Preface

Several years ago, when I published *Gay and Lesbian Themes in Latin American Literature* (1991), queer issues were just beginning to gain a place in Hispanic studies. More recently, with the assistance of over sixty scholars in the United States, Latin America, and Europe, I edited *Latin American Writers on Gay and Lesbian Themes: A Bio-Critical Sourcebook* (1994), which provides coverage for approximately one hundred authors.[1] Since the publication of these two volumes, I have continued to write on gay and lesbian topics and, more important, to direct theses and dissertations on these topics in my home department, Spanish, as well as in English and the Interdisciplinary Graduate Program in Humanities. The current compilation includes some of this additional work. It incorporates much more of a theoretical base than *Gay and Lesbian Themes,* primarily because the bibliography that has sought to develop a queer theory in general and specific applications for Latin America only dates from the early part of this decade.

Because queer issues have recently begun to constitute an integral part of a research agenda for Hispanic studies, I begin with an overview of what a gay male heritage for Latin America might look like. Although feminist dimensions will be addressed elsewhere in this study, this chapter is male-oriented because gay male authors have received the bulk of critical attention, and have been translated into foreign languages and reviewed in the literary supplements.

I take up feminine figures in the following two chapters. Eva Perón, whom I discuss in Chapter 2, has always been an intriguing political and cultural icon. Scholars are divided over the degree to which she ought properly to be allied with feminist issues—whether her activist agenda represented an empowerment of women through the empowerment of her political persona, or whether she was nothing more than a stand-in for her husband with little personal identity, as she repeated the gestures of masculinism. However, I am less inter-

ested in interpreting Eva Perón as a historical figure than I am in her as a cultural icon and the degree to which her body, her persona, and her social concerns can be of interest to a queer culture.

The attempt to define a feminist pornography for Latin America is inspired less by the desire to fill a gap in literary historiography than by the desire to engage a controversial issue: i.e., whether to even speak of feminine pornography is to make use of a disturbing oxymoron. However, the opposition to pornography and the attempt to relate it to male violence against women is typically an American concern. American writers on sexuality such as Pat Califia and Camille Paglia, both of whom endorse pornography as a form of sexual liberation and argue for its first-amendment protection, are arguably much more in concert with Latin American feminists than are writers such as Andrea Dworkin and Catherine MacKinnon. In Chapter 3 I make this possibly questionable assertion, while considering the defense made by Califia and Paglia for the visible display of sexuality and the deep imbrication of sexuality and human rights. The sort of social engineering to achieve a sex-safe environment championed by the antipornographers stands in sharp contrast to the strong tradition in most Latin American societies of the defense of the freedom of the body. This freedom is necessarily curtailed by the restrictions the antipornographers have in mind, which for many Latin Americans sound very much like the moral agenda of recent neofascist military dictatorships. Of specific interest here, however, will be how the focus on the body entailed by pornography may also include queer dimensions.

Jaime Hermosillo's film *Doña Herlinda y su hijo,* which I discuss in Chapter 4, has become something of a cult classic among gay American audiences. More about a feminine figure than about homoerotic sexuality in Mexico, it too raises serious questions about whether the accommodating mother of one of the protagonists is, in her concern for appearances, in the end reduplicating the rules of the patriarchy, or whether her collaborative efforts to create a privileged space for her son constitute a viable queering of the social text.

Chicano literature, especially that which is oriented toward male experiences, has been slow to accept queer perspectives, despite the impressive bibliography that now exists on Chicana lesbian sexuality. I argue in Chapter 5 that Chicano culture, as it struggles to address both its Hispanic and its Anglo components, exemplifies the phenomena of liminality. Sexuality is no exception, and even less so homoeroticism. Among the authors of interest in this regard, John Rechy exemplifies especially the marginations involved in Chicano

culture, including his own internal margination because of his self-identified sexual outlawry. Cherríe Moraga, the author of the stunningly provocative essay "Queer Aztlán: The Re-formation of Chicano Tribe" (1993), is notable for the ways in which she has attempted to create homologies around questions of sexual identity, cultural place, and language usage.

Exilio (1988), by the Cuban-American dramatist Matías Montes Huidobro—the topic of Chapter 6—raises other issues of homoerotic identity. Montes Huidobro, who has produced numerous literary works, most of them in the narrative and theater, has not been generally concerned with a gay-marked cultural production. Nevertheless, several of his plays address erotic issues in Cuban culture, and it is possible to read into these plays, perhaps even despite the author's conscious interests,[2] perspectives than can be labeled queer. In the case of *Exilio,* however, sexual identity is a marker for questions of political expediency and oppression in Castro's Cuba. This issue has been revisited with more positive results in Tomás Gutiérrez Alea's 1983 movie, *Fresa y chocolate,* which has done much to call attention to a changing sexual environment in Cuba. What is of interest, then, is how unanalyzed questions of sexuality can be used in an essentially heterosexist context as a metaphor for political interpretations.

Although Alejandra Pizarnik has been extensively identified with lesbian-marked writing in Argentina, my examination in Chapter 7 of the representation of the body in her poetry is not directly concerned with lesbian erotics.[3] Rather, I am interested in questioning the affiliations with surrealism that have been established for her poetry, affiliations which in my mind detract from the materiality of the body to the extent that they imply a separation from concrete sociohistorical contexts. An exploration of the materiality of the body in Pizarnik, furthermore, would seem to be absolutely crucial for a study of queer, and not just lesbian, erotics.

In Chapter 8, I take a different approach to an investigation of queer perspectives by examining the crisis of masculinity in Argentine fiction in the 1950s. During this period the outlines of compulsory heterosexuality in Argentina become even more clearly drawn in the context of the machismo represented by the figure of Juan Domingo Perón. In a sense this question is the contrary of the queer dimensions associated with the figure of Eva Perón and her gender-challenging personality, while at the same time it complements the hyperfemininity of her persona and her (largely unsuccessful) attempts to assimilate to the oligarchic matriarchy. Concomitantly, Evita served as a dream fulfillment for many Argentine women. By exam-

ining texts from differing and conflicting social vantage points—the high bourgeoisie occupied by Sylvina Bullrich, the militant left by David Viñas, the traditional oligarchy by Manuel Mujica Láinez—I wish to chart the distance between the general social ideology of compulsory heterosexuality (along with the privileges of the patriarchy) and the specific machismo of the Peronista regime on the one hand, and the interpretations of the breakdown of that ideology on the other. It is precisely the space that is created by this distance in which a queer reading of society is made possible—which is what characterizes, in a global fashion, the fiction of Mujica Láinez.