the general breakdown of liberal optimism, of the proceses of immigration and, of the dream of ‘an ARGENTINA for all those that want to inhabit its soil’. [...] the stark portrayal of a class-based society immersed in an economic crash of 1929 and the military coup of 1930 that would only exacerbate. Grotesco criollo is distinguished by its opaque dialogue, riddled with slang of Buenos Aires (the argot of the cocksure swaggerers who popularized the tango) and linguistic turns in cocoliche (The Columbia Encyclopedia of Modern Drama 563).

Play texts that have come after this time period as early as the sixties have been referred to as neogrotesco,

Beginning in the 1960’s, there was even talk of a neogrotesco as seen in the works of the playwrights of Griselda Gambaro and Eduardo Pavlovsky, Roberto Cossa. Yet this term only applies to the aesthetic characteristics of these plays and ignores the specific historical circumstances that prompted—and indeed defined—the rise of grotesco criollo (The Columbia Encyclopedia of Modern Drama 563).

Neogrotesco then takes from the aesthetics of el grotesco criollo but does not have the historic specificity of the latter.46 In “Variables culturales e ideologicas”,

---

46 Some authors such as Osvaldo Pellettieri have used the terms grotesco criollo and neogrotesco interchangeably. In his article, “Presencia del sainete en el teatro argentino de las últimas décadas” he states, “De estas lecturas nace la síntesis que en los diferentes momento
Perla Zayas de Lima summarizes how others have defined the term, “Dan Eperly afirma que “el neogrotesco es casi una comedia negra” while others have thought of it to be a more scathing version of a dark comedy, Marie Oppendisano y Bhadre Methz also adduce its similarities, (..) un pariente mordaz de las comedias del humor negro (Zayas de Lima 144).

*Cachafaz* interweaves between the the sainete, the grotesco criollo but better dialogues with what has been denominated as the neogrotesco. The play text does not allude to a specific moment in history. Another text it directly dialogues with, in terms of content, is *El matadero* by Esteban Echeverría. This influence in the play text will be further discussed later in the study. Copi’s employment of various styles and genres in *Cachafaz* is destabilizing and resists classification.

**Gender Performance and Location.**

*Cachafaz* *is* the first play that appears in the compilation. The two main characters in the play text, Raulito/a and Cachafaz, remain on the margins of the Uruguayan society on different degrees. The play text is comprised of two acts and employs minimal stage directions. The stage directions call for the stage to be set in *El Conventillo del Medio Mundo,* “La acción transcurre en una pieza del conventillo del medio mundo en Montevideo” (Copi 7). The space of the play

---

47 As previously discussed, Raulito is referred to both in the masculine and feminine. For the purpose of brevity, the masculine will be employed in this study. The election does not imply that a gender has been chosen for the character.
is limited to the inside of Raulito and Cachafaz’s apartment. Although there are some descriptions of actions that take place outside of the space, most of the action is relegated to the interior and intimate space of the home. With respect to economic class, the two remain on the outskirts, as they and their neighbors, coro de vecinos and coro de vecinas, are members of lower economic class.

From the beginning of the play text, Raulito performs household chores that have stereotypically been assigned to women, such as the opening performative act of washing the floors, Raulito: (fregando el piso) (7). This opening act appears to set the tone of Raulito’s gender performativity throughout the play text and his space where his acts will take place for the duration of the play. Although the majority of the action of the play text is set in the interior space of the conventillo, Cachafaz leaves the space of the home and goes out on his adventures while Raulito is left at home tending to the daily chores of housework that have been traditionally relegated to women such as cooking, and sewing, “¡Ay, no, Negro, no te vayas/ tus pantalones a rayas te los tengo que zurcir” (13). “¡Sacate los pantalones / que los tengo que zurcir!” (26). Interestingly, Raulito’s weapon of choice when Cachafaz looses their monetary income by gambling, as will be later examined, is a kitchen appliance, a frying pan, “Raulito, (con la sarten) (8). The following are Raulito’s opening lines:

Levantate desgraciado ‘e la catrera
que no hay nada pa’ morfar
y estoy harta de esperar la noche entera
que me vengas a enchufar! Y pa’ colmo no me traés ni un rabanito,
desgraciado.
¡Sos un pardo apolillado y te me vas enseguida! (7).
In Raulito’s opening verses the character’s gender is exposed in a twofold manner: his speech and actions he performs. Raulito refers to himself in the feminine, “estoy harta” while performing traditional household chores that have historically been relegated to women. These opening verses also allude to the dependent nature of his relationship with his live in partner Cachafaz. Raulito depends on his partner for food and for sex as Raulito describes it, “que me vengas a enchufar”. A careful reading of Raulito’s opening lines and the way in which his name appears demonstrates an incongruity. Even though Raulito refers to himself in the feminine, as well as do others, mainly Cachafaz, his name appears throughout the play text as Raulito.48

Cachafaz lives up to his name and the various meanings it encompasses from the beginning of the text. The name Cachafaz has a double meaning in this play text. Cachafaz was the nickname by the famed tango singer of the early twentieth century from Argentina, “Ovidio José Bianquét, “El Cachafaz” (Groppa 24).49 Cachafaz is said to have pioneered tango dancing, along with his longtime dance partner Carmencita Calderón The Cachafaz of the play text thinks extensively about tango and writing tango music, “Cachafaz: ¡Pienso en la letra

---

48 The diminutive form of Raúl could be interpreted as a reference to the author, Copi (Raúl Damonte Botana). In this reading of the play text, direct associations between the playwright and the text are precisely what this study avoids: an application of the playwright’s gender and sexuality to the interpretation of the play text.

49 The first Argentinean tango dancer of note to travel to the United States, he was hired to perform in New York, 1911 (Groppa, 24).
There are also several references that allude to tango, “Cachafaz: ¡Para mí vos sos milonga!” (16). The references to tango are also performed between Cachafaz and Raulito and redefined. Cachafaz initiates the dance, “¡Dejame meterte pierna!” (17). Where by the dance ensues and Raulito attempts to show Cachafaz how to dance the tango.

¡No me destroces los pieses
que no sabés ni milonga,
¡sos un pardo sin mistronga
y yo te voy a ensenyar!
¡Si querés aprender tango
Olvidate de la conga!
Este es un baile de machos,
No te hagás el mamarracho,
Tenés que ponerte tieso
Así, ¿me entendés?, ¡así! (17).

Raulito chastises Cachafaz by firstly telling him he cannot even dance what some would consider the precursor to the tango, milonga. In other words, he does not even understand or know the basics of the dance. He reminds Cachafaz of his ancestry by referring to him as “pardo” while simultaneously referring to the conga dance that Cachafaz, insinuating because of his ancestry, may be more familiar. The tango has a longstanding rich tradition which has been a style of dance that is performed between a man and woman. Interestingly, the history of tango reveals another facet to what has been held as

---

50 See, Gabriel Plaza’s, “Carmen Calderón cumplió 100 años y aún quiere bailar” for an interview with the famed dancer.

51 “Milonga spirited and strong, emerged in Argentina in the 1870’s. It was not a mere precursor to tango, but tango in its own right, with its own sound, its own mode of action. [...] Derived from Kimbundu and Ki-Kongo words meaning respectively, “argument” and “moving of dancers”, milonga furthered the tradition of aesthetic dueling: pugnacity as poetry, battling as dance (Thomspon 121).
long standing tradition. Marta Savigliano reveals, in *Tango and the Political Economy of Passion*,

It was not unusual to see men dancing with each other, either in the streets or in rundown places by the harbor, and the police frequently intervened to break up the violent outcomes of these homosocial dance duels (146).

Raulito seems to redefine the tradition of tango by stating that the dance is one not just of men but of “machos”. Raulito is well aware of the history of tango and its beginnings and who was associated with it,

Tenés que ser elegante
si querés pardear tango.
El tango no es atorrante,
ya ha triunfado en el salón (18).

Tango had its beginnings in the lower-class sector of Argentina. It was considered a dance that was done by the “atorrantes” or vagabonds and synonymous with those that that do not like to work.

In Argentina, tango was sinful because it was danced in clandestine sexual places but also because it was danced in the streets and in the *patios* of the miserable tenement houses. The public place of the *arrabales* […] those street corners where few street lamps stood and where sidewalks were illuminated by shop windows were the gathering places of the tango dancers (Savigliano 146).

Tango was later accepted by the bourgeois social class in Argentina and other countries after its success in Paris, France.

[…] Transformed into an enjoyable and exciting practice through a careful screening of “indecent” features, as well as through the establishment of distance/difference between the ways of the “primitive” and the ways in which “primitiveness” could be
appropriated by the “civilized” –tango was accepted by the Argentinean elite as a legitimate practice (Savigliano146).

Raulito openly recognizes the historical antecedents of tango and wants Cachafaz to perform the dance with elegance because it is no longer danced on the streets but in ball rooms.

Cachafaz’s nickname, aside from also being synonymous with the famed tango dancer’s nickname, signifies: shameless, someone who has lots of nerve, someone who cunning and crafty or as David William Foster translated the play text *Cachafaz* as “The Rogue”. Although his birth name is revealed in the play text, “el ciudadano Sigampa que lo llaman Cachafaz”, it is not employed (19). His response to Raulito’s opening questions of act one of his night time whereabouts is representative of that of a scoundrel. The lack of food in the home is answered by a hangover Cachafaz, who as the stage directions clarify is snoring, “(ronquidos de Cachafaz)” right before he answers, “Ay por favor, mi querida/ que ayer tomé mucha canya / para el velorio de Ocanya y me pasé de medida (7). He also confesses he gambled away their money the night before, “¡me jugué todo a los dados! / y me he quedado en la ruina!” (7). He not only gambles away their money but loses his wallet too, “Raulito: ¿dónde está la billetera? / Cachafaz: ¡La he perdido!” (8). Cachafaz performs the meaning of his name by asking Raulito not to ask him to go to work on various occasions: “Yo te quiero como sos/ mas no me hagás trabajar, / te lo pido por favor, ¡dejame pensar en paz!” (12).

He repeatedly steals food, “Raulito: Andá a robar una jarra/ al cuchitiril del vecino” or requests Raulito to acquire food for his “tortas fritas” (22).
“Cachafaz: Ay, no querida, andá vos que yo me estoy inspirando […]”. Raulito also refers to Cachafaz as a “proxeneta”, that is a pimp. This accusation of pimp is directly related to Cachafaz’s “cachafaz” ways of having his lover work while he relaxes, “¡Mientras yo duermo una siesta / te me vas a trabajar!” (11). Cachafaz also literally becomes a pimp as the metaphor for a pimp becomes a reality when he directly tells Raulito to prostitute himself so that he can eat,

    Mirá … te pones el zorro,
    te apoyás en un farol
    y no me volvés a entrar
    sin un kilo de morcilla (11).

The two opening verses analyzed are indicative of the queer gender performativities through spoken language which, in and of itself, is a performance as well as body language. As was previously mentioned, the character’s name Raulito is maintained throughout the text; that is, his lines are always entitled as Raulito by the playwright. There is however an exception made by Copi, where there is a direct reference, albeit, only one instance, in which the playwright refers to Raulito in the feminine. This is only textually visible as it only appears in the stage directions, “con el zorro de la Raulito” (11). The playwright utilizes the feminine article but maintains the masculine version of his name.

On the other hand, the play text maintains a constant vacillation with respect to Raulito’s name between referring to Raulito in both the masculine and feminine which permeates the text. This vacillation results in a destabilization of the classifications of masculine and feminine as well as challenges gender binarism. That is to say, Raulito’s gender is consistently contested by the way he is referred to in the play text. Most of this particular destabilization is performed
by the way Cachafaz refers to his love, “¡ mas no te me haces de guapo/ porque aquí el puto sos vos! (9). It would seem that Raulito contests the masculine gender that Cachafaz regiments him to in these instances. Raulito’s response to him can be interpreted as a proclamation of his desired gender. Raulito responds to the gender attributed to him by his lover by correcting him and referring to himself in the feminine, “Raulito: Porque yo puta no soy, ¡yo soy una intelectual!” (12). His references to himself as well as the gender speech corrections from masculine adjectivization to the feminine, as the one previously discussed, are not a constant. In other instances, he refers to himself in the masculine as a “puto”, “¡Ser un puto es una carga, / vos lo sabés como yo!” (11). It should be noted that although Raulito’s self-reference in the masculine are minimal.

Aside from the varied use of feminine and masculine adjectives, either performed by Raulito or attributed to him, he also makes reference to masculinity. This was evidenced when he gave tango instruction to Cachafaz. He clearly stated that it is a dance not just of men but of “machos”. Raulito frequently refers to himself in the feminine, but as has been illustrated employs masculine adjectivization or refers to himself as a macho. These examples illustrate Raulito’s resistance to self impose a fixed gendered identity. Although Cachafaz employs both the masculine and feminine adjectives when speaking directly to his partner, the feminine adjectives outweigh the masculine. The gender binary, with respect to Raulito, is constantly being challenged but is never clearly pigeon-holed into a gender. Gender hinges on constant fluctuation and instances of
performatively being blurred. Raulito’s gender is at a state of flux, and from a queer theoretical stance, is destabilized.

**Transvestism / Gender Bending**

Ben Sifuentes defines transvestism as “the performance of gender” (3). This definition is reminiscent Judith Butler’s famous metaphor of drag as gender performance, which is also based in part on Simone de Beauvoir’s concept of gender as historical, in her article, “IMITATION AND GENDER INSUBORDINATION”.

Drag is not the putting on of a gender that belongs properly to some other group, i.e., an act of expropriation or appropriation that assumes gender is the rightful property of sex, that “masculine” belongs to “male” and “feminine” belongs to “female” [...] Drag constitutes the mundane way in which genders are appropriated, theatricalized, worn, and done; it implies that all gendering is a kind of impersonation and approximation (1519-20).

As Butler succinctly explains,

*Gender is a kind of imitation for which there is no original;* in fact, it is a kind of imitation that produces the very notion of the original as an *effect* and consequence of the imitation itself (“Imitation and Gender Subordination” 1520).

---

52 Butler later laments her example of drag as a metaphor for performativity in an interview by Peter Osborne and Lynne Segal, “Butler: The problem with drag is that I offered it as an example of performativity, but it has been taken up as the paradigm for performativity. One ought always to be wary of one's examples. What's interesting is that this voluntarist interpretation, this desire for a kind of radical theatrical remaking of the body, is obviously out there in the public sphere. There's a desire for a fully phantasmatic transfiguration of the body. But no, I don't think that drag is a paradigm for the subversion of gender. I don't think that if we were all more dragged out gender life would become more expansive and less restrictive. There are restrictions in drag. In fact, I argued toward the end of the book that drag has its own melancholia” (“Gender as Performance” 111).
As was earlier mentioned, Copi offered minimal stage directions. Nowhere in the play text does it require either Raulito or Cachafaz to wear what would be denominated as women’s apparel. Marcos Rosenzvaig’s text, *Copi: Sexo y teatralidad*, describes both characters as transvestites, “dos travestis compadritos” (82). Perhaps this was an oversight on Rosenzvaig’s part. There is not an instant or moment where Cachafaz mentions, evokes or performs transvestite.

Cachafaz, on the other hand, performs the stereotypical “macho” and reiterates the performance of the stereotypical macho throughout the text, where he repeatedly states not only that he is a man but that he is macho and associates with machos. “¡estoy en Montevideo, / cuna de machos sinceros!” , “quiero que me digas vos / si soy un macho de veras” (29). Although Cachafaz explicitly performs sexual acts with Raulito, he performs the dominant role, specifically in the act of fellatio, “¡Chupame un poco la pija!” (48). Cachafaz’s performance of sexual acts is always as the initiator and the penetrator, “Cachafaz: ¡Qué bien que tenés el culo!” (16). “Cachafaz: Soy un hombre de palabra / Bajate la bombachita, que te la pongo hasta en el alma” (10). Does it matter if Cachafaz is the penetrator if he is having sex with what seems to be someone from the same sex? It depends on the geographical location where it takes place. In Latin America, sex between two men does not necessarily imply that both men are homosexual. As Silvia H. Chant has clearly presented in her text, *Gender in Latin America*: 
One of the primary themes, in work on homosexuality on Latin America has been the notion of a distinctive Latin/ circum-Mediterranean view of homosexuality which distinguishes it from popular interpretations in North American and North European contexts. In the latter areas, homosexuality is usually regarded as an ‘oral phenomenon’ and characterized by same sex preference. In Latin America, the central defining feature of homosexuality is argued to hinge upon being ‘active’ or ‘passive’ in anal intercourse (147).

As Jane Carroll succinctly states, “the implicit message of such cultures is that to mimic female behavior is disgraceful and shameful in a male” (290). Sexuality, then, is necessarily performative as it is based on “what one does” (Chant 147). These cultural differences in Latin America that ascribe to gender roles are not dependent upon what one does but how one does it. This concept of sexual performance in Latin America, queers (destabilizes) what is considered to be the sexual performativity of gender in the United States. Cachafaz’s sexuality is also blurred by the mention of his girlfriend which in a heated discussion with Raulito, “Cachafaz: ¡Yo me vuelvo con mi novia/ que es una chica sincera,/ estoy harto ‘esta catrera/ pa’ no hablar de tus maneras!” (13). The term “novia” is never contested by Raulito. The reader or audience member is left to wonder his girlfriend’s sex. Cachafaz’s utterance is open to interpretation and therefore continues to performatively queer his sexuality.

Raulito is described as “travestido”, “transvestite” “transvesti” by critics of the play text. The conceptualization of Raulito as a transvestite seems illusory because the stage directions do not specify his clothing, and there are few references to this possibility in the text. Further analysis of Cachafaz’s declarative sexual statement to Raulito will clarify the transvestite references:
“Cachafaz: Soy un hombre de palabra / Bajate la bombachita, que te la pongo hasta en el alma” (10). Cachafaz uses the term “bombachita” which in Argentina and Uruguay refers to women’s underpants.

Another reference to Raulito’s clothing takes place when Cachafaz reminisces about his first encounter with Raulito,

Te conocí taconeando / cubierta de baratija/ en la rambla de la playa/ que bordea el arrabal. / ¿Fue tu mirada de tango? / ¿Fue tu aire compradón? / Pero te me entraste al alma / vestida de maricón (28).

Cachafaz highlights Raulito’s garments as he takes the stroll down memory lane. He first makes reference to the high heel shoes Raulito wore while he was dancing. The reference to “baratija” alludes to cheap jewelry. Although he questions if the tango gaze Raulito gave had an air of “swagger”, it is Raulito dressed as a “maricón”. The term “maricón” is Spanish has two possible definitions, an effeminate man or a man who is submissive when copulating with another man. The attraction Cachafaz has incited by Raulito’s blurring of genre in his destabilizing performance of gender. Marjorie Garber unveils in *Vested Interests* transvestism’s challenge to the gender binary:

One of the most important aspects of cross dressing is in the way which it offers a challenge to easy notions of binarity, putting into question the categories of ‘female’ and ‘male’, whether they are considered essential or constructed, biological or cultural (10).

Garber later expounds upon her statement by dialoguing with sexual binaries as well:

The cultural effect of transvestism is to destabilize all such binaries: Not only ‘male’ and ‘female,’ but also ‘gay’ and ‘straight,’ and ‘sex’
and ‘gender’. This is the sense-the radical sense- in which transvestism is a ‘third’” (133).

Transvestism has queer performative implications. It de-essentializes the rigidity of the stereotypical binary norms relegated to each gender as it is transgressive. Cromwell succinctly explicates the transgressive nature:

To call someone a ‘transvestite’ involves making a series of prior assumptions about them. This cluster around the notion that there is some original ‘sex’ or ‘gender’ to which they really belong. Transvestites: cross-dress, they do not just dress. Transvestites transgress, moving across the boundaries, marking gendered difference. In so doing, they pose a taken-for-granted association of men with ‘male’ and ‘masculinity’, and ‘women’ with ‘female’ and ‘femininity’ (qtd. in Chant 149).

Interestingly, the transvestite description of Cachafaz's moment of falling for Raulito elucidates a queer attraction. Cachafaz's attraction to Raulito was incited by Raulito's garment which crossed the gender binary by de-stabilizing it. His attraction is based on a queer performative act of gender. Interestingly, right before he describes the moment of attraction, he tells Raulito, “Antes que me maten quiero / saber algo de tu esencia” (28). In other words, he has yet to know the “essence” of Raulito. Captivingly, this verse is juxtaposed with Raulito's gender bending performance in heels; that is, Cachafaz grapples with not having been able to get to the invariable nature of Raulito.

Raulito also describes one of his transvestite performances. The moment is attention grabbing because it is the only instance whereby Raulito alludes to his person with a masculine physical quality. This occurs when Raulito responds to Cachafaz's requests and later demands that Raulito get a job in order to sustain their hunger pangs,
Pero me querés decir
de qué voy a trabajar?
¡Ya me echaron de mucama
tantas veces por la barba!
vos lo sabés como yo (11).

In Raulito's confession his performativity of femininity, is seen as just a cloak for others; that is, his cloak is not a “tightly sealed” performative tool. Although he did work as a mucama, or maid, he could not continue because of his beard. This revelation also begs the question, “What does it mean to perform woman”. Judith Halberstam offers some insight that is in direct consonance with Raulito's unfruitful- in the eyes of his employers- performative vestiment. Judith Halberstam examines this notion in “F2M: The Making of Female Masculinity”,

We all pass or we don’t, we all wear our drag, and we all derive a different degree of pleasure-sexual or otherwise-from our costumes. It is just that for some of us our costumes are made of fabric or material while for others they are made of skin; for some an outfit can be changed; for others skin must be resewn (212).

Raulito's expulsion from his job as a maid was based not on “passing” as a woman. This moment further elucidates the complexities of performatively transgressing gender roles and furthermore highlights the decision of “passing” is based on other’s preconceptions of gender roles. These instances of Raulito's transgressions and blurring (or attempts at blurring) gender binaries with his cloak are referenced to mainly in the past. Another example is Raulito, who reminisces about transvestites in a brothel, where women “were” men, “¡Raulito: hay quilombo que de chica / me gustaba frecuentar. / Las mujeres eran hombres!” (73). The two instances of gender performed by Raulito, as well as
Raulito’s memory in the brothels, demonstrate the acceptance and rejection of queer gender.

Discussed in the “now” of the play are body markers of sex. In the play text, Cachafaz’s genitals are the only ones that are referenced. Raulito’s genitals are not mentioned. Cachafaz alludes to his genitals with the direct object pronoun “la” when he tells Raulito to lower his underpants, “Bajate la bombachita, que te la pongo hasta en el alma” (10, my emphasis). The direct object pronoun he makes references is to “la pija” or what is known in Argentina, Uruguay and also in Central America as a vulgar way of referring to a penis. The term is later contextualized by a verse that was earlier analyzed, “¡Chupame un poco la pija!”. When Cachafaz and Raulito are beginning their tango performance in their home Cachafaz warns him to not kick him in his genitals: “y no me patee las bolas” (18). In a moment of anger he declares to Raulito to stop fondling his genitals, “Dejá de tocarme el bulto, / que me arrugás la bragueta” (14). It is important to note that Cachafaz uses the term “bragueta” to refer to his male underpants and not bombachita as he did previously with Raulito. Throughout the play text, Cachafaz refers to his virility, through his sexual expletives and discussions of his strength as “macho” and exalts it as a definite marker of his “masculinity”. He asserts his “macho” and it is through his performativity he ends up performing the stereotypical Latin-American “macho”. Interestingly, it is in a dialogue between Raulito and Cachafaz that he queers his virility. When Cachafaz tells Raulito, “te la pongo hasta el alma” (10), Raulito responds “¡Pero si no se te para!” (10). Raulito challenges Cachafaz’s performative capability of
demonstrating his virility by “outing” Cachafaz’s impotence, by his inability to sustain an erection. One would expect Cachafaz’s reaction to be one of anger or denial at a challenge to his masculinity. He instead retorts, “¿y no te gusta blandita?” (10). Cachafaz destabilizes the stereotype of the “macho” performative in this instance by not denying the possibility of his impotence and in fact agreeing by asking Raulito if he prefers it that way. Cachafaz’s lack of reproach to Raulito about his performative inability to “perform” masculinity is a moment that is not in consonance with his portrayal performance of “macho” throughout the play text. This queer moment is one that puts into question and destabilizes the reader, or audience member’s understanding of Cachafaz’s “macho” performativity.

Although Raulito’s genitals are not referred to by Cachafaz, he refers to his body, having female attributes such as breasts, “Raulito: “¡Acariciame las tetas!” (14). Whereas Raulito contested Cachafaz’s virility, Cachafaz does not dismiss Raulito’s declaration but responds aggressively by attempting to scar his breasts with a cigarette butt, “¡Te las quemo con un pucho!” (14). Raulito’s announcement augments an air of question. As was previously noted, Raulito has been described as a transvestite, but is he in fact a transvestite or does his body fall into another category such as a transexual? The second insinuation of Raulito’s body and the only allusion Raulito makes to his genitals are with the figurative term, “tajo”, “¿Será porque sos un reo / siempre listo para el tajo?” (49). “Tajo” can mean a cut or slice which would make sense since Cachafaz could always be ready to be cut by those who he steals from. However in the
context that Raulito is utilizing the term as well as the geographical location of the play text, the Río de la Plata region, it refers to in a vulgar way, a women’s vagina. The term tajo is used widely in the region and was written about in and became part of the title of a hit blues inspired song by the Argentinean, Luis Alberto Spinetta, “Me gusta ese tajo”. Raulito’s utterance then leaves one to question if he is in fact referring to a possible sex change or is it a figurative reference to his backside? It is a question that remains unanswered and is left in a space that does not allow it to be neatly classified into a female or male sex category; it remains in a queer space.

When the “Agente” arrives at Raulito and Cachafaz’s apartment Raulito and the agente engage in a conversation that openly discusses and provides an imperfect insight into Raulito’s performative and his physical body, “Raulito: Hace un año que lo he visto/ cuando me hizo una gauchada: / me selló el cambio de sexo/ en mi carta ‘e identidad” (55). Raulito utilizes the term “una gauchada”. The term means to perform a favor. Taking Raulito’s utterance into context as well as the play text’s references to the Río de la Plata region, “hacer una gauchada” is to lend a hand to someone without any interest. Raulito’s utterance seemingly discloses a sex change. The word “seemingly” is employed because Raulito does not say that he in fact did have a sex change but that his sex was changed on his identity card. His sex still is not concretely divulged and continues in a queer state that does not allow itself to be inscribed.
A Queer Matadero?

In the beginning of this chapter, similarities between José Hernandez’s epic poem, *Martín Fierro* were analyzed. This portion of the chapter is dedicated to the performativity and dialogues between another nineteenth century Argentinean writer, Esteban Echeverría. The classic text, *El matadero*, which was not published until the author’s death, “Este mensaje directo hizo imposible que […] se publicase durante su vida” (Franco 63). *El matadero*, a short story, which has been translated to English as the “Slaughter House”, has been described by many critics, such as Roberto González Echevarría, as a “political allegory” for Argentina’s state of affairs during the reign of government of Juan Manuel de Rosas during Lent. For others such as Jean Franco, *El matadero* reads as a metaphor, “El matadero es la metáfora de la Argentina bajo el régimen de Rosas” (64). González Echevarría’s English translation of *El matadero* (The Slaughterhouse), sets the premise of the action of the text, salve the flooding and inundations the public underwent:

[...] the events narrated here occurred in the 1830’s of our Christian era. Moreover, it was during Lent, a time when meat is scarce in Buenos Aires because the Church, adopting Epictetus’ precept – *sustine abstine* (suffer, abstain)-orders vigil and abstinence to the stomachs of the faithful because carnivorousness is sinful, and as the proverb says, leads to carnality (60).

The hunger pangs were deafening as Echevarría describes the lack of food available, In the Slaughter House not even one rat remained alive from the many thousands which used to find shelter there. All of them either perished from starvation or were found in their holes by the incessant rain (61).
The similarities between Cachafaz and El matadero are evident. Raulito and Cachafaz live in poverty stricken tenements. The poverty is overt in the tenement vis a vis the eminent hunger that pervades the neighborhood. One of the main actions in the play text revolves around the acts of cannibalism which is effectuated by Cachafaz and assisted by Raulito who performs the role of butcher. The prey of the cannibalistic acts are the government officials who are solely murdered by Cachafaz. The murders of government officials are incited by the constant pangs of hungers that debilitate not only Cachafaz and Raulito, but their neighbors as well who are comprised of three choruses: Coro de vecinas, coro de vecinos, coro de ánimas. The chorus in Cachafaz is in consonance with its function in Greek tragedy; that is, they provide commentary on social attitudes and morals:

**Coro de vecinas:** ¡Nosotras tenemos hambre! / ¡Nuestros chicos tienen chinches, tienen lombriz y escorbuto, / están más flacos que un pinche. / ¡No es porque vos seas un puto que no vas a armar bochinche! (34).

Cachafaz decides to take matters into his own hands and leaves in inner space of his apartment with Raulito in order to assassinate government officials who feel and justifies their deaths because they have wronged him and his community:

**Cachafaz:** ¿Mas, si es por necesidad? / No hay ninguna falsedad / en comer a un hombre rico / ¡mucho menos si es milicio! / ¡El ha querido matarme sólo por la butifarra/ en una noche de farra! / ¡Y yo soy un muerto de hambre! / ¿Vamo’ a privarno’ de un fiambre/ para que coman los chicos! (38-39)
The Chorus of vecinas, or women neighbors are against as they clearly declare, ¡Canibalismo es pecado! (38). The chorus of men, however, defend Cachafaz and praise him for his actions.

Although cannibalism does not occur in *El matadero*, the short story is memorable for its grotesque scenes of violence and torture and descriptive slaughtering scenes. The grotesque and the gore of the acts of cannibalism is unmistakable in the second act of *Cachafaz*, where the stage directions describe human meat hanging, while Cachafaz brings into the home another official, “(Jamón de hombre, achuras colgadas de ganchos. La Raulito se depila. Cachafaz arrastrando un nuevo agente)” (51). The “jamón” or ham that was described at the beginning of the second act takes a life of its own as well as other dead body parts and starts moving, “¡El jamón se está moviendo!”, “¡Aquella mano también” (56-57). Much like *El matadero*, religious notions are interweaved between the play text. The coro de animas impress upon Cachafaz and Raulito the need for a burial for the corpuses, “Cachafaz y la Raulito, / somos voces de penumbras, / estamos en un mal paso, / ¡no tenemos sepultura!” (57). Cachafaz blatantly dismisses their suggestions and reclaims that they killed in order to eat and not to bury them, “Y a nosotros qué no’ importa? / Los matamos pa’ comerlos / no pa’ darles sepultura” (57). The chorus of souls, “ánimas” offers Cachafaz and Raulito an olive branch that would relinquish the course they have put on the two lovers for their cannibalistic acts. If they do Cachafaz is permitted to enter into their kingdom only if he repents. Raulito, on the other hand, will not be permitted to join his partner because,
Juramos solemnemente retirar la maldición / pero a una condición: / la Raulito repelente/ queda fuera de las sombras: / en nuestro reino no entran más que hombres y mujeres. / ¡las mujeres con bigotes se quedan en la tranquera! (64).

Raulito’s queer gender performance, or as the chorus of souls put it, “women with beards” are not permitted into the kingdom. Cachafaz refuses the offer and chooses Raulito over ending the curse.

The intertextuality of Echevarría’s work in Copi’s can be interpreted however the relationship becomes direct with Cachafaz’s references to El matadero.

Towards the end of Act Two, Cachafaz and Raulito are at the end of their rope as an “agente” knocks their door down and declares their imminent death, “¡Abran, podridos del alma / que al son de una boyoneta / los vamos a destripar / ¡ Van a aprender al final lo que es derramar sangre!” (69). Cachafaz makes a direct reference to El matadero, “¡Y si quise enamorarme / es porque en el Matadero / es la gloria del matrero / ser adorado de un puto!” (71). The capitalization of matadero, as it appears in the play text implies emphasis, and leaves little room for interpretation of the direct relationship to “the” matadero. While making reference to “the” matadero, Cachafaz rewrites the Argentinean national treasure, El matadero, by inscribing a romantic relationship between two men of which one, Raulito, may be a transvestite or possibly a transsexual and by all accounts is queered. As a writer quipply noted,

¿Qué hace Copi? ¿Parodia El matadero o lee el clásico demasiado bien, literalmente, diciendo con todas las letras, lo que Esteban Echevarría-fundador del género patrio o excelencia: la porno-carnicería-, solo podía decir entre líneas? No: Copi es el que viene
después, el que llega tarde para hacer algo que parecía imposible: dar toda la vuelta y reírse de la parodia (Pauls 2001).

Pauls notes that Copi is not only parodying the classic *El matadero*, but laughing at the parody in and of itself. In this analysis what is important is not only the eerie similarities between *El matadero* and *Cachafaz* or the parody but more so *how* the parody is queerly performed.

**Conclusion:**

In this chapter I have only analyzed the queer performative elements of both Raulito and Cachafaz. Their gender performances were analyzed contextually within the parameters of their sociocultural specificity. To analyze the elements of queer outside of this context would be fruitless as it would not take into account the cultural and historical markers that define gender performativities. As Sifuentes has stated, “Transvestism is an operating strategy that deconstructs a specific ‘normality’ in a gender binary hierarchy” (4). What defines the normality are the cultures where one perceived “the script rehearsed”,

The act that one does, the act that one performs, is, in a sense, an act that has been going on before one arrived on the scene. Hence, gender is an act which has been rehearsed, much as a script survives the particular actors who make use of it, but which requires individual actors in order to be actualized and reproduced as reality once again. (“Performative Acts and Gender Constitution” 272).

One of the crucial moments discussed in performing gender in the play text are the moments of copulation between Cachafaz and Raulito. In the Anglo tradition,
there would not be a question of blurring lines. The act is queered because it does blur the lines of what is classified as a homosexual sex act. The close readings of the play text do not, under a queer lens, confine Raulito’s transvestite performative acts to be pigeon-holed as either a transsexual or a transvestite. His queer cloak allows for a de-stabalized gender to do without being pigeon-holed.

The queer performativity of the text adds another dimension to the intertextuality of the play text. The play text dialogues with two canonized national Argentinean classics that ascribe to heterosexual norms. Copi penetrates both texts and makes caricatures of them by introducing and rewriting the texts with queer performativities. His use of the regimented octosyllabic verse of *Martín Fierro*, to discuss the graphic sexual scenes, “¡No querrás que se derroche todo el semen por el piso!” is common place (49). He also references *El matadero* by exacerbating grotesque scenes of the original and topping it with human flesh. In two acts, Copi has destabilized two canonical texts.
Chapter 5: Performing the Explicitly Queer: Mi muñequita la farsa

Muñeca: Claro los hombres hacen cosas que las mujeres no.

Muñeca: Ella, es una niña, se peina como niña, se viste como niña […]
(Mi muñequita, la farsa)

Gabriel Calderón and COMPLOT

Gabriel Calderón is currently the General Coordinator of Programs and Cultural Projects for the Department of Education and Culture in Uruguay. He is also a new Latin American playwright, actor and director who, at the ripe age of twenty seven, has had international success. His plays have won many accolades, in his native country for different roles he has performed with respect to his texts. His directorial debut commenced in 2000 in Teatro Joven in Montevideo’s Theatre Festival where he received honorable mention for his work as a playwright. He has received honors such as a directorial award for two plays he wrote Caricas and Taurus. Although Calderón had previously received accolades for his theatrical work, it was the play text he wrote and directed with Ramiro Perdomo, Mi muñequita, la farsa that garnered him with a break out role in theater both in Uruguay and across the globe.53 He wrote this play as a

53 For a complete list of Gabriel Calderon’s awards see COMPLOT: Compañía de artes escénicas contemporáneas..
teenager, “La escribí cuando tenía 16 años.” (Santillán).54 In this introduction, Calderón’s age has been highlighted not only to distinguish his accomplishments in his short lifetime but to also contextualize and compare his theatrical productions within his birth country. In an interview with Cecilia Hopkins, in the Argentinean newspaper Pagina/12, he describes his success of Mi muñequita, la farsa and contextualizes it with Montevideo’s plays of the new millenium.

Pero en Montevideo tuvo un significado especial porque no había teatro hecho por gente de nuestra edad. Hasta el momento, los directores más jóvenes tenían 40 años (Hopkins).

With the success of Mi muñequita, la farsa, which was favorably received in Montevideo, theater started to change in the city; that is young playwrights and actors became integral to the theater. He explains: “Fue una obra bisagra: a partir de ahí, los teatros empezaron a llamar a directores muy jóvenes y se llenaron las salas” (Hopkins).

Mi muñequita, la farsa was first staged in Montevideo on October 16, 2004 at the Teatro Circular. The play was nominated for six Florencio awards, in Montevideo.55 The praise reached across the Atlantic and has been staged internationally in theater festivals such as: The International Theater Festival (FIT) en Cadiz, Spain in October, 2008 and Panama’s Festival Internacional de las Artes Escénicas in the same year, to name a few.

54 There seems to be a discrepancy with respect to the playwright’s age when he wrote the play text, Mi muñequita, la farsa. In the previous article cited, he states he was sixteen years old while in another interview by Leo Flamia, he states, “La había escrito a los 17 y la montamos cuando ya tenía 20”.

55 The specific areas it was nominated for was, “Nominado a 6 premios Florencios otorgado por la Asociación de Críticos de Teatro del Uruguay a- Mejor Espectáculo- Mejor dirección- Mejor Elenco- Mejor texto de autor Nacional- Dos actuaciones revelación” (COMPLIT).
With the success and accolades of *Mi muñequita, la farsa*, Calderón started a theater company COMPLOT, in 2006, which in English has two possible translations: to "plot" or "conspiracy" (Hopkins). Although both definitions can be linked to the group, the latter is more fitting for the collective’s aspirations.

The theater group's webpage offers insight to the objectives of the group:

Complot no es un colectivo de artistas unidos bajo una misma forma de pensar la escena, ni siquiera perseguimos los mismos objetivos. En COMPLOT los objetivos y pensamientos siempre son diferentes, las formas de pensar la escena, los resultados buscados, las razones que mueven los diferentes espectáculos y actividades que desarrollamos son siempre distintas y aun mejor, contradictorias. [...] Y así, sin objetivos y pensamientos eternos, sin manifiestos ni teorías perpetuas. Somos un grupo de artistas complotados para cada trabajo en particular, y será nuestro trabajo el que con su mera y continua existencia asegure por mucho tiempo la vida de COMPLOT (COMPLOT).

At first glance, the mission reads as an antithesis of a group statement. Complot’s members define themselves by describing everything they are not: A collective group of artists, tied by the same way of thinking of the stage. Nor does COMPLOT have the same objectives, manifestos or theories. What the group does is embrace divergent positions on theatricality and objectives of their theater work which underscores a queer ambiguity. For the company, contradiction is favorable. Calderón as well as *Mi muñequita, la farsa*’s co-director and member of COMPLOT, Ramiro Perdomo, have elaborated on their concepts of theater in an interview:

Nos gusta disentir, trabajar sin respetar ningún decálogo estético-formal [...] No queremos tener un posicionamiento estético-ideológico ante el mercado cultural (Hopkins).
Perdomo and Calderón clarify that they do not ascribe to rules nor do they want to position themselves within a formal aesthetic. The two co-directors are also aware that they are to some extent describing an aesthetic which does in and of itself create a position that could also be bound by restraints,

Tampoco queremos convertirnos en una institución, porque entonces vamos a cristalizar nuestros puntos de vista, que es lo que le pasa a la mayor parte del teatro independiente de Montevideo. Nosotros queremos estar en un grupo sin perder por eso la libertad individual. Y queremos contradecirnos, no buscar la coherencia (Hopkins).

Both Calderón and Perdomo’s explanation elucidates COMPLOT’s repudiation of a fixed notion of aesthetics and theatricality. Disagreement and dissonance are at the core of their conceptualization of their theatrical productions; in fact, it is one of their aspirations. The dissonance and de-stabilizations they desire are based on their thoughts of theater in its three dimensional form and are related to the reactions they aspire from their audiences, “Nuestros espectáculos intentan generar un conflicto en el público. No queremos que todos salgan pensando lo mismo sino acrecentar los diferentes puntos de vista” (Hopkins). The goal is then to communicate the conflicts to the audience and that they hopefully leave with disparate ideas from the performance, and in a word, conflicted.

Mi Muñeiquita, la farsa /Staging

The play text consists of one act and is divided into twenty scenes. The play text offers minimal stage directions. Gabriel Calderón furnished me with a digital copy of the performance of Mi muñeiquita, la farsa. The digital copy
permits me to see how the staging was executed by allowing a visual counterpart to the mise en scène, the director’s vision and the relationship between the characters as well as their relationship with the audience. Using the DVD as a medium to view the performance of the play does in and of itself presents some complications. The complications that arise are directly related to an analysis of a digital text as opposed to a three dimensional performance; that is, I am no longer studying theater but a filmic presentation of the performance. Jon Whitmore, a professor and theater critic, succinctly describes the effect of a live dramatic piece as opposed to the act of reading a play in his text, *Directing Postmodern Theater: Shaping Signification in Performance*. Whitmore points to differences in the act of reading a play text as opposed to being an audience member of a performance. What he contrasts are the determining effects of perception and the difficulties associated with each possibility:

The difference in perception between reading and listening to words however is significant: during a performance words exist only at the moment in time when they are spoken—they cannot be read or listened to again. A performance marches on; more words come forth at each new moment. [...] theater experience exists in real time, communication by means of the spoken word is quite different from, and more often more difficult than, reading a novel or play script (12).

Whitmore highlights the core of theater and performance and live and lived experience in real time. Another critic Babak Ebrahimian, who is a director as well as professor, utilizes four points of differentiation of theater and film that appears in his text, *The Cinematic Theater*. The four points he illustrates are: space, time, actors and sound. I am cognizant of the fact that the performance
analyzed, is no longer a (three dimensional) live performance but a screen on
two dimensions, the time, actors and sound is no longer immediate but recorded
(Ebrahimian 7). In other words, there is a violation of the ‘liveness’ and
immediacy of theater as a live art, and what is being studied has already
occurred and in effect is in the past. Ebrahimian considers further live theater’s
singularity as an immediate art form:

Theater’s essence and uniqueness lies in the fact that it is
occurring in the ‘here and now,’ defying the past and being in the
present. In this light, theater as an art form is rooted in the present
time, privileging presence over distancing and absence. It has presence: it presents, it narrates, it engages, and constantly
remains in the present time-the present moment (5).

What will be analyzed then, is not necessarily theater as has been defined but a
filmic representation of the performance.

The two dimensional digital text, provided by Gabriel Calderón, was not
filmed in front of a live audience. This also presents further complications in that
the audience’s reception is not accounted for. There are, however, video clips of
the play text that will be analyzed which in turn will allow for an interpretation of
the audience’s reaction to some scenes. Of course, the ideal situation for the
analysis of the performance would have been to be a part of the live performance
as a spectator. However, with an understanding of theater as an art of three
dimensions and the inherent immediacy that pertains to the live production, the
digital recording permits a visual counterpart where, the mise en scène, gestures,
lighting and music become tangible, albeit in a two dimensional text.
Since the play text does not provide stage directions for the scenography, without the digital medium, this analysis would lack descriptions of the staging. In the digital copy of *Mi muñequita, la farsa*, the stage has a minimalist décor. There is a black curtain in the backdrop and in front are three pieces of furniture: a wooden sofa whose wooden framework and design evoke the styling of early twentieth century design, two small wooden end tables placed on each side of the sofa. The only visual prop that forms a part of the stage is an empty silver platter. From the onset, it is apparent that it departs from the tradition of realism. The combination of the simplistic furniture and the black curtain in the backdrop is a constant signifier to the audience that they are in a theater and not transported into verisimilitude.

The staging is the first thing the spectator sees as the performance commences with brief silence followed by music. The song immediately plays after a brief silence is the Italian pop singer, with international success, Mina Anna Mazzini's song “Ta-ra-ta-ta”. The song is off her 1966 album, “Studio Uno 66”. The song brings to mind the era of the mid 1960s pop genre. The pop song “Ta-ra-ta-ta” describes the attraction a woman has for a man especially when he smokes, “Lo so non sei un divo / ne un artista ne l’eroe del west / Ma quando fumi / c’è in te un che di irresistibile”. The election of Mina’s song is not present in the play text. In an interview I conducted with Calderón I asked him if there was any specific reasoning for the song choice. He explained that there was not and the idea surged out of the eight month rehearsals with the actors and co-director. He also suggested that it was a song that evoked their parent’s generation, “y
bueno también era música que se asociaba con la generación de nuestros padres” (Personal Interview). The song continues to play as the characters approach the stage from stage left. They appear in sequential order and begin to communicate with the audience by breaking the fourth wall and stare directly at them. As soon as they make their way to stage right, they again commence to walk over to stage left and approach the sofa one by one and take their places in character through gestures that characterize them. As soon as they are all seated, the music stops and the performance ensues. The music functions as a mode of introduction for the characters on stage as if it were the opening credits of a filmic piece.

Music is employed throughout the performance and each time serves a different purpose. The opening of the first scene, or what the playwright names “Prólogo” in the play text, is not the last time Mina’s songs are heard. Another song by Mina that is used for another function is the eight track of the same album, “Mi sei scoppiato dentro il cuore”. The song evokes a melancholic melody as the lyrics describe a love that has ended, “Ora / io non ho capito ancora / non so come può finire / quello che succederà” (Mina). The Italian song is played after the final assassination of the mother, who is the last family member in the chain of assassinations. Madre’s death leaves Nena the only the child, her daughter, and the butler as survivors. The song functions to close the end of an era, of a generation.

Throughout the rest of the performance, the other song that is heard is another melancholic tune interpreted by Jeanette and written by José Luis
Perales. The song had international success in the mid seventies. As opposed to the other two songs in the performance, this song is in Spanish. The playwright describes the function of the song in his stage directions as a leitmotiv, “Música se utilizará el siguiente tema musical como Leit Motive de la obra. Aparecerá en varios momentos, interpretado de diferente maneras” (5). There are various versions of the song “Por que te vas” employed throughout the performance. In an interview with Macarena Langleib, Calderón names the four versions employed that range from the original to a punk rock version, “Jeanette, la original de (José Luis) Perales, una de Attaque [Attaque 77], otra desconocida y la más nueva, que es de La oreja de Van Gogh”. To the playwright and actors’ surprise, the song served a different purpose for the audience that was, at the time, beyond their scope. “Por que te vas” was unlike Mina’s songs, more than a melancholic melody and a leitmotiv. The song had climbed the charts in the mid seventies, years before the playwright was born, and became an international success because of its inclusion in the Spaniard Carlos Saura’s 1976 film, Cría Cuervos.

The film Cría Cuervos depicts a family during the time of the Franco regime. The story is told from the point of view of child, Ana who, twenty years later, recounts memories of her childhood, which are based on her family and her interpersonal relationships. The film also utilizes the song as leitmotiv as, “a record of Jeanette’s song Ana plays throughout the film” (Yeon-Soo 79). In a taped interview with Catalonia’s national radio station, La radio nacional de Catalunya (Catradio), Calderón was asked about the striking similarity between
use of the song “Por qué te vas” in *Mi muñequita, la farsa* and the film *Cría cuervos*. He states that the similarities and choice of song was a coincidence, “Fue una casualidad pero que inmediatamente no más estrenamos tuvimos que asimilarla como una realidad” (Catradio, my transcription). He further explains how immediately after staging the play the group had to “assimilate it as a reality”,

¿Por qué te digo esto? Porque sí bien sabíamos que había una película *Cría Cuervos* que había trabajado con la canción de Jeanette. Y bueno, sabíamos pero no habíamos visto la película y bueno los espectadores empezaron a decírnos que vieron la película y tuvimos que ir a la película y realmente las similitudes eran increíbles por algunos temas algunos pasajes lo que le pasa a la niña y tuvimos que ir a verla porque la mayoría de la generación más grande nuestra mayores de 40 la habían visto y cuando escucharon inmediatamente la linkaba con esa película. Entonces bueno nosotros lo asimilamos inmediatamente y cuando nos hacían las preguntass decíamos sí bueno la habíamos visto y sabíamos como dialogar con la canción y la película (Catradio, my transcription).

He clarifies that the group was not aware that audience members were associating with song, “Por qué te vas” with Saura's film. Their audience's reaction to the song led them to visit the film. It was there that they perceived the similarities, such as a family and the young generation’s pessimistic childhood, and the dialogue between their play, the song and the film *Cría cuervos*. He candidly states that after viewing the film, he and the group would reply that they had seen the movie and that they knew how to create a dialogue between the film and the song’s use in the play. The song “Por qué te vas”, then, no longer solely functions as a leitmotiv but an inextricable subtext that serves as a bridge
which is in continuous dialogue with the film *Cria cuervos* and the previous generation who saw the film in its debut.

The lighting throughout the performance is minimal as only one spotlight is utilized which leaves the stage to remain dark. When all of the actors are on stage and speaking there is a dim spotlight focused on the group and at times when a monologue takes place, the light is centered on the individual. The light serves to maintain the audience’s focus solely on the actors and not on any other aspect of the stage. The light not only provides focus for the spectator but also visually frames the performance. The lighting’s dim nature also sets the “mood” and is in consonance with the dark nature of the performance and the ensuing actions.

After each scene, the lights are dimmed and the visibility is lost. A brighter light reappears and is focused on the entirety of the actors. The lights also serve the purpose to make the audience conscious of the end of a scene and the beginning of a new one. Additionally, the lighting works in conjunction with the music. At the moment a new scene is staged, a version of “Por qué te vas” also sounds. The music is accompanied by brighter lights whereby, the spectators have a brighter view of the actors and their movements. There is only one scene where the lighting and music utilized is unlike the other instances described. In the scene where the father murders the uncle at gun point, the lights flicker incessantly while at the same time the punk rock version of “Por qué te vas” plays. The light takes on the movement and speed of the song. The unification of the type of light utilized and the rapid song presents and is representative of a
chaotic mood. The chaotic state of the song and lighting represents the action of the murder to accentuate the horror and disarray for the audience.

The final aspect of staging that would normally be described in this section is the costumes. Because costumes are integral to the discussion of gender, I will discuss it in the section on gender performativity.

Mi muñequita, la farsa and “Género”/ Genre.

The one act play comprised of twenty scenes is difficult to classify, define and describe. It would seem that the difficulty of classifying the play is at odds with the given title that appears to categorize the play as a farce. A farce is defined as:

A type of comedy designed to provoke the audience to simple, hearty belly laughter – “belly laughs” in the parlance of theater. To do so it commonly employs highly exaggerated or caricatured types of characters, puts them into improbable and ludicrous situations, and often makes free use of sexual mixups, broad verbal humor, and physical bustle and horseplay (A Glossary of Literary Terms 50).

Although Mi muñequita, la farsa does for some, primarily younger, audience members incite laughter, it can hardly be depicted as a “simple, heart belly laughter”. The situations that are employed are horrid. The physical moments, that is interactions, that take place such as sex with minors and murders, are far removed from horseplay and are performed in a more serious and disturbing manner than that of a farce. In an interview with Calderón, he explained to me that he was playing with the definition of “farsa”. For him it is does define the play as a genre, “además eso de los géneros ya no existe”, but the terms
describe more so the theatricality of the play; that is, “que en todo momento lo que pasa no es verdad”, in that at every moment, the audience is being signaled that they are watching theater (Personal Interview). An analysis of how that is achieved will prove fruitful for an understanding of the destabilizing effects of theatricality.

The play text depicts a traditional middle to upper class family and reveals the underpinnings of their lives; that is, on stage their family secrets are revealed and lead to a chain of assassinations. The scene sequences are rapid, fragmented and disordered while at the same time allowing for various familial stories to unfold. This allows for a sense of chaos that is further fueled by disjointed speech utterances that border on the absurd and an apparent lack of cohesion between scenes. The non-linear schema utilized unravels so as to allow the story line to be exposed. The playwright was not interested in telling a story or for it to be understood but rather his interests are vested in the art of creating theater, “teatro que es lo que a nosotros nos interesaba, no que se entendiera la historia, que fuera terrible, un mensaj e sobre la violencia” (Catradio). Embedded in the dissonance is violence that is carried out verbally and physically. Its dark theme of violence is injected with humor that is more of a dark comedy whereby horror, tragic events, and laughs share a space. Interestingly, the humor in the performance is not as present in the play text. It was later included by the playwright during the collaborative rehearsals,

En su momento, cuando empezamos a ensayarla, yo me di cuenta que la obra es demasiado oscura que respondía a algo muy oscuro y que a mí no me interesaba Cuando empezamos a
Although the comedic aspect was later injected, as was earlier mentioned, for some audience members the comicality worked and for others it did not take effect. Calderón discusses the disconnect with the humor in the play and some audience members,

Y habían funciones que eran un embole. Me acuerdo cuando hacíamos funciones los domingos, no había ni una risa, eran personas adultas y muchas salían muy trastocadas. Se vivía totalmente diferente y a mí me parece bárbaro (Flamia).

For the older crowd, the intended humor left them feeling disturbed whereas in some performances a laugh could not be heard. Calderón also explained to me that the days the plays were performed affected the age bracket of the audience members whereby “los viernes el teatro era fiesta pero el domingo solía ir personas de cuarenta, cincuenta y setenta años y bueno la gente salía realmente conmovidas con los ojos llorosos o trastornados” (Personal Interview). The humor works as a destabilizing factor that is dependent upon the generation of the audience.

In *Mi muñequita, la farsa*, the performance vacillates between genres where commercials, musicals, parodies, fairy tales, farce and dark comedy comprise one compact act. The six characters that comprise the play are: “Nena” (little girl), “Muñeca”, (doll), “Madre” (mother), “Padre” (father), “Tío” (uncle) and “Mayordomo” (butler / master of ceremonies). The characters’ names do not give specificity nor does the play text or the staging of the play incorporate
specific names. The technique alludes to the roles that the actors will perform. In addition, the lack of specificity allows for models of archetypes of a traditional family. *Mi muñequita, la farsa* intelligently presents the archetypes of family and destabilizes the notion of family by depicting a fragmented family whose history is filled with crude violence that includes physical abuse in the form of beatings from the father to the mother, a pill addicted and alcoholic mother, a child who falls in love with her uncle and subsequently has sex with him, an uncle who seduces the child in order to gain vengeance from his brother who married his sweetheart, and the child who witnesses and lives the tumultuous violence and finds an abusive friendship and love interest in her little doll.

The title of the play, *Mi muñequita, la farsa,* (My Little Doll, A Farce) as well as the depiction of a “traditional family” and its secrets is reminiscent of Henrik Ibsen’s play from 1879, *A Doll’s House.* Ibsen’s play was radical for the time, for it also presented a family that superficially seemed to represent an ideal traditional family. As the plot is unraveled, truths, such as lying and forgery, are revealed. The focal point becomes not only the marriage between Nora and Torvald Helmer, but a criticism of the institution of marriage and womens’ roles in that particular institution as well as society. The similarity between both plays lies in the criticism of institutions such as marriage and family and social values. Ibsen ended his controversial play, with Nora leaving her husband and slamming the door.

Ibsen did not resolve his plays in ways that confirmed to receive ideology. Rather, he made ideology the cause of problems and suggested the need to change it (Brockett, 372).
Mi muñequita, la farsa and Doll House have commonalities such as: the dissolution of the concept of traditional families and the space of the living room where the action takes place; that is, the space of the private becomes public. The style and content in which Calderon’s play is performed is extensively contrastive of “the well made play”.

Mi muñequita, la farsa’s three dimensional representation is far removed from Ibsen’s realist approach to theater. The opening of the play, which was discussed earlier, with respect to the inclusion of music, breaks the fourth wall. As the characters approach the stage in a single file from the left, they each directly stare into the audience. They stroll in to the beat of Mina’s, “Ta-ra-ta-ta”. This is a way of presenting the characters and function as opening credits. From the onset of the play, the audience is made aware that they are at a theater and the actors that walked in will perform the play. After the first brief scene of the play, which is approximately five minutes long, the brighter light shines over the group and they break from the scene abruptly in unison. Jeanette’s, “Por qué te vas” plays and they commence to take their respective positions and physically prepare to dance by adjusting themselves by either swaying from side to side or fixing their hair, or tapping each other and nodding as to wish each other luck. The dancing is rehearsed in the sense that it is not spontaneous dancing. At first Nena and Mi muñequita are at stage front lip-synching with the same dance moves. The Mayordomo, Padre, y Tío fulfill the role of background dancers and then the group forms a semi circle and are synchronized in their dance moves.
The abrupt change from the first scene to the group’s synchronous dance sequence echoes the variety show genre which emanated from vaudeville of the early twentieth century.

Vaudeville was a style of theatrical presentation that was built around song-and-dance numbers, comedy routines, and short dramatic skits, and tableaux, (the cast freezing in dramatic poses) (Television: Critical Methods and Applications 68).

The effect that the abrupt musical number in Mi muñequita, la farsa disrupts the previous scene much like the vaudeville performances:

Vaudeville performance does not demand that we forget the presence of the actor within the guise of the character. That is, vaudeville performance frequently reminds us that we are watching a performance and that the characters before us are not real people (Television: Critical Methods and Applications 69).

If we recall, this was the effect Calderón wanted to in reach the audience. In another scene, Nena directly addresses the audience and explicitly reminds them that they are at a performance. While she addresses the audience, the other characters have their backs turned and the focus is only on her. In her address to the audience her voice changes and the tone of her voice changes to that of a master of ceremonies:

¡Bienvenidos, es un placer tenerlos acá! Están justos de presenciar un espectáculo inolvidable. Quizás el mejor que hayan visto en sus vidas. Porque hoy señoritas y señores, después de lo van a ver,

56 Dr. Manzor, who has seen the play, elucidated another important facet of the musical numbers and their relationship within the play, “If we focus on the acting in the musical numbers, the body movements, we can see that behind the show of the musical act is the ‘real’ familial drama that is unfolding – like at the very beginning of the play”.

What is evidenced here is another disruption of the prior scene where the actors were performing their archetypal roles. Nena directly speaks to the audience, as she looks directly at them, and welcomes the audience by referring to them as ladies and gentleman. She makes them aware that they are at a performance and proclaims to them that the show they are about to witness will be unforgettable. Nena proceeds to introduce the character Mi muñequita. The way in which she presents her is in consonance with the physical style, (she extends one arm from her chest towards the doll), and tone of a master of ceremonies, (she elongates the name and adds emphasis) of a variety show or vaudeville act. Vaudeville acts, “direct[ly] address [...] the viewer. Vaudeville actors often look straight at the audience, perform toward them, and even make comments to them” (Television: Critical Methods and Applications 69).

All of the actors address the audience either by looking directly at the audience as they perform or maintaining a direct dialogue with the spectators. The audience is repetitively made aware of the act of being at a performance. The following excerpt that will be analyzed is made by the Tío. Much like Nena, the uncle welcomes the audience to the theater, “Bienvenidos”, and states that he Nena’s uncle, “Yo soy lo que podría decirse un tío responsable. Es el

---

57 Nena’s lines do not appear in the play text. The lines provided were however in the digital copy of the performance I acquired from the playwright where I then transcribed them.
cumpleaños de mi sobrina (6). His monologue turns into a commercial announcement for a doll,

En esta oportunidad tenemos a la HUERFANITA. Lo último en muñecas. ¿Cuántas veces usted se ha cansado de que su hija le diga... "Estoy aburrida, estoy aburrida" Cuántas veces le ha comprado las inservibles barbies? Cuánta plata ha gastado en juguetes que su hija ni mira y se pierden en el olvido para siempre? Bueno, no se preocupe más. Gracias a los más especializados colaboradores en materia de juguetería. Por fin han creado lo que usted y yo tanto necesitábamos. La HUERFANITA... la mejor amiga para su hija. La HUERFANITA... la mejor hija para su hija. Este nuevo modelo trae una innovación en lo que es el relleno, para hacerlo más real, no sólo cuenta en su interior con un fino polifón sino con... Y escuche bien...Carne sintética! Dígale adiós a los falsos rellenos de algodón. Este nuevo modelo cuenta con todos los músculos del cuerpo humano en una genuina y verdadera... carne sintética! ¿Asombroso verdad? Pero esto no es todo... (7).  

The fourth wall is consistently ruptured, and the audience is repeatedly made aware of the farse; that is, what they are watching is a theater piece and, by extension, they cannot be passive but active spectators. Where in Nena’s monologue the other characters had their backs turned and did not participate, throughout his monologue, the other actors become part of the commercial. The doll positions herself in the center stage and the actors situate themselves around her forming a square. Tío is located at a distance, in front of the doll. After his welcome to the audience, he repositions himself on the left side of the stage and the focus is shifted and placed on la huerfanita, which is performed by Muñeca, the doll, with characters around her. Music is not used for this scene; however, the actors perform individual dance steps, as if there were music, that are incongruent. As they dance they interact with the audience by looking at

---

58 Dr. Manzor commented to me this may also elucidate, “Modernity’s family need to have dolls to keep their children entertained”. 
them and making gestures at them. The uncle moves around the stage to the right and continues his announcement. The actors are continuously moving to the tune of their individual drummer. The only sound that is heard is the Tío giving a loud clap after every time “La HUERFANITA” and “carne sintética” are mentioned. At the sound of the clap, the actors cease dancing and stay static and look at the doll and stretch their arms opens as if they were presenting the doll in a commercial advertisement. Throughout the advertisement, the doll does not make contact with the audience and maintains a steady stare off to the left. The performance of the commercial signals to the audience, in a direct way, that they are witnessing an advertisement for a doll. After the commercial is performed, the Muñeca mimics the speech of a doll, “Hola”, “Querés jugar conmigo” and the actors abruptly return to their performance (7).

Another example breaking the fourth wall is through another monologue performed by the Mayordomo. The Mayordomo is the narrative thread that pieces together the scenic fragmentization and crystallizes the plot; that is, the character allows for the back story of the actions that take place among the family. He speaks directly to the audience, and clarifies a phrase that also functions as a leitmotiv, one he has utilized throughout the play, “¿Y es como una herida sabés?” (15). Through his monologue, the audience learns “what exactly is like a wound” and for whom. While looking directly at the audience he reveals, through a flashback, the love triangle that existed between the Tío, Mamá, and Papá. During his explanation, his demeanor vacillates between laughter and seriousness, he maintains a dialogue with the audience and directly
engages the audience by asking them questions such as, “¿Sabés qué? Entienden entonces?” (17).

The fragmentation and deconstruction of the fourth wall was apparent in the dialogue of the opening scene. The dialogue could be denominated as “absurd” because of the lack of coherence and communication between the family:

Nena: Te extraño.
Tío: No.
Nena: Hablame
Padre: No.
Nena: ¡Contame algo, una historia, algo, por simple que sea, un cuento como excusa para encontrarnos, aunque sea encontrarnos en palabras, no importa lo que, contame lo que quieras, pero vení, vení, hablame!
Madre: ¡Habla!
Tío: Sí
Madre: Es fácil, cocinar es fácil, cualquiera puede hacerlo.
Tío: Sí
Madre: Es cuestión de seguir detalladamente los pasos de cualquier receta
Tío: Sí, pero no es mi culpa.
Madre: Conejo por ejemplo (1).

During the performance, the actors do not direct the lines towards each other but at the audience. Their performance thus enacts the lack of coherence in their lines or the disconnection and the lack of communication within this dysfunctional family. In this first scene, the mother gives instructions on how to cook rabbit. An interesting note is that in the play the mother’s lines appear in Spanish while in the staging of the play the mother’s lines are in Italian. In the play text, her lines are in Spanish. In an interview with Calderón, the author explained to me that the
inclusion of the Italian songs and the mother’s language choice were a coincidence and a result of their rehearsals.\textsuperscript{59} The inclusion of the Italian language, adds yet another facet of incomprehensibility to the absurd nature of the opening scene.

The analysis of the previous scenes of the play text and play \textit{Mi muñequita, la farsa}, provide a handful of examples of the multiple fragmentations and destabilizations through the breaking the fourth wall and use of elements of the absurd. The absurd nature is elucidated vis à vis the disconnected dialogues. Although the role of the disjointed dialogues in the play is to create a destabilization for the audience, it also reveals the incommunicability between family members. Within the fragmentations there are dialogues with other theatre genres. The musical numbers and commercials advertisement borrow from the vaudeville genre with which the playwright- director was familiar and cognizant of when writing the play text and later directing the play. In an interview with Radio Catalunya, the playwright elucidates his conceptualization for the plot and makes a direct reference to vaudevilles as a source of inspiration:

\begin{quote}
Con 17 había leído unas obras pocas […] que eran unas cadenas sobre todo vodeviles, la obra tiene mucho de entrar y salir pero en los vodeviles cuando aparece un amor empiezan a parecer otros y de repente todos están enamorados de todos y no son correspondidos. Entonces, a mí se me había ocurrido la idea de hacer lo mismo pero con la muerte. En el momento que aparecía un asesinato aparecía otro y otro aparecía otro y al final todos muertos. Y ése era un poco el juego todo una espiral de muertes que cuando uno va a empezar, le seguían otros inmediatamente (\textit{my transcription}, Catradio).
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{59} It should also be noted that the language choice also resonates with Uruguay’s history of Italian immigration. For a more in depth study on Italian immigration in Uruguay see Ketty Corredera Rossi’s, \textit{Inmigración italiana en el Uruguay, 1860-1920}.
The incorporation of the music in conjunction with the dance numbers and murder scenes increases the variety show aspect for the audience.

The performance is also fast paced, not only in terms of the length of the performance, which is roughly sixty minutes, but the delivery of the lines. The speed at which the lines are delivered commands the complete attention of the audience. The audience is constantly bombarded with the fast paced speech, with humor embedded, which at times results completely frenetic. How can this theater piece be classified? It does not easily allow itself to be categorized into one genre as it is comprised by various genres. Perhaps Calderón has already offered an answer. In the play text, the title appears as *Mi muñequita, la farsa*, and below it in italics reads, “*Comedia Negra o algo por el estilo en muchos cuadros*” (1). The subtitle refutes the original title as a farce and renames it as a dark comedy and then changes the category again by adding that it could be something like the style of a dark comedy. The inclusion of the subtitle does not allow for clarity of the genre of the play but rather adds to the multiplicity of possibilities. Calderón’s subtitle much like the play text and staging that has been analyzed signifies a resistance to categorization and implies a destabilization of genre and category.

**Destabilizing Costumes:**

*Mi muñequita la farsa*’s structure and staging dialogues directly with the queer performativity of gender and sexuality evidenced both in the play text and performance. The theatrical aspect of costumes represents a visual signifier for
the audience that interacts simultaneously with the body it clothes and the performance. The costumes that represent queerness that will be closely analyzed are Nena’s and Muñeeca’s.

The play text does not offer stage directions suggesting the clothing for the characters. This type of analysis is only possible through the wardrobe utilized by the actors in the digital performance of the play. The wardrobe in the performance is maintained throughout the duration of the play. At the moment the “opening credits roll”, Nena, who performs the role of a child, first appears wearing a short white slip that she wears as a dress whose length only covers her mid thigh. Her legs are covered by white thigh high stockings. The stockings and the slip do not cover her whole leg as a portion of her upper thigh is clearly visible. Nena also wears white panties which she made visible during her performance.60 Her shoes are black and flat Mary Jane style shoes.61 The style of shoes is significant because of their historical use by children and their re-appropriation in the mid 1990’s that is in consonance with Nena’s performance.

The childhood classic slipper is the Mary Jane – that flat blunt-toed, single strapped party shoe that signals a child’s transformation from baby to little girl boy. Decades later the shoe was revived as the “waif look” of the early 90’s. New nymphets, notably Kate Moss, sported shrunken T-shirts, sheer Sunday school dresses and shiny Mary Jane’s (O’Keeffe 236).

---

60 In Brite’s book, Courtney Love: The Real Story, Brite, reprints a note Courtney had left describing the clothes she was wearing, “Xtra pair undies, high waisted white cotton from Woolworth, Xtra vintage white slip” (110).

61 As defined in William Brown’s text, Art of Shoe Making, “Mary Jane is an American term for a kind of strap shoe that typically have low heels, rounded closed toes, and a buckled strap across the instep. They are often made of black patent leather […]. Traditionally Mary Jane’s are a variety of shoe worn mainly by girls, but historically have been worn by boys as well. Mary Jane was a character created by the Brown Shoe Company. Mary Jane would often tag along with Buster Brown, another marketing character by the Brown Shoe company.”
The combination of the shoes and white short slip dress became staples of the 'kinderwhore’ look that was made fashionable in the 90’s by Kourtney Love and her rock band, Hole. The kinderwhore look as defined in The Routledge Dictionary of Modern American Slang and Unconventional English is the description of, “a young woman whose dress suggests both youthful innocence and sexual abandon” (593). Kourtney Love is given as an example in the dictionary, “Hole’s Courtney Love, who called her own slut-infant-fashion ‘kinderwhore’ (593).

Nena’s costume, which evokes sexiness, destabilizes her performance of child and what has been regarded as appropriate clothing for a young girl. Nena's costume is reminiscent of the kinderwhore look not only because her garb is similar to the style but because of the actual age of the actor that wears them. The actor, Dahiana Méndez, who interprets the role of Nena, is visibly an adult in her early twenties; that is, the actor is an adult woman. Throughout the play she performs the role of a child by: playing with her doll Muñeca, her speech, and gestures.

Her performance and costume is further complicated when the character's actual age is revealed. El Mayordomo, the narrative thread, discloses events in Nena’s life and directly informs the audience that the little girl, Nena, is not chronologically a little girl. In actuality, she is sixteen years old and has reverted to a child-like mental state. Mayordomo explains: At the age of sixteen Nena had fallen in love and had sex with her uncle. Ironically, it was not the sexual
relationship that had incited her to revert to an infantile state, but rather, her uncle’s absolute rejection of her,

Entonces, el tío le dijo una sarta de barbaridades, que era su putita y ni siquiera eso y cosas mucho más terrible. En definitiva, que la dejaba. La niña se deprimió a magnitudes jamás vistas” (16).

The revelation of Nena’s actual age is at odds with her performance of a young girl which is further complicated by her costume that destabilizes societal views on minors evoking sexuality.

Nena’s clothing in the stylings of ‘kinderwhore’ destabilizes the fixed notion of what is purported as the dress of a child. As Malcolm Barnard has argued in *Fashion as Communication*, “‘kinderwhore’ disrupts traditional or ideological versions of female decorum” (147). Nena’s clothing not only disrupts “traditional versions of female decorum” but also destabilizes notions of a young girls clothing while at the same time visually contests her performance of her child-like state.

Nena’s doll, Muñeca’s is also portrayed by an adult female actor, Cecilia Cóssero. Her dress consists of white panty hose, Mary Jane shoes, a fitted white dress with ruffles, puffed short capped sleeves, a black bow that’s fixed on her waist that ties in the back, black short gloves and a white bonnet. On a superficial level, one could say she is dressed as a doll that is reminiscent of porcelain dolls. The act of women dressing as a doll, much like the kinderwhore style pertains to a subculture of dress. It is not that Muñeca’s clothing depicts a subculture of

---

62 Barnard makes reference to make-up. He describes the make-up of the kinderwhore look, “The eyes are heavily mascara-ed and the lips are bright red” (145). Nena does not wear this type of make-up. Her make-up is soft and natural.
dress but rather, it is the combination of an adult woman dressed in young girl's garb. As with Nena, it is not necessarily the clothing but who wears it and how it is worn. The subculture of dress that Muñeca depicts is the style of dress that incarnates women dressing as what has denominated as “lolitas”. The Lolita style became popular in Japan and has had many variants of the Lolita dress. What is being made reference to is the Lolita aesthetic that started in Japan.

The Victorian-era dolls and dress were removed from their original Western context, which allowed their assimilation and incorporation into Japanese culture as the Lolita aesthetic. This aesthetic uses elements both from the East and West in a way that represents a resistance of the dominant ideology of culture (Lunning 60).

The name appropriated by the aesthetic of this style of dress directly dialogues with Lolita by Vladimir Nabokov. Muñeca’s attire is similar to the clothing described for Lolita described in Nabokov’s text:

Goodness, what crazy purchases were prompted by the poignant predilection Humbert had in those days for check weaves, bright cottons, frills, puffed-out short sleeves, soft pleats, snug fitting bodices and generously full skirts! [...] what little girl would not like to whirl in a circular skirt and scanties? (107).

Muñeca’s clothing dialogues with the dress of both the classic text Lolita as well as the subculture of “lolitas”. Muñeca’s garb and performance of a doll contests the innocent attributes of a child’s toy. She explicitly incites sexual contact, when she performs the uncle’s commercial for “Mi huerfanita” by asking audience members if they want to put their hands under her little skirt, “Querés meter tu manito debajo de mi pollerita?” (7). Instead of providing security and comfort for Nena, Muñeca is cynical and reacts violently by swearing at her, “Muñeca- ¡Qué
va a salir lindo! ¿Por qué mierda me hiciste cantar eh?” (5). She also manipulates her to kill her mother,

Muñeca: ¿Entonces, si tu madre me quiere matar a mí, no es como que te quisiera matar a vos también?
Nena: Sí
Muñeca: ¿Y si ella te quiere matar a vos, no es justo que vos la quieras matar a ella? (11).

Muñeca’s costume and performance of a doll disrupts the fixed categories of representations and traditional societal views of how women should dress and behave. On the other hand, Nena’s clothing destabilizes societal norms of clothing for women and children by performing what could be interpreted as a child who is sexualized or an adult who is sexualizing childhood.

Nena and Muñeca- Sites of Resistance

The play text *Mi muñequita, la farsa*, is recent; sufficient time has not passed for there to exist an abundance of scholarly work on the new Uruguayan playwright. Most of the publications that have surfaced are interviews with Calderón. Within the descriptions of the play, particularly with reference to its staging, it has been described as an inside look into what can be considered a traditional middle class family. To illustrate, one of the many examples, FIBA or (Festival Internacional de Buenos Aires) has described *Mi muñequita, la farsa* as:

En Mi muñequita (la farsa) se alza una lente deformante sobre la concepción burguesa de familia, mostrando las atrocidades que rigen desde un nivel subterráneo a la moral que se pregoná desde la superficie.
The majority of the descriptions that appeared in the newspapers focus on the institution of the family and the catastrophic actions that take place within that construction. There are, however, two scholarly pieces that have recently been published that also have as the locus of their arguments the presentation of the institution of family. Roger Mirza’s article “Violencia y representación en la escena contemporánea” focuses on the family and the representation and theatricality of violence within the play. Bárbara Padrón-León’s article, “Mi muñequita la farsa- -Juego infantíl macabro con un toque de vodevil”, elucidates the staging of the play and the representation of family, at the International Theater Festival (FIT) in Cadiz. Both articles highlight the use of violence and dark comedy with respect to the family unit.

In this section of the chapter, I analyze the destabilizations of fixed societal norms that are performed by Nena and her relationships with both her mother and Muñeca. Throughout the play, Madre is the voice and voices societal norms. She is consistently preoccupied with what in Spanish is known as “¿el qué dirán?”. El “qué dirán” can be loosely translated in English as “What will they say?”. The ‘they’ refers to society as a whole as a regulatory means of reacting to a person’s actions that do not fit into societal norms. Madre’s worry resides in what she believes is Nena’s performative failure as a young woman. The majority of her complaints are due to her childlike state which is exhibited by her playing with a doll and speaking like a child. Madre’s worry is not performed as a sincere concern for her daughter’s psychological development but rather because it is
viewed as a societal taboo. The mother consistently scolds Nena’s child like pronunciation and swears at her:

**Madre:** ¡Durmió bien?
**Nena:** ¡Chi!
**Madre:** (Seria) ¡Habla bien! (Cachetada) ¿Cuántas veces tengo que decirte que hables bien?
**Nena:** Pedo yo no…
**Madre:** ¡Qué hables bien carajo! (4). 63

The mother’s declaration to Nena to “Speak well!” is affixed to societal norms of how a young woman should speak and carry herself. Nena’s mother not only is adamant in regulating her daughter’s speech to societal norms for her betterment but more so because of the “el qué dirán”. She further explains to her daughter: “Madre: No es lindo que la gente te vea siempre como una nena, con esa muñeca para todos lados y esa forma de hablar tuya… ¿entendés?” (20). Nena’s mother rejects, in one aspect, her daughter’s interaction with the doll because it goes against, within her understanding, societal views; that is what society has relegated as a fixed norm. The mere presence of the doll disturbs certain society’s conception of a fixed implicit/explicit norm. Immediately after she clarifies that it is not just her concern for her daughter but a concern that stems from the “el qué dirán”, “Es por tu bien. Es por tu propio bien.”. The mother’s repetitive statement expressing to her daughter that “it is for her own good” needs further analysis. The statement comes immediately after she explains that

63 In the performance of the play, it is interesting to note that when the mother slaps her daughter for imitating children’s pronunciation such as “chi” instead of “sí” and “pedo” instead of “pero”, the audience laughs. The audience laughter is also related to the connotations of “pedo” and its scatological implications.
society does not approve of her performativity as a young woman. What can be understood then is not that it is solely for her own good but that it is for her own good that she performs her role as the way society accepts it as a fixed norm. It is no longer for her own good but for the good of society.

A grown woman playing with a doll, holding a doll, specifically in public, was the subject of a 2008 documentary done by the BBC channel. The documentary entitled, “My Fake Baby”, showcases adult women, who purchase highly expensive “re-born” dolls that are very similar to the touch, feel, and weight of a newborn. The act of documenting these woman’s lives points to the need to highlight an action that is understood as “abnormal” for adult women. The documentary was highlighted on “The Today Show” where, one of the main anchors, Matt Lauer interviewed several American women who not only play with the re-borns but, much like Nena, incorporate them into their everyday life. What is of interest here is Matt Lauer’s introduction to the segment,

It’s a rite of passage of girlhood playing with baby dolls. A surprising documentary reveals that hundreds of adult women still play with baby dolls. Remarkably, realistic ones that almost seem alive (My transcription).

Lauer’s opening remarks capture societal views on the matter as well as reinscribes gender binaries. After a brief clip of the documentary, Lauer functions as society’s voice by posing a question to the women in the form of a statement, “You know there are people out there right now saying this is weird?”. After the women’s response, Lauer again points out the strangeness that is associated with it by pinpointing it is not just the dolls but their behavior around them, “They
find the fact the way you behave you do around these dolls the strange part. Do you understand that?”

Much like Matt Lauer acts as the society’s voice, so does Nena’s mother. Throughout the play the mother makes reference to her daughter as a “mujercita” a little woman, better defined as a young woman, and the need for Nena to correctly perform the role,

Madre: Ya no sos una nena, no tenés cinco años. Parecés una tonta hablando así. Esa no es la forma ni el tonito en que habla una mujercita como tú. ¿Por qué sos una mujercita no es verdad? […] Una mujercita como vos ya no necesita esa muñeca (3).

The Madre stresses the need to act, that is the need to perform the role of “woman” that is in accordance not only with how her mother deems fit but as society regulates it. In this scene Mayordomo plays a crucial role as an outsider; that is he is not a member of the family and suggests what the mother should say:

Mayordomo: Es por su bien.
Madre: Es por tu bien.
Mayordomo: Es por su propio bien.
Madre: Es por tu propio bien (3).

Madre’s repetition could be interpreted as an element of the absurd within the play as she merely repeats Mayordomo’s thoughts. However, it is not a mere repetition; it is the way in which Mayordomo utters the words, during the performance, with an air of sarcasm that imitates society’s voice and by doing so parodies societal regulations vis à vis “el qué dirán”.

The Madre functions as not only societal norms but as an enforcer of the norms that reinscribes gender roles for women and appropriate gender
performativites. The mother’s utterances in *Mi muñequita, la farsa* are also reflective of the construction of gender and its norms. The mother by frequently repeating and describing how a woman should perform “woman” evokes Simone de Beauvoir’s concept whereby, “one is not born, but, rather, becomes a woman”; that is, Madre’s utterances both elucidate gender as a construction as well as essentialist. To explain, the way in which the mother explains a “mujercita” needs to perform is not given any further explication, it is taken as a norm. The mother is, in Judith Butler’s terms is, “entranced”, “The authors of gender become entranced by their own fictions whereby the construction compels one’s belief in its necessity and naturalness” (“Performative Acts” 157).

On the other hand, the mother’s need to explain how a “mujercita” is to perform also reveals the need to construct the adult gendered woman.

Repetition is a leitmotiv of the play. The critiques of the performance allude to the repetitive nature of the violence. COMPLOT’s description reads: “La terrible necesidad de la libertad que ha sido vedada, niños condenados a repetir y acentuar los errores de sus antecesores” (COMPLOT). Although the chain of deaths and the repetitive nature of them provide a valuable reading, the repetitive nature of the gender performativities, gender constructions and sites of resistance that attempt to regulate anything that destabilizes it are the repetitions that are more revelatory for this study.

In a scene in *Mi muñequita, la farsa* where the actors break into a dance musical, Madre starts to perform a burlesque repetitive number on the couch to a pop version of “Por qué te vas”. The mother concentrates on her own moves
without giving any instruction to Nena. Nena starts to observe and repeat her mother's evocative dance that involves pelvic thrusts and slapping her bottom. Nena repeats the move until she is in sync with her mother and her efforts are seamless. The performance of the mother's dance and Nena's ability to firstly, learn the dance and then to be able to reproduce it as a natural seamless performance, performatively demonstrates the theoretical construction of gender:

Consider that there is a sedimentation of gender norms that produces the particular phenomenon of a natural sex, or a real woman, or any number of prevalent and compelling social fictions, and that this is a sedimentation that over time has produced a set of corporeal styles which, in reified form, appear as the natural configuration of bodies into sexes which exist in binary relation to one another (“Performative Acts” 158).

The binary relationship between the sexes is also exposed in the play. In Muñeca’s panic, incited by Madre’s threats to kill her, she reminds Nena in a dialogue of her promise, “Muñeca: ¡Me prometiste que me ibas a proteger!” (8). In the conversation, the essentialist concept of differences between men and women is discussed:

Nena: Bueno, lo que se dice un hombre, hombre...
Muñeca: ... Y como todo hombre, hace cosas que nosotras no.
Nena: ¿Que nosotras no?
Muñeca: Claro, los hombres hacen cosas que las mujeres no. […]
Muñeca: ¡Diferente! (8).

As Nena is about to possibly repeat a saying that she has heard about men, Muñeca cuts her off and explicitly reinscribes the concept that all men do what women do not. Nena innocently repeats Muñeca’s statement replete with essentialist binaries but poses it as a question. By posing it as a question, it is clear that she is not aware of the essentialist difference Muñeca names. Once
again, gender construction and binaries are taught to Nena. Muñeca responds to Nena’s lack of understanding by repeating the statement she had earlier made by prefacing it with “of course”. Her retort, “of course”, depicts the “natural” differences between both sexes. She is not able to explain and only able to exclaim they are different.

In another scene Muñeca and Nena are again convening and discussing their plan of attack on how they will eliminate Madre who threatens Muñeca’s elimination by way of assassination. Mayordomo interjects, while the rest of the actors are in silence, and offers “psychological” methods for killing Madre”. Below are two of the three options Mayordomo offered:

**METODOS PSICOLÓGICOS**

1- Presentarle al nuevo noviecito... (con tono despectivo) peludo, barbudo, con tatuajes y caravanas por doquier. 10 años mayor que vos, oloroso, repugnante, vago, sucio, malformado, pulgoso, piojoso, costroso! (retomando un buen tono) ...con el cual has decidido casarte dentro de una semana (con tono severo) sin importarte un carajo lo que piense ella.

2- Decirle, confesarle, aceptarle, de una vez por todas que no sos “normal”. Que sos... lesbiana (tapándose la boca) ...gay...(se destapa la boca) homosexual ! Torta, marimacho, que no te la comes, que nunca viste ni querés ver en tu vida una buena ver... ... verdad? Morirá de tristeza (12).

The Mayordomo offers a heterosexual possibility as well as homosexual mode for Nena to kill her mother. The first possibility is to introduce her mother to a boyfriend that does not adhere to the societal norms that would please her mother. In brief, a man with tattoos, who smells and is lazy. The physical description of the future suitor is in opposition to her father who is dressed in a three piece suit and is cleanly shaven. In other words, the way of killing her
mother is by bringing someone who is the opposite of Nena’s father. Introducing her new boyfriend would not be what kills her mother. A quick marriage and indifference to her mother’s wishes would seal her death.

The second option that would psychologically kill her mother would be to tell her that she is not “normal”. Interestingly, the playwright put quotes around normal as to signal sarcasm either to the reader, performer or audience member. The quotes also signal the social construction and impossibility of naming a “normal” sexuality. The way in which the Mayordomo performs this scene is with high drama and a ridiculous tone has a twofold function. The delivery of these lines in this fashion parodies societal views on the prospects of a child coming out to his/her parent as well as describes the unfortunate reality for many.

In the first example, heterosexuality is a viable option for Nena as long as she adheres to the expectations of what her mother constitutes an appropriate man for her daughter. The second method of psychologically killing her mother does not permit homosexuality in any capacity. The act of telling her mother she is gay; that is the act of coming out of the closet to her mother is sufficient enough to kill her emotionally with sadness: The act of announcing to her mother that she does not fit the heteronormative parameters that her mother has constructed or taught her daughter. Both instances, echo and parody binary sexualities and heteronormative regulations. In addition, this is ironic because Madre also does not conform to societal norms which is revealed in her; constant inebriated state, provocative attire, highly sexualized gestures that she performs with the Uncle and the Mayordomo.
At the end of the play, Nena, Muñeca and the Mayordomo are the only three characters that are left “alive”, although they are emotionally distraught. The Padre, finds out about his brother’s plot to venge his brother for having taken his girlfriend, Madre, at the age of sixteen,

Y claro, cuando tuvieron a la niña el tío vio la oportunidad perfecta para vengarse. Fácilmente la niña se enamoró de su tío, el cual se la volteó por todos lados (15).

The vengeance the uncle sought was due to his brother’s actions. The Father took his brother’s girlfriend, Madre and married her. The Father, who at the time was thirty, had explained to his brother, who was sixteen, the same age as Madre, that Madre was too mature for him and that it was best that he find a woman more suitable for him, “...ella es muy Madura para vos, ... conseguite a alguien más chica” (15). The uncle revealed to father of his fulfilled vengeance and the father murders him. The chain of murders continues as the mother reveals to Nena that father had verbally and physically abused her, “Y me hacía mal a mí, me pegaba [...] 20 años con él, 20 años pegand...” (20). Madre as a result avenges Father and murders him. The Mayordomo describes the murders repetitively as a chain of reactions. He depicts not only physical deaths but psychological deaths as well:

**Mayordomo:** El tío mata sentimentalmente a la niña. El padre mata físicamente al tío y tortura físicamente al tío y tortura físicamente a la madre. La madre mata físicamente al padre, tortura sicológicamente a la niña e intenta a matar físicamente a la muñeca. ¿Es como una venganza terrible, entienden? (21).
As most have reiterated, the description that the theater group has of the play is: “[una] terrible necesidad de la libertad que ha sido vedada, niños condenados a repetir y acentuar los errores de sus antecesores” (COMPLOT). It would seem as though Nena’s actions as performed in the staging of the play is simply the final link to the chain of murders. In the play text, the way in which the murder is carried out is not stated. In a dialogue with Muñeca, Nena at first does not remember that she has a mother. Muñeca triggers her memory in a series of questions, which incites Nena to confess her actions:

Muñeca: ¿Y tu madre?
Nena: ¿Qué madre?
Muñeca: La tuya.
Nena: ¿Yo tenía una madre?
Muñeca: Sí, que me quería matar.
Nena: ¿Te quería matar?
Muñeca: ¿¿Sí, no te acordás??
Nena: ¡La mate!! (22).

In the staging of the play, Nena gives Mayordomo orders to kill Madre, an action he completes without hesitation.

Although Madre’s murder can be interpreted as part of the chain of assassinations, this analysis has another reading of the final (physical) death. The Madre was the regulator of the heteronormative. She asserted heteronormative gender construction of woman vis-à-vis Nena. Nena’s character, however, poses a site of resistance. Throughout the play text and staging of the play, she resists constructions of gender by continuing to perform her gender against the grain. Nena presents a challenge to the fixed identity her mother and society have imposed upon her. She refused to stabilize her identity in accordance with the constructions of gender and sexuality she was taught.
Madre’s hope was that Nena reproduce and reiterate what she and society considered the only passage to becoming a “mujercita”. Nena’s actions of not adhering to the norms disrupted and destabilized the countless attempts of the heteronormative doctrine that attempted to regulate her.

By Nena killing her mother, she is not simply performing the assassinations she has seen repetitively performed through her life, but rather she takes action to eliminate the final chain in the system that attempted to regulate her body, gender and sexuality. In the final scene Muñeca and Nena share a kiss that is incited by Nena. In the play text it is described in the stage directions as,

Empieza a subir la música que hemos escuchado toda la maldita obra, ellas, empiezan a acercarse una a otra, y de repente cuando ninguno lo espera, se besan, apasionadamente se besan, con amor, realmente con mucho amor, se abrazan, y besan (23).

This final kiss leaves questions: Did Nena have a homosexual desire? Did Nena fulfill her homosexual desire? Can it be described as a homosexual desire? Is Nena and Muñeca’s relationship a gay relationship? Categorizing the kiss as in either homo or hetero binary would result as essentialist. Instead of categorizing it in a binary, it is more productive, from a queer understanding, to interpret the kiss as a performance of resistance. This interpretation allows a destabilization, a final act to challenging fixed identities by resisting traditional sexual hegemony.
Conclusion:

The young Uruguayan’s play, *Mi muñequita, la farsa*, offers a theatrical presentation of a mode of resistance to institutions that attempt to regulate the self. Throughout the play, challenges to what is considered, in the Mayordomo’s words, “normal”, are questioned. The archetype of family is the vehicle through which these challenges are posited. In an interview I had with Calderón, the word that was mostly utilized both on his part and mine was “desestabilizar”. For him, “la obra trataba desconstruir instituciones” (Personal interview). He chose the family because of the way in which family in Uruguay is considered, “En Uruguay, la familia es protegida como salvación de uno” (Personal interview). However, in this analysis, it is not just the archetype of family as an institution that is destabilized but the heteronormative construction of gender and sexuality that the institution produces that is also destabilized and resisted.

The destabilizations of “género” are carried out throughout the play text and staging of the play. The theatrical devices such as the rupturing of the fourth wall, musical numbers, the music, the costumes, the absurd, flashbacks also are an integral thread to destabilization that takes place in the dialogue. The staging of the play and play text also resist categorization of “género” or genre as it takes from various theatrical genre’s to create a new one. The destabilizations occur at the title of the play. When I asked him about the title of the play text and why he chose “farsa”, since it is not a farce in theatrical terms, he replied that “Estaba haciendo juego, con el otro sentido de la palabra. [...] De que lo que pasa allí no es verdad”. The destabilizations continue throughout the play, particularly
through Nena’s performativities. Instead of interpreting the play as a chain of assassinations, our interpretation is that the play is a chain of performativities that constantly reveal another destabilization that performed vis à vis: theatrical representations, gender and sexual destabilizations. In the words that el Mayordomo repeated throughout *Mi muñequita, la farsa*, “siempre hay más”; that is there is always more and as the queer reading of the text has demonstrated, there is always more to an identity that resists.
Chapter 6: Conclusion

The character Mayordomo from *Mi muñequita, la farsa*, closes the last scene by proclaiming to the audience, “No, esperen, ¿Por qué se van? ¡Aún hay más, siempre hay más!” (24). This last phrase recasts the underpinnings of the theoretical lens employed to analyze the play texts. As was elucidated in the introduction of this dissertation, as well as through the chapters, the focus was to engage the play texts under a queer theoretical lens in order to forge a new dialogue that “primarily aims to continuously destabilize and deconstruct the notion of fixed sexual and gender identities” (Lovaas 6). I initially set out to focus on queer moments vis à vis performatives; as Butler describes “in the sense that the essence or identity that they purport to express are *fabrications* manufactured and sustained through corporeal signs and other discursive means” (“Gender Trouble” 185). The queer moments were evidenced not only in the plot, characters the relationship between the characters and their dialogues but also through the play texts theatricality such as its staging, stage directions and mise en scène. The destabilizations of gender and sexuality were accompanied by the destabilization of genres through the plays’ structure, intertextuality and theatricality.

One of the main premises of this dissertation was the avoidance of forging a direct dialogue between the play texts and the playwrights; that in the analysis of the texts, the author’s sexuality was not applied to the play text itself. When the author’s biography was incorporated into the dissertation, it was not an “A-ha!” moment that revealed the crux of the queer performativities; rather it was
utilized to further consider a point of departure from the direct applications scholarly criticism has constructed. To directly connect a literary production with its author is to essentialize and prioritize the author’s identity over his work.

Does this then mean that the playwrights are potentially not queer but their artistic productions are? The answer, in my theoretical positioning: neither is queer. My use of the theoretical term queer throughout the dissertation has been employed as a verb or adjective. It has not been used as a noun because of the very nature of queer’s theoretical premise which is “consistently destabilizing and deconstructing”. To name a queer subject is to define a subject which subsequently reinscribes and regulates a fixed identity. Instead of using the term as a noun, using queer as an adjective or verb is in consonance with the term’s resistive argument. Lee Edelman succinctly states, “queerness can never define an identity; it can only disturb one” (17). The play texts, then, have queer moments and queer performativities that challenge and disrupt the sexual and gender identities as well as the theatricality.

In the first chapter, “Queering Historical Times”, I showed how René Marqués’ literary production is best known for its metaphors and allegories with respect to the question of Puerto Rico’s nationhood and its contention with United States’ imperialism. His work is also distinguished for his copious attention to detail. One of his last written plays, *David y Jonatán* proved to be the exception with minimal stage directions and stage design. Although there were loud rumors of Marqués’ non heteronormative sexuality and grave efforts to mask his sexuality both on his part as well as Joe Lacomba, who currently has control
over the playwright’s artistic production, Marqués chose to write a theater piece based on the biblical story of David and Jonathan. The playwright could have kept the relationship between both men as a platonic love but instead chose to depict their queer desires. The employment of the theatrical device of the gauze resists the heteronormative version and instead reveals and makes the audience complicit in the destabilization of the Biblical text. *David y Jonatán* not only queers history and a historical text but René Marqués’ literary production.

René Marqués’ sexuality was examined within the analysis in order to destabilize the current scholarship that indulges in his closeted sexuality. My reading of his play text does not confirm nor deny his sexuality but rather contests critics’ notions of it as well as Joe Lacomba’s attempts to keep it veiled. On the other hand, Raúl Damonte Botana, better known as Copi’s sexuality was openly out of the closet. The critics have chosen to explicitly apply his sexuality to his literature. Through a compilation of interviews, Copi openly discussed his sexuality, his gender performance on stage and the question of nationality. His responses in the interviews unequivocally argued against a “homosexual condition” that others tried to impose on him and his work. The inclusion of non heteronormative sexualites in his literary production were interpreted as a direct result of Copi’s homosexuality. Although Copi was clear about separating his private sexual life from his work, critics have still chosen to draw a formulaic equation between his sexual self and his literature. The play text *Cachafaz*, parodied two of Argentina’s canonical texts which are considered classics. Copi queers the representation of the “macho” figure by presenting two queer figures.
The character of Raulito destabilizes gender and sexuality through speech, and queer cloak. Raulito’s gender is consistently in flux as it resists categorization and is constantly under construction.

Unlike Copi, José Ignacio Cabrujas as well as his work is well known in Latin America. In the play text *El día que me quieras* the playwright depicted two historical moments, one of which included a pop culture phenomenon Carlos Gardel. Much like René Marqués, he was rumored to have been a homosexual. The play text alludes to Gardel’s possible homosexuality; however his sexuality is never explicitly defined. In addition, Gardel’s nationality has historically been contested. In the play text when Gardel was directly questioned, he never declares his nationality but instead plays with the “mystery” that shrouds it by speaking in French or not remembering basics about his biography that could elucidate his identity. By not directly answering these questions, Gardel does not only maintain the “mystery” but resists a national definition. In effect his sexual and national identity remain unfixed and in a state of continuous instability.

In *Mi muñequita, la farsa*, the construction of gender and family and society’s role within that construction is highlighted. The archetypal family presented is completely destabilized as fixed notions about a traditional middle class family are shattered. Family secrets such as incest with a minor, a verbally and physically abusive father and an alcoholic and prescription pill addicted mother are in contention with society’s “qué dirán”. In the analysis of the play text and performance of *Mi muñequita, la farsa* Madre reveals how gender and the performance are constructed. Through her daughter Nena, Madre attempts to
construct heteronormative gender of woman and defines how it is to be performed. Madre repetitively attempts to impose heteronormative regulations that adhere to society’s view of a correct “mujercita”. Nena, however, poses a site of resistance of the regulatory gender her mother poses on her. By murdering her mother she kills and resists that which forces to define and construct her gender. The staging *Mi muñequita, la farsa* directly dialogues with the destabilizations of the play by rupturing the fourth wall, including musical numbers and commercials, which all call attention to the theatricality of the play. The audience is consistently reminded that they are attending a performance. By doing so, they are made aware of the fact that the action on stage is fabricated and a performance, much like the gender Madre attempted to construct, regulate and reinscribe in Nena.

What are the implications of a queer theoretical approximation to these Latin American play texts? In order to answer this question, a reflection on Foster’s note on the unenthusiastic reception from “colleagues, writers and the Latin American public” on the dialogue between queer theory and Latin America offers a space of departure (“Relations between Queer Studies”). As was previously noted, Foster’s response to his studies are not isolated incidents as I too have encountered responses from the Latin American public that are disinterested in understanding queer theory and are much less interested in forging a dialogue between queer theory and literary modes of production. In some instances where there exists acknowledgement of non heteronormative genders and sexualities but it is not a point of interest as these topics are treated as
inconsequential and detract from the play texts “real” importance, or what the play is “really” about. The interest resides in maintaining the heteronormative criticism of the play texts where the focus is solely relegated to reinscribing essentialist binary identities. On the other side of the spectrum, if the author is rumored to be gay or is openly gay and situates their focus or alludes to non heteronormative genders and sexualities in their literary production, critics apply a formulaic approach as in the case of Copi: [non heteronormative author + possible allusion to non heteronormative gender or sexuality = gay themes].

In both scenarios, there is a resistance to critically acknowledge unfixed identities and uphold a critical perspective that maintains a heteronormative compulsory mode of regulating the play texts and criticism. The play texts, much like Nena of Mi muñequita, la farsa, resist the heteronormative constructions as well as essentialist binary constructions under which they have been relegated and regulated. To write about queer performativities, moments and theatricality is to destabilize and create another site of resistance to the compulsory heteronormative regulatory modes that encompassed these play texts. Perhaps, with the new generation of playwrights and critics, a dialogue between queer theory and Latin American literary productions will not be perceived as trivial but rather as productive and allow for additional interpretations and analysis to ensue. It would appear that it has already begun. The conversation that I had with Gabriel Calderón seemed to point towards that direction. After my explanation of queer theory and its relationship to Mi muñequita, la farsa, I asked him his thoughts on it and he responded, “Sí, sí pudiera ser.” In conclusion, Calderón’s response indicates that he is open to the possibility of a dialogue between queer theory and Latin American Theater. His openness in conjunction with the recent academic recognition of queer theory in Latin America, seem to be forging a dialogue that will hopefully destabilize the
trivial space queer theory has been relegated to and open the door for more non heteronormative critiques to come forth that destabilize and allow for a reconceptualization of the compulsory existent heteronormative and gay criticism that define and fix identities.
Works Cited


*Cria cuervos*. Dir. Carlos Saura. Criterion Collection, 2007. DVD.


*Mi muñequita, la farsa*. Dir. Gabriel Calderón and Ramiro Perdomo. Personal Copy, 2006. DVD.


(Appendix)

Telephone Interview with José M. Lacomba:

Partial Excerpts

(August 05, 2008)

POL: Buenas, ¿es la Fundación René Marqués?

LACOMBA: Sí, sí, ¿en qué le puedo ayudar?


LACOMBA: Ahh qué bien. Sabes que fue una de las última obras que René publicó e inclusive han querido volver a publicarla, pero imagínate, gratis.

POL: Sí, la incluyo en la tesis por muchos motivos pero lo que he notado es que casi no hay crítica sobre la obra y tampoco se ha escenificado. No, no sabía que se quería hacer otra publicación.

LACOMBA: ¿Tiene tiempo?

POL: Sí, como no.

LACOMBA: Bueno sí, casi no hay y si hay es muy poca y no muy bien profundizada. Fíjate René a leer la Biblia la interpreta y no como las sectas religiosas. René en *Sacrificio Monte Moriah* interpreta lo de Sara y Abrahán. La lógica era que Abrahán era bien anciano. También yo recuerdo que la edad de Abrahán pueda que se debe al calendario que era mucho más corto.

POL: Ajá eso lo había leído también en su ensayo, “La leyenda de Sara y Abrahán”.

213
LACOMBA: También, René aborda un tema que nunca lo había interpretado y lo hace de una manera más sutil que lo trabaja más en lo político. Que es un tema que lo tiene hasta los animales. Fíjate que el título de la obra es Fulano y otro nombre y eso es importante. Creo que eso es uno de los grandes valores, la sutileza. Tampoco se ha escenificado, creo que había un tal Jean Saya pero no creo que llegó a escenificarla.

POL: ¿Por qué cree que la obra tiene muy poca crítica? ¿También por qué cree no se ha escenificado?

LACOMBA: Creo que la obra es difícil en el sentido de espectáculo. René mismo me decía que eso se podía hacer. También la cuestión de lo desnudo. En esa época era prohibido y no se podía hacer. Hoy en día no saben que quitarse. Me parece que eso es otro factor. Como René requiere hacer las dos [juntas].

POL: Sí, es verdad.

POL: Sí, era muy detallista en sus ensayos y en las obras pero no sabía que lo meticuloso también se trasladaba al escenario como director.

LACOMBA: Fíjate una característica de René es lo sutil, no importa que el tema sea Monte Moriah se aplica a Puerto Rico. Siempre hay un hilito que se puede aplicar a Puerto Rico. Me parece muy importante ubicar la obra en su desarrollo temático de la obra, ubicar la obra dentro de la producción de René. Es significativo que es una de las últimas obras.

POL: Sí

LACOMBA: En la portada, el diseño de la portada lo hice yo- una corona marqués. Cuando René va a Madrid y se escenifica por primera vez una obra de
un autor no español, le molestaba cuando veía su nombre con una zeta porque sabes que también se escribe con zeta. Y él me decía que le molestaba (se ríe). Sabes que es título de comportamiento del ser humano.

POL: ¿(Riza) y tanto le molestaba?

LACOMBA: Sí, ah, lo más importante para René era el espectáculo. René tenía un concepto visual en donde el va creándole imágenes al lector cuando hace su descripción, de tal modo que el lector lo va visualizando. La simbología me parece sumamente importante como *La muerte no entrará en el palacio* o *Los soles truncos*.

POL: Sí eso lo vi en una tesis, ¿con quién hablo? ¿Es el señor José Lacomba?

LACOMBA: Sí, soy yo.

POL: ¡Qué placer, es un verdadero honor! Sí, usted escribió su tesis sobre la simbología en la Universidad de Kansas.

LACOMBA: Sí, fui uno de los primeros y me molesté y me levanté de la mesa. Exigían mucho y como estaban empezando el programa se entendía. Por los primeros 6 meses nadie me hablaba. Me veían como un white Puerto Rican, me veían como si yo pertenecía a las gangas de *West Side Story* o de unas de las pandillas.

POL: Ay, ¿de verdad?

LACOMBA: Sí, me parece que tiene un tema nuevo algo que no se ha tocado. Otra preocupación que tuvo René, sabe como son los grupos “manda fuego” los muy religiosos. René tenía miedo que lo utilizaran [la escenificación] de la obra como para capitalizarse en el nombre de él. Ya el era muy famoso.
**POL:** En esta obra, o las últimas dos, no hay tantos detalles, tantas instrucciones, ¿por qué no? ¿Ah, y por qué se empeñaba René en poner tantos detalles meticulosos en la obra?

**LACOMBA:** Porque él quería que las obras se hicieran tal como él las imaginó. El no quería las interpretaciones, no es así. Con las interpretaciones él decía, "Nacariles, esa obra se tiene que escenificar como yo la concibo porque eso es parte de la obra".

**POL:** ¿Y en *David y Jonatán*, se relaja un poco con las acotaciones e instrucciones o…?

**LACOMBA:** Muchas de las cosas están en la Biblia. Sobre el aspecto bíblico es tan lejano. Aún así, habla de la vestimenta de los personajes. Es que está en la Biblia. René tenía una biblia con unos dibujos y allí lo tenía. Esa copia a tengo en la Fundación René Marqués que fundé justo después que murió. Tienes un tema muy nuevo te sugiero que creara una biografía, entiende lo que te digo. Yo lo conocí prácticamente toda mi vida. Muchas personas escriben sobre él, pero no lo ubican. Unamuno tenía un concepto, "Para ser internacional, primero tienes que ser nacional" y eso lo tenía Marqués.

**POL:** No se puede negar. Le agradezco muchísimo su tiempo y comentarios. A la verdad ha sido un gran honor en poder hablar con usted.

**LACOMBA:** Ya sabe cualquier cosa me llama y le ayudo en lo que pueda.

**POL:** Mil gracias, un abrazo y cuidase.

**LACOMBA:** Igualmente
Telephone Interview: Gabriel Calderón

Partial excerpts

(March 14, 2010)

Pol: ¿La inclusión de la música italiana, cómo surgió y por qué?

Calderón: La inclusión de la música italiana... nosotros hicimos un proceso de ensayo de ocho meses. En ese proceso de ensayos, durante los meses, trabajamos sin textos. No sabíamos que íbamos hacer durante cinco o seis meses. Estuvimos investigando, acá dentro de esos encuentros y yo te diría que nunca he estrenado una obra fuera de esos encuentros; en dónde gente con menos de treinta y cinco años paran una obra en menos de cuarenta y cinco minutos. En eso, cuando estábamos buscando la música, Leo Quinto que era el que hacía el Padre, nos presentó la canción y nos gustó. En vez de utilizar la canción en inglés que estábamos manejando usamos esas. Empezamos a utilizar las canciones en italiano y allí empezó la madre de vez en cuando a cambiar las palabras y hablar un poco en italiano.

Pol: Ya, pero no fue cualquier canción. Fueron canciones de la época de los sesentas de Mina.

Calderón: Sí, o sea; mira, después que estrenamos y todo nos dimos cuenta después como con Cría cuervos y las canciones de Mina todas pertenecen a una etapa que por ejemplo nuestros padres tenían referencias a esas canciones. Siempre nos gustaba y las canciones de Mina nos sonaban. Eso no lo vimos hasta después del estreno. No, no lo vimos en la etapa del montage. Para mí el
trabajo de *Mi muñequita* fue un trabajo de aprendizaje también. Ya ahora, cuando elijo pienso en la música que voy a poner qué dice en torno al texto.

**Pol:** Ah ya, otra pregunta. En torno a los trabajos académicos por lo que investigado solamente hay dos. Uno de Roger Mirza que aparece en el libro de Pelletieri y otro de Bábarba que fue a Cádiz. Específicamente, en el artículo de Bábarra (Padrón-León), que aparece en *Gestos* se enfoca más bien en la puesta en escena y Roger en que se enfoca en lo absurdo. También, por otra parte, en las entrevistas del Internet y los blogs he leído que en realidad a ti no te interesa lo absurdo sino más bien le interesaba a Perdomo, ¿no? Pero a la misma vez cuando uno lee el texto, en la primera escena hay una incoherencia que da aparecer como si fuera lo absurdo, al principio donde empieza el diálogo, “decime algo hablame”….

**Calderón:** En la primera escena, al igual que una de las últimas escenas, cuando la muñequita está relatando la fiesta de último año y la miran y quieren tocarle la colita y todo eso, esas tres escenas se agregaron después. Yo me tenía que ir. Yo dejé esas escenas escritas para que cerraran bien el espectáculo para contar. Un poco lo que queríamos contar no era tanto lo absurdo sino más bien lo de farsa. Todo eso apareció al final en donde al principio parecen incoherentes, en donde no se entiende.

**Pol:** Exacto, o sea, que no es el absurdo por ser absurdo sino más bien que bueno, a través del Mayordomo, nos damos cuenta que él es como el hilo conductor que nos da el proceso de flashback.
Calderón: Totalmente de acuerdo. El Mayordomo aparece y nos damos cuenta de lo que había pasado.

Pol: Ya que mencionaste lo de la farsa, en realidad no es una farsa en sí como se define una obra teatral como una farsa. ¿Por qué le pusiste la farsa o sea es el hecho de que sea un juego de que se vea que todo es teatro? ¿Me puedes explicar un poco?

Calderón: Sí, el hecho que sea una farsa no se refiere a que sea un género teatral sino más bien al significado de la palabra. Le pusimos la farsa porque el espectáculo estaba atravesado con la idea de denunciar continuamente- que: Eso lo que estábamos mostrando no era verdad en la dramática sino lo que estaba pasando por los ojos del espectador no estaba pasando. Muchas cosas que tratábamos de hacer era romper con la identificación total del espectador, con: El aislamiento de la representación teatral o con la magia teatral. Es decir: Rompíamos con la cuarta pared no nos mirábamos, bailamos, nos dirigíamos al espectador y eso empezó a llegar a una caricatura del personaje que en determinado momento se caricaturizaban (los personajes)... en que la madre hacía de mamita. Pero en determinado momento, la obra tomó un peso real. Y cuando ese momento dramático estaba instalado se insertaban: Fuera música, fuera baile y chiste que rompía ese estado esa atmósfera. Entonces eso de la farsa; es decir, esto no es verdad, esto es teatro, es un cuento es mentira. La farsa tiene más relación con la mentira que con el género de teatro. Esto no es verdad, jugando a la mentira todo el tiempo hasta que aparecen momentos de verdad que en realidad son muy fuertes.
Pol: Se ha visto el enfoque en la cadena de asesinatos y el efecto de la repetición. Pero, en mi trabajo, no me voy por lo psicológico que también sé que a ti bueno, no es lo que no te importe, sino, no es lo que te llama la atención. Sino en mi trabajo no sé si manejas la teoría queer o no o cómo la entiendes. Me imagino que lo queer ya le da referencia a lo gay. Pero, se trata más bien de desestabilizar los puntos de vistas esencialistas de cómo se construye el género ya sea masculino o femenino y la sexualidad. Lo que más me interesa en la obra es la construcción de género. ¿Me pudiera hablar un poco sobre el tema?

Calderón: Lo más interesante para nosotros es cuando nosotros la estrenamos y sobre todo en la época o el momento en que yo estaba. Tengo que ser honesto contigo. Yo ahora lo pienso y lo trabajo. En ese momento era puramente inconsciente y sí está allí en escena todo el tiempo la idea de desestabilizar y de no crear ninguna institución; es decir, de cuando dijéramos nenita no hablábamos de las niñas en general. Cuando hablábamos de las relaciones familiares, hablábamos de la particularidad de la generalidad con un lenguaje que los actores iban improvisando en sus ensayos que yo eligiera que me gustaba. Descubrimos al estrenar que eso era un lenguaje que primero desestabilizaba a la mayoría del público. Era más una excusa para hacer una obra que nos divirtiéramos un poco que a nosotros nos gustaba, hacer de estos personajes de la farsa. Después empezamos a ver lo que generaba, por ejemplo la generación de nuestros padres y cómo ellos se identificaban. Y una cosa que siempre comento es: Era una cosa cuando se ensayaba la obra un viernes a las once de la noche o los sábados a las doce de la noche en que iba mucho
público de nuestra edad y era una fiesta o sea la gente se reía todo el tiempo a
veces hacían comentarios. Era una cosa la obra y otra cosa era los domingos a
las siete de la tarde cuando venía el público mayor, mayoritariamente mayor de
gente de 40, 50, 60 70 años era la edad de la mayoría de las personas. Y en la
obra casi no había risas. En toda la obra era un silencio absoluto y la gente salía
o molesta o realmente conmovida o sea con los ojos casi llorando entonces eran
percepciones diferentes de la misma obra. Fueron cosas que vimos después de
las funciones y tuvimos que empezar a pensar, ¿Qué era lo que estábamos
contando que producía eso? De las obras que seguí escribiendo y trabajando
después, algo que sí yo mantuve fue el trabajo de cierta manera sobre la
desestabilización de las instituciones ciertamente nacionales. Algunas cosas que
en Uruguay son intocables, por ejemplo; la familia En Uruguay no es solamente
institución si no es visto como salvación de todo cuando en realidad en muchos
casos no lo es. El sistema [...], militar son instituciones que en Uruguay en
muchos casos está en declive y en decadencia y bastante pervertida desde el
imaginario de la sociedad en su conjunto todavía son instituciones que deben
ser protegidas, salvadas, levantadas A partir de Mi muñequita yo he mantenido
ese trabajo de desestabilizar los lugares sagrados. No es que yo crea que no
debé de haber familias o debe de haber instituciones. Es que no creo que deben
de estar exageradamente protegidas o idealizadas porque pasa lo que pasa. Y
entonces, en este caso, Mi muñequita como mis otras obras son lugares de
desestabilización y por lo menos son reflexión sobre la conversión que pasa en
algunas de ellas.
Pol: En todo eso, aparte de la familia también se puede hablar de la institución del género de la mujer.

Calderón- Totalmente

Pol: Porque la Madre se pasa diciéndole a Nena, “así no, no es lindo que la gente te vea así” y también hay mucho lo del qué dirán

Calderón- Estoy totalmente de acuerdo

Pol: No es que la Madre se preocupe tanto por la niña el qué dirán ese agobiante que bueno yo siempre le preguntaba a mi mamá: ¿Quiénes son ellos y qué van a decir?

Calderón- (Riza)

Pol – No solamente trata de la familia sino también de la sociedad.

Calderón- Totalmente sí sí, la obra va desestabilizando desde más allá los hombres presentan una masculina violenta una agresión y burlándose como aparece el Mayordomo.

Pol- Y, también el Mayordomo funciona también como en ese momento cuando la mamá le está diciendo a la Nena bueno es por tu bien entonces el Mayordomo hace un eco para mí cuando lo dice es una manera satírica de hablar del qué dirán. Pero, en realidad, no es por su bien sino es por el bien. ¿De quién? De ella, porque ella es un reflejo...

Calderón- Sí, el qué dirán está bien presente.
Pol- Y otra cosa, La Nena por muy discapacitada que supuestamente se ha mantenido... en un estado de niña... pero al final yo veo que Nena como que encaja un espacio de resistencia porque ella como que se limpia con todo lo del qué dirán. Lo que le queda es repetir todo lo que ha visto que es matar pero al mismo tiempo ella toma un momento consiente y le dice al Mayordomo, sí mátala (a su madre). Pero, no es para quedarse sola. No es que bota a la muñequita. Sino parece ser un acto para que ella viva su vida realmente como ella quisiera.

Calderón- Sí ahora me recuerdo, no sé qué tan consiente era pero si era una reflexión. La muerte simbólica de los padres era necesaria para que nazca aunque esté muerta en vida pero para que nazca esa persona. Entonces la liberación de ella que es oscura que es terrible. Entonces, desde el campo morfológico, una vez que pasa algo es más fácil que se repita es más fácil o parece ser les hago menos difícil asesinar (...). Sigue siendo una cosa terrible pero es un transmite como para el Mayordomo y la muerte de la madre. Los asesinatos están relacionados con el campo morfológico que sostiene el aprendizaje de las especies. En la obra el primer asesinato es difícil la segunda más fácil y así las terceras y las cuartas son casi naturales

Pol- Me puedes hablar un poco del final del cierre, en términos del beso que no es un beso simple sino un beso apasionado. ¿Cuáles fueron las reacciones del público?
Calderón- Para mí, pensé que al final tendría que haber un beso. Y lo empezamos a trabajar y nos cerraba perfectamente. Después de toda la ausencia y toda la implicación que le tenía ella a la muñequita que al final cerrara reuniéndose Pero, era una idea más intuitiva Y, el beso al final, es un punto de discusión de la mayoría del público. Hay gente que sostiene que es totalmente innecesario. Mientras otros sostienen que es lo que cierra y lo que da sentido y de una manera concluye lo que viene pasando en la obra. Inclusive, alguna gente dice que es innecesaria- la manera en que se besan y no el beso. Y, a la vez, juega con la molestia del espectador. Sí te puedo decir que la mayoría de gente que cree que el beso es innecesario es porque básicamente piensan que estamos tratando de hacer una transgresión barata. En realidad, en todas partes se da la misma discusión. Esto es un buen final o esto es un final innecesario

Pol: Me parece que en cuanto a: La estructura de la obra, el texto, la representación teatral, en lo que se dice en la obra, en lo que se hace en la obra … para mí: La obra es una manera de tratar de desestabilizar todo.

Calderón: En eso estamos de acuerdo. Si, tal vez no tan fuertemente no tan consistente. O sea conscientemente o que sí hacíamos era desestabilizar lo que espectador se esperaba que se hiciera contando a desestabilizar lo de la representación teatral bailando, desestabilizar la idea de los personajes. La idea era desestabilizar ni cruelmente ni fuertemente que continuamente se supiera lo que esperar del espectáculo.