PREFACE

Of all of the acts of critical inquiry I have indulged myself in, this has been the most thoroughly exhausting. To attempt to pursue doggedly a topic that has no ontological status in most realms of literary criticism, and specifically much less so in the case of Latin American culture, which is generally considered to be even more taboo-circumscribed than American society, is to set oneself up for a heavy dose of frustration. The difficulty of identifying appropriate texts, setting parameters for which texts to examine, and establishing the dialogic relationship between them that critical analysis implies, makes the critic wonder whether he had embarked on a reasonable course of research.

Moreover, to talk about homosexuality in Western culture at the present moment is to venture into a minefield of issues, ideologies, and opinions. In an earlier day, it would have been quite adequate to highlight those texts that recognize the "problem" of homosexuality (a term with nineteenth-century origins in German clinical medicine, meant to be descriptively neutral). Yet the phenomenon of homosexuality may no longer be a problem (medical, moral, or otherwise); what has come to be regarded as the "problem" is the definition of homosexuality as a problem—or even the categorization of one complex of sexual behaviors, perceptions, and outlooks as a conceptually unified something called homosexuality.

There can, nevertheless, be little question that it is legitimate to identify certain works that view homosexuality as a problem; it is perhaps less valid to frame in a study those texts that promote (like so much of Manuel Puig's writing) the view that homosexuality is not a problem, but rather that social classifications of it (literary criticism included) are the problem. In this sense, the critical analysis of lesbian and gay writing does more to perpetuate the "problematization" encouraged

by homophobia than it does to promote the cause of an allegedly healthful sexual liberation. Yet only because the bulk of the writing examined in this study focuses on the abyss that continues to exist between liberation and actual sociocultural practice is it possible to claim the ideological validity of this investigation. From those texts that advance the "vampire" theory of homosexuality, through those that reinforce the image of a tragic blemish of nature and a tragic victimization by society, to the more recent ethos of assertive naturalization, the texts discussed in the following chapters assume with a variety of interpretive registers that there is something to write about called homosexuality.

As a consequence of the foregoing, I often had the sense, while composing this monograph, of engaging in something "dirty," not because of the topic itself, which surely large segments of our society continue to classify as such, but rather because it sustains the framing of one constellation of sexual activities when, perhaps, what is most called for is the de-emphasis of problematized erotic practices in favor of a farranging project involving the reeroticization of culture in all of the multiple dimensions such a process might imply. Nevertheless, criticism should be dirty work, if it is ever to deal with the real issues of human history and the social dynamics that disable the individual's quest for decency and dignity.

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