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Proliferation of Disease in Iberoamerican Fiction

Óscar Fernández, Portland State University

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PROLIFERATION OF DISEASE IN
IBEROAMERICAN FICTION

A Thesis in
Comparative Literature

by
Oscar Fernández

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The thesis of Oscar Fernández was reviewed and approved* by the following:

Djelal Kadir  
Edwin Erle Sparks Professor of  
Comparative Literature  
Thesis Adviser  
Chair of Committee

Aníbal González Pérez  
Edwin Erle Sparks Professor of Spanish

Thomas Beebee  
Professor of Comparative Literature and German

Javier Escudero  
Associate Professor of Spanish

Caroline D. Eckhardt  
Professor of Comparative Literature and English  
Head of the Department of Comparative Literature

*Signatures are on file with the Graduate School.
ABSTRACT

“Disease” has become an emergent metaphor in describing, policing, and regimenting sexual, racial, and political difference. This study of narrative and disease in the Americas reveals how dissident, sometimes queer, bodies come to be regarded as viral threats to the state, and how such a construction of illness comes to be resisted in AIDS narratives.

In moments of epidemiological crisis when governmental institutions enact states of emergency to counteract disease, regimens of biopower construct aberrant bodies as diseased and therefore as subject to state inspection, medical isolation, and criminalization. Reflecting characteristics of colonial and eighteenth-century narratives of an enervated New World, José Ricardo Chaves (Paisaje con tumbas pintadas en rosa, 1998, Costa Rica) depicts how AIDS in the Americas echoes colonial accounts of disease, race, and sexuality. With the emergence of AIDS, the Cuban government enacted states of emergency to contain and incarcerate its HIV-positive citizens. The literary manifestation of such detention wards is evident in works by Severo Sarduy (Pájaros de la playa, 1993, Cuba) and by Juan Goytisolo (Las virtudes del pájaro solitario, 1988, Spain).

In addition to those writers, who resist statist medical treatments and quarantines, this study examines how Reinaldo Arenas (El color del verano o Nuevo jardín de las delicias, 1990, Cuba) and Silviano Santiago (Stella Manhattan, 1985, Brazil) use religious iconography, especially localized in
homoerotic representations of saints, to challenge the mechanisms that create, maintain, and police the state. Furthermore, mystical adumbrations are evoked in Sarduy and in Goytisolo, who construct biomedical policing, approach medical protocols, and lastly, re-write invocations of the hereafter. Narratives such as these attempt to reify the sacred component of all life, but especially life that has been interpreted to be aberrant and diseased. Contemporary history and writing in the Americas both show that before bodies are excluded, quarantined, or exterminated, they are denaturalized as diseased, heretical, criminal, and dangerous to the state.
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Dedication

In memory of *abuela* Braulia.
Introduction

Museum Pathologies

Illness, in general, is not a good literary subject. [...] It is not the disease itself, but the effect it has on an individual's life that interests the writer. [...] In a similar way disease is used in a great many novels, either in the evolution of the plot or in order to characterize a given situation. 

—Henry Sigerist, Civilization and Disease (1943)

Disease narratives in the literatures of the Americas establish a trajectory for the emergence of disease and also for the states of emergency enacted to contain, eradicate, and construct diseased bodies as subjects of medicine and of the state. Among artists, critics, and epidemiologists, uneasy negotiations arise when chronicling the emergence of disease. Who gets to narrate how disease impacts culture? What kinds of texts become palpable in discerning the emergence of disease? Can works of fiction share the stage with medical testimonies on disease? At most, as Henry Sigerist points out in Civilization and Disease, illness was initially considered a tangential literary subject. In the very least, narrations of disease advanced plot lines or helped shape the persona of characters in novels. The seventeenth-century man with gout, for example, was characterized as the archetype for a bon vivant, and his disease was linked to psychosexual excesses involving food, womanizing, and even too much singing (Sigerist 187).

Though Sigerist is cautious about endorsing the study of disease as one possible pursuit in literary criticism, he posits the study of literature and of medicine as an endeavor that may provide some “interesting documents” in the future (194). In “Disease and Literature,” for instance, he confesses that though
the faculty at Johns Hopkins University purchased books narrating the presence and the effects of disease, they were rarely read, and therefore hardly informed their critical scholarship. He adds that “We feel, however, that some day they will make interesting documents. And this raises the question whether works of fiction may be used as sources of medical history” (194, my emphasis). Especially as infectious organisms continue to complicate international travel and transactions, and to affect global populations, the time-frame for disease continues to be in a critical now. Recent outbreaks of Ebola, SARS (Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome), and HIV/AIDS tragically dramatize the close rhizomatic connections between humans and other organisms. In A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism & Schizophrenia, Deleuze and Guattari had underscored these symbiotic processes, now benign, now malign—as in the case of Ebola, SARS, HIV/AIDS—as forming “a rhizome with our viruses, or rather, our viruses cause us to form a rhizome with other animals” (10).\(^2\)

Moreover, it is the “demos” (fr. Gr., “people”) that localizes the various permutations of infectious diseases.\(^3\) The rhizomatic connections between humans and infectious organisms can be manifested by a three-point constellation: the endemic, the epidemic, and the pandemic. Whereas endemic diseases only affect specific locales or peoples, epidemic infections take a prevalent disease among a people to inhabitants of other localities. The pandemic, being the most “vulgar” (fr. L., “common people”) of the three, affects whole continents, and can encompass the entire world. In 1993, for example, measles infected 45 million
worldwide, killing 1.2 million children. During the same year, the World Health Organization reported 600,000 new cases of leprosy. Though it is estimated that at least 20 million people die from infectious diseases each year, the vast majority of these deaths continue to occur in the so-called developing world (Asia, Africa, the Middle East, and Latin America).

The emergence of epidemic and pandemic diseases in the Americas coincided with transoceanic travel and a host of social, cultural, and economic exchanges resulting from European exploration and colonization. In the Americas, specifically, though other continents have shared a similar fate, the emergence of disease both as discourse and as epidemiological practice underscored, depending on time period and location, racial, sexual, and social differences. In the Caribbean, while reflecting on-going European and U.S. constructions of racial difference, disease came to embody the “black” African. Fearing miscegenation in the Caribbean, the black body was construed as riddled with disease and with sexual abnormalities. In *Subjects of Crisis: Race and Gender as Disease in Latin America*, Benigno Trigo remarks how this difference was “suggested by comparing the ‘black’ body of the former slave to both a metaphorical and a discrete disease, while the peasant body [presumably “white”] was compared to the innocent victim of disease. The construction of illness as metaphor for the ‘African race’ was gradual.” Though this metaphorical process may have been gradual, the relationship between using medical technologies and fomenting U.S. imperialism in Puerto Rico was almost immediate. Under the
military supervision of Dr. Bailey K. Ashford, a lieutenant in the U.S. Army, the 1898 invasion of Puerto Rico coincided with the birth of laboratory medicine on the island. Trigo notes, for example, how Ashford claimed to “have discovered the true cause of anemia: ‘Not climate, nor food, nor bad hygiene, nor malaria, nor anything of that sort, but a worm—an intestinal worm!’” (85-86). Though this “Puerto Rican” worm was merely a version of the Old World hookworm, Trigo points out how hygienists and doctors depicted the worm as a New World vampiric parasite “‘full of teeth and hooks’” (86). In keeping with the racial construction of disease, the hygienic and educational regimes surrounding the treatment of these “vampiric” parasites reflected not only racial dichotomies, but also helped maintain discrete segregation along racial lines: “If parasites were a metaphor for the ‘black’ body of the members of an ‘African race,’ the microscope helped to bring the ‘white’ body of the peasant closer than ever before to that dangerous ‘race’” (86-87). Hence, the threat of miscegenation between white peasants and black workers came to be policed by making the black body infectious and “vampiric.”

The process of constructing the Americas as a site of disease and of enervation, a process that has been part of Europe’s philosophical and scientific engagement with the Americas, provided a platform for the on-going colonization of the New World. Industrial and medical projects of the nineteenth and twentieth century employed America’s naturalized history of being a locus of disease and of enervation to further exploit—and police—natural and human resources.
*Proliferation of Disease in Iberoamerican Fiction* explores how “disease” becomes an emergent metaphor in describing, policing, and regimenting sexual, racial, and viral difference. Travel narratives, Enlightenment natural histories by Europeans and Americans, taxidermy, writing workshop literary anthologies, religious iconography, and contemporary AIDS novels form the constellation of sign posts for the study of viral narratives. Instead of narrating a whole or even a partial history of epidemiology in the Americas, *Proliferation of Disease* explores moments of epidemiological crisis when the state enacts states of emergency to counteract disease. Instead of pursuing one viral genealogy, *Proliferation of Disease* opts for a recurrence of disease metaphors, but especially those surrounding AIDS in the Americas and its European backdrops. Instead of a history of disease, *Proliferation of Disease* is concerned with the regimens of biopower, or with “games of biopower,” that construct aberrant bodies as diseased and therefore as subject to state inspection, isolation, medical quarantines, and at times, imprisonment. In this regard, *Proliferation of Disease* explores how dissident, sometimes queer, bodies come to be regarded as viral and vital threats to the state, and how such an internalization of illness comes to be resisted in AIDS narratives. In *History of Sexuality*, Michel Foucault had emphasized this link between madness, illness, and criminality:

> Not a history that would be concerned with what might be true in the fields of learning, but an analysis of the “games of truth,” the games of truth and error through which being is historically situated as experience: that is, as something that can and must be thought. *What are the games of truth by which man proposes to think his own nature when he perceives himself to*
be mad; when he considers himself to be ill; when he conceives of himself as living, speaking, laboring, being; when he judges and punishes himself as criminal?” (my emphasis).

Indeed, in exploring moments of encounter between the burgeoning European powers of 1492 and the Enlightenment scientific constructions of the Americas, for example, disease and sexuality serve as the foreground not only to the ontology of disease (the “nature” of disease, what its source may be, for example), but also to its epistemology (how the disease is constructed, made knowable, rendered dangerous depending on social, institutional, and economic factors). For instance, syphilis, during times of colonialism in the Americas and elsewhere in the world, became the prevailing medical and social symptom for cultural and sexual conquests.

During the eighteenth century, constructions of a diseased America were internalized to describe endemic aberrations in bodies coming from the New World. The visualization of America’s monstrosity came to be localized in ongoing descriptions of New World hermaphrodites. In addition to narrating the first sexual encounter between the Americas and Europe, chapter 1, “Potency and Enervation: Sexualized America,” argues how French philosophes Abbé Guillaume-Thomas Raynal (1713-1796), George-Louis Leclerc, Comte de Buffon (1707-1788), and Cornelius de Pauw (1739-1799) abused natural history to help establish a conceptual foundation of America as a site for disease, miasmas, and for endemic, and monstrous, hermaphroditic bodies. These “New World hermaphrodites” responded more to the vogue of aberrant museum visualizations
emanating from European clinics, hospitals, and especially from museums. Between 1775 and 1776, the Marquis de Sade, for example, was fascinated by the display of aberrant anatomies in the museum of the Palazzo Torregiano in Florence, which included wax corpses in various stages of decomposition. The museum became a site for the visualization and the verbalization of disease, as Foucault has reminded us in *The Birth of the Clinic.* In its display of aberrant anatomies, the European museum of the eighteenth century became a “scientific” tour and a fetishistic art exhibit. It is no wonder that when hermaphrodites were configured as endemic to the New World and especially to the Florida Keys, European *philosophes* reflected Old World concerns regarding miscegenation, gender, and “competing” genitalia. As Sander Gilman comments in *Sexuality: An Illustrated History,* the hermaphrodite became “the ultimate monster, doubling and connecting the genitalia [...] the monster of reference when speaking of the relationship between the clitoris and the penis” (200). Moreover, British surgeon William Cheselden (1688-1752), in publishing the illustrated *The Anatomy of the Human Body* (1713), dramatized the fear of the black body and of the perils of miscegenation. The end of this illustrated text shows a picture of a black hermaphrodite, only with the trunk spread open, and according to Gilman, “the senses, sexuality, and race are linked in this image. It is an image of the genitalia that signifies the ambiguity of all those categories that Cheselden takes as ‘real,’ sexual, and racial” (Gilman 213).
Serving as a counterpoint to European natural histories, chapter 1 also examines the role of American natural histories written by New World scholars. The work of Francisco Javier Clavijero (1731-1787), a Mexican Jesuit priest, challenges the construction of America as monstrous and as enervated. After Jesuits were expelled from Mexico in 1767, and while in Bologna, Clavijero began to compile *Historia antigua de Mexico* (Cesena, 1780). Like other European natural historians, Clavijero wrote his natural history on the Americas from the Old World. Unlike de Buffon or Raynal, though, Clavijero argued against the monstrous depiction of American flora, fauna, and natives of Mexico. In fact, in assessing the impact that his *Historia antigua de Mexico* would have, Clavijero offers his own museum of curiosities on and by Americans. Clavijero’s conceptual museum of curiosities challenges European displays of New World monstrosities: “[U]n museo no menos útil que curioso, en donde se recojan las estatuas antiguas [. . . ]; las pinturas mexicanas esparcidas por varias partes, y, sobre todo, los manuscritos, así los de los misioneros y otros antiguos españoles, como los de los mismos indios” (4; “[A] museum no less useful than curious, which brings together ancient statues [. . . ]; Mexican paintings scattered in various parts, and above all else, the manuscripts from missionaries and from other ancient Spanish men, and from the Indians themselves”).

Moreover, in chapter 5 of his *Historia antigua*, “Constitución física y moral de los mexicanos” (“Physical and moral constitution of Mexicans”), Clavijero posits monstrosity as endemic to the Old World, especially as Americans began to
travel to Europe and to bring back to the New World news about European metropoles. Clavijero narrates how compared to Mexico, the number of cripples seen in Europe was far greater: "Todos los españoles y criollos que en 1778 vinieron de México a Italia, quedaron y están aún admirados al observar en las ciudades de esta cultísima península un número tan grande de ciegos, jorobados, cojos, tullidos, etc." (193; "All the Spaniards and criollos that in 1778 came from Mexico to Italy remained, and continue to be, astounded when observing in cities of this most cultured peninsula the great number of blind men, hunchbacks, lame, cripples, etc.").

If monstrous bodies had been the operating metaphor up until the eighteenth century to designate difference, *Proliferation of Disease* reveals how diseased bodies, not monstrous ones, begin to amass racial, cultural, and sexual residues of culture, what Sigerist called the "general character and style" of disease: "At all times, however, certain diseases were in the foreground, and it is interesting to see that there is a certain relation between the prevailing diseases of a given period and their general character and style" (186, my emphasis). In the nineteenth and twentieth century, the "character" and "style" of disease was punctuated by a tropical thinking that encapsulated colonialism and tropical medicine. If the eighteenth century had described the body of dwellers of the tropics in the Americas and in Africa as exuding sexual monstrosities, the "tropicalization" of disease in the nineteenth and twentieth century marked a place, the tropics, as rendering entire native populations as endemically infectious.
The eighteenth century also saw an explosion of the visual representation of “otherness” with the popularity of wax museums, of surgery observation decks, and of illustrated anatomy books. To understand the bodies of the diseased, textual accounts were no longer valid. The body of the aberrant was taken asunder and scrutinized as spectacle. The nineteenth and twentieth centuries recuperated that medical gaze and localized it in the museum, and later in the clinic. Moreover, science took to the field, and germ theory forced scientists to travel to specific locales deemed in need of medical intervention. As Trigo had pointed out, these so-called “medical interventions” occurred contemporaneously with the programmatic imperialism of Anglo America and of Europe.

In *Proliferation of Disease*, the textual recurrence of disease thus shifts from colonial narratives of sexual exploitation to eighteenth-and nineteenth-century “scientific” discourses on disease, and especially those occurring in the Isthmus of Panama. After the late eighteenth century and continuing on to the twentieth century, an explosion of medical regimes occurred paralleled only by armed forces and by an imperial ethos across the West. In *Epidemics and History: Disease, Power, and Imperialism*, Sheldon Watts remarks on the conflation of imperial and of epidemiological underpinnings in the scramble for China, Africa, and the Americas:

The transitional years (1880s-1930s) that led to the full medicalization of the West (lay people’s acceptance of medical doctors as their first line of defense against disease) coincided with the great age of European and North American imperialism; the two phenomena were not unrelated. Coming out of the scramble for Africa, the scramble for China, and the
conquest of Spain’s old empire in the Caribbean and Pacific by the USA was the new discipline of Tropical Medicine. From its very onset tropical medicine was thus an "instrument of empire" intended to enable the white "races" to live in, or at the very least to exploit, all areas of the globe. Coincidentally, those sites for intervention also came to be markets for colonizing nations. In *Globalizing Aids*, Cindy Patton argues how "the late-nineteenth-century version of germ theory made sense because it was consistent with the political logic of invasion and occupation." It is not accidental that industrialization in the New World, in the construction of the Panama Canal, for instance, coincided with the rise of tropical medicine. The deployment of tropical medicine was propelled by a colonial urge to render the colonizing body as superior to the native work force: "Tropical medicine thus grew out of and supported the idea that a First World body is the proper gauge of the health. [. . .] Tropical medicine points to a presupposed map and hierarchy of bodies" (Patton 36). Particularly, as explained in chapter 1, "Potency and Enervation: Sexualized America," the construction of the Panama Canal tracks an early twentieth-century example of transnationalism in the Americas and the simultaneous advancing of technology and the associating of disease with racial, sexual, and class particularities in order to guarantee the completion of the Canal.

Chapter 1 examines the etymological and epidemiological history of the isthmus, a history of imprisoning and of exterminating aberrant bodies. A telling example is the killing of isthmian natives when the Spaniard explorer, Vasco Nuñez de Balboa (c. 1475-1517), encountered local chiefs "infected with most
abhominable and unnatural lechery.” Balboa commanded his men to give them as “pray to his dogges.” Connecting the flow of enervating discourses surrounding the Isthmus of Panama with political ones, the chapter also examines the brief hopes of Simón Bolívar (1783-1830) in remapping the isthmus as a possible center for America’s world order. After Bolívar’s death, and during the canal’s construction, though, the canal reflected its contractor’s racial and sexual prejudices against migrant workers from the Americas (and the world). In chapter 2, *Luna verde* (1951) by Panamanian Joaquin Beleño (1922-1988) and *Tumbas con tumbas pintadas color de rosa* (1998) by Costa Rican José Ricardo Chavez (b. 1958) illustrate how disease in Central America echoes colonial accounts of disease, race, and sexuality present in the history of the isthmus.

*Proliferation of Disease* brings together a variety of texts and of disciplines surrounding disease. The fictional trajectory of medical histories is not disjointed from literary narratives, as evidenced by the composition of natural histories from travel narrative fictions collected by de Buffon and Raynal. For the Americas, an interconnected three-tier approach is helpful in understanding the trajectory of America’s proliferation of disease metaphors, practices, and of regimens. Each tier should be viewed as vectors connecting with other agents. The trajectory of disease in the Americas, and its impact in culture, can be categorized along the vectors of a triad: the *unnatural*; the *supernatural*; and the *denaturalized*. None of these vectors has a specific direction, and the order just given is not necessarily consequential. Also, each vector can contaminate other vectors, especially since
one of the biological meanings for vector involves small organisms, called "vectors," that transmit pathogenic viruses (OED).

The construction of the Americas, both sexually and epidemiologically, was initially rendered as **unnatural**, and as not conforming to an ostensibly stable European nature. In other words, America was the unnatural place, a site for abnormality (as in the deemed hypersexuality of raped victims in Michele de Cuneo's account) or for monstrosity (as in the currency of New World Floridian hermaphrodites). Contemporary texts dealing with the afterlife of AIDS treat the disease in its **supernatural** effects. *Proliferation of Disease* approaches the supernatural in two modes: in chapter 4, texts such as *El color del verano o nuevo jardín de las delicias* (1990) by Cuban Reinaldo Arenas (1943-1990), and *Stella Manhattan* (1985) by Brazilian Silviano Santiago (b. 1936) approach the supernatural, at least initially, by employing religious iconography to contest not just the church, but regimens of power erected by the Cuban and the Brazilian state. Chapter 4, "Queer Iconography," analyzes a variety of Saint Sebastian sightings in colonial America and in contemporary web sites. "Sightings" of plagued saints and of religious iconography provide secular narratives for homosexual subversion: the homosexual body becomes a weapon, an inflammatory text, and even an "Other" deemed dangerous to the state and to nation building. Disease, now veiled in religious and homoerotic figures, becomes a way of challenging oppressing regimes.
As Gilman notes in *Sexuality: An Illustrated History*, the representation of religious iconography was closely tied to the technology that also allowed perverse models to be depicted in eighteenth-century museums. The transition from depicting waxed moldings of saint's relics to displaying anatomical lessons of a vagina or erect penis only depended on technique and on the secularization of the eighteenth century:

The tradition of wax molding, a technique that created (for the eighteenth-century eye) an absolutely 'real' image, was applied to the creation of anatomical images. Prior to this use, this technique had been employed to create realistic relics in the form of mimetic human shapes for the bones of saints and martyrs. The movement of the wax cast from the realm of religious art to the world of anatomical study is an important one, as it parallels the general secularization of the eighteenth century (Gilman 184).

The vectors connecting the secularization of the supernatural, the mystical representation of disease, and the resistance to anatomical reductions of the body actually parallel the creation of wax museums during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

The transference of religious iconography to anatomical models also found a place in the Americas. In *Memoirs from the Provinces* (1850, *Memorias de provincia*), Domingo Sarmiento considers vice and immorality in the Americas as following the same mode of contagion as any communicable disease: "I firmly believe in the transmission of moral aptitude through the organs; I believe in the injection of one man's spirit into another by means of the word and through example. [...] Perverse men rule by infecting the atmosphere with the vapors of their soul; their vices and defects reproduce themselves. [...] and the moral of the
civilized" (cited in Trigo 92). Despite associating physical health with morality, religious iconographies, as the homoerotic paintings of Saint Sebastian revealed to Renaissance denizens, also intersected the spectrum of pornography, or at least, of erotic mystic rapture. Nineteenth-century museums now exhibited a close relationship between wax sculptures and homoerotic imagery. In 1858, for example, Nathaniel Hawthorne, visiting the Palazzo Torregiano in Florence, known for its display of anatomical dissections (the Marquis de Sade had also visited it in 1775), remarked on the close relationship between religious and erotic iconographies. After his visit, Hawthorne especially remembered his reaction to a wax sculpture of an ephebe located in the oratory: “And here, within a glass case, there is the representation of an undraped little boy in wax, very prettily modelled, and holding up a heart that looks like a bit of red sealing-wax. If I found him anywhere else, I should have taken him for Cupid; but being in an oratory, I presume him to have some religious signification.”

In the Americas, the erotic representation of a saint is apparent in Arena’s Verano, and as chapter 4, “Queer Iconography,” will argue, the figure of the erect Saint Sebastian points out the threat to the state by the homosexual phallus. In Verano, the depiction of erections throughout the novel attempts to unsettle the power dynamics operating within the Cuban state against homosexual dissidents. Interestingly enough, Gilman’s study of eighteenth-century penis wax molds also concludes that “the missing body and the head serve as the normal context for the penis; once they are removed, the penis becomes pathological, taking on a life of
its own, becoming erect, and therefore liable for infection and disease” (Gilman 195).

Finally, one possible vector that poses other sets of problems is how the diseased body comes to be understood as supernatural. Chapter 5, “Pájaros and Tombs: AIDS takes Flight,” explores a supernatural mode which stresses the corruptibility of the AIDS body and how AIDS is regimented by bio-medical practices to subsume the individuality of PLWAs (People Living with AIDS). This supernatural vector, then, intersects eschatological discourses on the “end of things,” especially since Severo Sarduy’s and Juan Goytisolo’s approach to the apotheosis of the AIDS body depends on their texts’ engagement to the scatological dimension of having AIDS. While Sarduy’s Pájaros de la playa is excessively interested in the putridness of the body and its treatments, Goytisolo’s Las virtudes is resigned to glossing the corruptibility of the body for the apotheosis of the soul of the diseased. This possible second home is problematic because it tends to forget the reality of disease, especially since metaphors, natural or supernatural, of any kind tend to subsume individuality. In “Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius,” Jorge Luis Borges remarks how metaphors, what he calls “espejos” (“mirrors”), are monstrous, “Descubrimos (en la alta noche ese descubrimiento es inevitable) que los espejos tienen algo monstruoso” (13; “We discovered [very late at night such a discovery is inevitable] that there is something monstrous about mirrors” [68]).15 Though disease does indeed alter the health of an individual, and in this definition denaturalizes the very nature of an individual’s biological and
social make-up, the denaturalization of the diseased body also renders the
individual only as subject and object of medical scrutiny. Taking a cue from
colleagues in biochemistry, to denaturalize a protein, for example, means applying
heat so that its original properties are lost. To denaturalize a diseased body means
that if enough medical scrutiny is applied, the life of an individual is lost. A
telling example on the loss of individuality, and the conflation of disease and its
deemed criminality, is the incarceration of AIDS patients in Cuba during the late
1980s. Chapter 3, “Bared Life of AIDS,” examines the quarantine of Cubans with
AIDS and the adoption of writing workshops as part of their medical treatment.
The chapter also examines how the onset of AIDS in the early 1980s amalgamated
three perceivably distinct institutions (the clinic, the prison, and the concentration
camp) into one overarching material and metaphoric site, the AIDS medical ward,
as presented by accounts written on and by Cubans who were part of the AIDS
quarantine, and from novels such as Sarduy’s *Pájaros de la playa* and Goytisolo’s
*Las virtudes del pájaro solitario*.

Chapter 5, “Pájaros and Tombs: AIDS Takes Flight,” argues that one
manner of resisting the medical denaturalization that AIDS brings about is to reify
the power of the viral word. For Sarduy, writing is not only affected by AIDS, but
itself becomes symptomatic of the virus:

Nuestra escritura, por ejemplo, antes equilibrada y uniforme, en la que el
pensamiento se encadenaba sin esfuerzo, legible como la partitura en el
fraseo de un gran pianista, hoy se desvía de la línea, tiembla, exagera
puntos, acentos, banderines y tildes (134).
Our writing, for example, balanced and uniform before, one in which thinking created links without effort, legible like the phrasing in the sheet music of a great pianist, today deviates from the straight line, trembles, exaggerates points, stresses, diacritics and accents.]

Sarduy’s use of the homosexual letter was evidenced earlier in his literary work. In *La simulación* (1983), for example, the letter is linked to transvestism and the homosexual. In Sarduy’s work before *Pájaros*, and before revelation of his own HIV-positive status, the homosexual letter functioned as a camouflage. In “The Masked Letter,” for example, José Quiroga establishes a trajectory for Sarduy’s occluding words:

Culture is decoy, it is the central element in the exhibitionist camouflage that letters deploy. [...] This mode of camouflage illuminates the space of correspondence: openness in the act, and a certain reserve in the letter. The letter becomes the mode of camouflage as well as the exhibit of the mode. The letter camouflages something not quite localized—the point is not to name it as “homosexuality” and thus give it to a concrete referent, but rather to understand its own circuitousness as pleasure. The homosexual letter is the most controlled of objects (40).

As *Proliferation of Disease* argues throughout, a similar “camouflage effect” occurs when authors writing on AIDS keep HIV/AIDS unnamed in their work. Chapter 2, “Disease in *Luna verde* by Joaquín Beleño and in *Paisaje con tumbas pintadas en rosa* by José Ricardo Chaves,” especially examines the unnaming of AIDS in the literature of the Americas as responding to Anglo heteronormative perceptions of sexuality that inevitably exclude, despite good intentions, the spectrum of sexualities performed in the Americas. The final chapter reveals how the spread of the virus is compared with the act of writing itself, a process I am defining as “escrito-viral” (“viral-script”). The *escrito-viral* process entails the
"contamination" of meaning of one word by another. *Escrito-viral* writing is a specter knowable in its absence and its presence, reminiscent of Sarduy's own formulations concerning baroque writing and especially its poetry: "en la poesía barroca, las palabras que designan los materiales canónicos de la orfebrería no funcionan como signos plenos, sino, en un sistema formalizado de oposiciones binarias—la antítesis es la figura central del barroco—, como ‘marcadores’ afectados de un signo positivo o negativo, es decir, como puras valencias”¹⁷ (22; “in baroque poetry, the words that denote canonical materials of gold smithing do not function as plain signs, but as a formalized system of binary oppositions—the antithesis is the central figure of the baroque—like ‘markers’ affected by a positive or negative sign, in other words, as pure valencies,” emphasis in original). The positive and negative valency behind AIDS writing can be parceled by two possible configurations for "valency."

In "La palabra ‘Barroco’," Sarduy employs the chemical definition for "valencia" ("valency"), meaning the “capacity of certain elements to combine with or displace a greater or less number of hydrogen (or other) atoms” (OED). In other words, valency expresses the varying interconnections between the nucleus, positively charged, and its revolving electrons, negatively charged. The relationship between the positively-charged core and its negatively-charged electron periphery, though seemingly binary, is actually supported by degrees of relationships that may not be shared in the same degree by companion electrons surrounding the same nucleus. In this way, the valency behind *escrito-viral*
writing depends on the varying interconnections between AIDS and its surrounding interlocutors. When authors, such as Sarduy, Arenas, and Goytisolo, join in the writing of AIDS, each combination of stories carries its own valency, its own specified relationship with AIDS.

The emergence of AIDS, and the imminence of death that it continues to bring to the world (as of 2002, 42 million people are estimated to have HIV/AIDS) hastens a vital return to the second configuration for “valency,” from the Latin, “valentia,” vigor, and from “val,” to be well or strong. Spanish, for example, retains this expression with the command, “¡Sea valiente!” (“Be valiant!”). Writing, especially when authors have the illness, has the potential to give them the vigor needed to chronicle their varying testimonies surrounding AIDS. Their *escrito-viral* writing ultimately becomes the inevitable manifestation of their death. *Proliferation of Disease in Iberoamerican Fiction* presents a cautionary interjection against the secularization and medicalization of PLWAs. Instead, in its itinerant reading of disease narratives, *Proliferation of Disease* emphasizes the importance of exalting the sacred component of all life. No life should be reduced to its mere biological makeup or catalogued only according to its viral state. Contemporary history continues to show that before bodies are excluded, left behind, and exterminated, they are denaturalized as diseased, heretical, criminal, and dangerous to the state.
NOTES


Chapter 1

Potency and Enervation: Sexualized America

Under certain conditions, a virus can connect to germ cells and transmit itself as the cellular gene of a complex species; moreover, it can take flight, move into the cells of an entirely different species, but not without bringing with it "genetic information" from the first host.

—Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, "Rhizome," A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism & Schizophrenia

The quest and conquest of the Americas has been marked by sexual and epidemiological intercourses, utterances, and cross-pollinations. In order to provide a context for contemporary emergences of disease and its containments, chapter 1 considers how fifteenth-century discovery and travel narratives, scientific illuminations during the eighteenth century, and the construction of the Panama Canal positioned the Americas as a site of disease. Deleuze and Guattari's concept of the rhizome, especially in their formulation of the viral load as retaining, multiplying and maintaining information from host cells, becomes helpful in constructing an epidemiological framework that facilitates the examination of sexualized and diseased discourses as functions of colonization. Fifteenth-century narratives of quest and sexual conquest, along with eighteenth-century philosophical and sexualized discourses on the Americas, from a century that manifested an explosion of such sexualized narratives on the Americas by the likes of Abbé Guillaume-Thomas Raynal, Georges-Louis Leclerc, Comte de Buffon, and Francisco Clavijero, reveal the extent to which founding discourses on American geography and anthropology were intertwined with sexuality and
epidemiology. The trajectory of the European imaginary founded the Americas as a fertile "viral rhizome," connecting flora, fauna, and humans with disease and with enervation. As theorized in A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism & Schizophrenia, the "viral rhizome" confounds genetic genealogies and shows how even in biology, viral schemas are heterogeneous. Deleuze and Guattari rely on research by Benveniste and Todaro, for example, to express how a type C virus can be linked to the DNA of a baboon or of a cat. "We form a rhizome with our viruses, or rather," and Deleuze and Guattari read the "virus" as connecting seemingly disparate bodies or discourses, "our viruses cause us to form a rhizome with other animals" (10). Disease, whether expressed in travel narratives or in medical discourses, seems to share a heterogeneous connection among a variety of bodies and of textualities.

In this chapter, natural histories and travel narratives imagined by European travelers and scientists helped construct the zoology and biology of the Americas as contagious and enervated. After all, medical and philosophical texts by eighteenth-century French philosophes were disseminated around the globe to the extent that, as Gilbert Chinard remarks in "Eighteenth-Century Theories on America as a Human Habitat," American philosophers came to develop a distrust of "French theorizing and French philosophizing which is manifest in Adams, Jefferson, and even Washington." Moreover, in Spanish America, the historical account written by the Jesuit Francisco Clavijero, Historia antigua de Mexico, openly challenged findings by de Buffon and Raynal. Medical conflicts between
the Americas and Europe more recently involved, for instance, questions surrounding the discovery of AIDS. In the 1980s, French and American institutes fought for the rights to receive credit in deciphering the DNA structure of the HIV virus. In *French DNA: Trouble in Purgatory*, Paul Rabinow comments on the range of social, medical, and ethical discourses that permeate the examination of disease, specifically DNA of AIDS, and his commentary on the heterogeneous points of contact surrounding AIDS also suggests that illness is constructed on the crossroads of biology, sociology, politics, and cultural practices: "French DNA is about a heterogeneous zone where genomics, bioethics, patients groups, venture capital, nations, and the state meet. Such a common place, a practiced site, eruptive and changing yet strangely slack, is filled with talk of good and evil, illness and health, and spirit and flesh. It is full of diverse machines and bodies, parts and wholes, exchanges and relays."³

Not unlike contemporary scientific practices, eighteenth-century science was also constructed by "diverse machines and bodies," and by European confrontations and exchanges with American geographies. In *Natural History, General and Particular* (1791), de Buffon remarks on the genetic linkages between European and New World flora and fauna. Even though he cannot explain how animals would come to move between both landmasses, he still argues that they share a common origin:

But several of our animals which endure cold, and multiply in the northern climates, are found in North America: And, though they differ considerably, we are obliged to acknowledge them to be the same, and to
believe that they formerly passed from the one Continent to the other by lands, which are still unknown, or rather have long since been swallowed up by the ocean. This proof, drawn from Natural History, is a stronger contiguity of these two Continents, than all the conjectures of speculative geographers.  

The natural histories and travel narratives examined in this chapter function as these transatlantic “exchanges and relays,” to borrow Rabinow’s designations, and help record the sexualized and epidemiological constructions of America. Rabinow’s description of the epidemiological “common place” in constructing DNA becomes illuminating especially because in the scientific and cultural discourse of the eighteenth century, the Americas became the common place for disease and infection. In “Corneille de Pauw, and the Controversy over his Recherches Philosophiques sur les Américains,” Henry Ward Church summarizes de Pauw’s designation of the Americas as a locus where disease commonly affects flora, fauna, and inhabitants: “Domestic animals imported from Europe have either degenerated or failed to reproduce, with the single exception of the hog. [...] Dogs lose their voice and cease to bark. Camels could not reproduce in the new world. A degeneration is noted in transplanted trees, and all plants go through a similar process. [...] So frightful is this disease [syphilis] in America that in some places infection comes merely from breathing the pestilential air.”

Moreover, in designating the Americas as a common place for disease and enervation, de Pauw also constructs the Americas as an allegory for physical inferiority: Europe can speak of that other place (allegory as speaking from another place) that is marked by degeneration and by infection. A short quote
provides the general tone of de Pauw’s reading of American potency. Americans are like “une race d’hommes qui ont tous le défauts des enfants, comme une espèce dégénérée du genre humain lâche, impuissante, sans force physique, sans vigueur, sans élévation dans l’esprit [... ]” (xiii; “a race of men who have all the shortcomings of children, like a degenerate species of the human genre, coward, impotent, without physical strength, without vigor, without elevation of the spirit [... ]”6).

In writing a sexualized and a feminized America, natural histories by Raynal, de Pauw, and de Buffon construct a New World that can never measure up (in size, hair, or vigor) to Europe’s own decorum and seeming virility. Useful in trying to conceptualize the New World and its flora, fauna, and inhabitants, the sexualized discourses on America by Raynal, de Pauw, de Buffon, and by the Italian Michele de Cuneo and by the Spaniard Vasco Nuñez de Balboa, can be read as constituting a sexualized triad that ultimately sustains quest and sexual conquest ideologies.7 Since America became Europe’s prosopopoeia for a submissive female continental subject, narratives of sexual commingling in the New World became portents for ensuing conquest and for colonization. Generally, the sexualized triad could be rendered in the following manner: a) the coital as quest (and the first documented coital exchange between the Americas and Europe resulted in a rape); b) the vocative as conquest (“the who goes there?”) for Europeans in the Americas, as when Cuneo first describes naked Caribbean women, inevitably leads to possession); c) and the evocative as request (in
evoking the Americas, by way of travel narratives and scientific discourse, writing becomes a legitimizing force of conquest.\textsuperscript{8}

Raynal, de Pauw, and de Buffon made it their vocation to construct the Americas based on travel and scientific narratives (travel narratives functioning as the literary “who goes there?”). Since none of them ever walked in the New World, their sexualized discourse and natural histories were based on evocations of facts, as allegorical evocations of that remote place of pestilence. Eighteenth-century travel evocations of facts did not stop with the feminized construction of the Americas. The development of scientific discourses on race and on evolution coincided with a keen interest in travel accounts. In fact, travel narratives became the primary source material for “scientific” knowledge on New World and African races, and on America’s enervation. The “theory of American degeneration,” as coined by Durand Echeverría in “Roubaud and the Theory of American Degeneration,” further summarizes the Enlightenment’s three-tier categorization of America’s enervation: a) America’s geography, flora, fauna is endemically weak; b) Contact with America will make colonizers impotent and brutish; and c) America is contagious and likely to spread its ailments to the European continent.\textsuperscript{9}

In juxtaposition, Harry Bernstein notes how American Enlightenment, with figures such as Thomas Jefferson, Benjamin Franklin, and the Mexican Jesuit Francisco Clavijero, considered the Old World as the site for enervation, since “democracy, science, and learning were based upon man’s progress in the New World, compared with European decline.”\textsuperscript{10} Reacting against the vocation of
constructing natural histories blindly, in his prologue to *Historia antigua de Mexico*, Clavijero shows his discontentment when natural histories are written without due critical examination, and without the exploration of American lands, its flora and fauna: "[..] para lo poco que he dicho de historia natural, estudié las obras de Plinio, [..] Buffon, [..] y otros naturalistas, no contentándome ni con lo que había visto por mis propios ojos, ni con lo que se me había informado por hombres inteligentes y prácticos en aquellos países" (7; "[..] the little I have said about natural history I learned from works by Pliny, [..] Buffon, [..] and other naturalists, though not satisfied by what I had seen with my very own eyes, nor with what had been written by intelligent and practical men from those countries").

Additionally, Clavijero highlights in chapter 17, "Carácter de los Mexicanos y demás naciones de Anáhuac" ("On the character of Mexicans and other Anahuac nations"), how European physical decline actually contrasts with the native vigor characterizing native Mexicans, except in time of epidemics:

"Están libres de muchas enfermedades que son frecuentes en los españoles [..] Encanecen y encalvecen más tarde que los españoles, y no son muy raros entre ellos los que arriban a la edad centenaria" (138; "They are free from many of the illnesses that are frequent among the Spanish [..] They grow grey and bald much later than the Spanish, and it is not very rare that among them [referring to native Mexican populations] some reach to be centenarians"). Finally, in the fourth dissertation ("Cuarta disertación"), Clavijero is careful to demonstrate the
importance of using American source materials to examine the flora, fauna, and the peoples of the New World. In contrast to Europe's evocation of facts, Clavijero relies fundamentally on scholarship by Americans: "Para hacer este catálogo, [. . .] he tornado informes por escrito de personas doctas, exactas y prácticas de diversos países de América, [. . .]" (188; "To make this catalogue, [. . .] I have taken reports written by erudite, exact, and practical peoples from a variety of countries in the Americas"). In contrast to European fantastic evocations of facts and of reported sexual deviances, Clavijero's natural history is intentionally grounded by discourses, by first-hand travel narratives, and by facts borrowed from American scholars.

Therefore, to make sense of the sexualized discourse by Raynal, de Pauw, and de Buffon, the lascivious descriptions of American sexualities in their narratives should be considered as symptomatic of Europe's own will to sex and to power. In writing an account describing his second voyage to the New World, Michele de Cuneo, Christopher Columbus' childhood friend and travel companion, reveals that the history of mastery of the New World can be traced to the first documented bellicose, sexual, and racial exploits in the Caribbean: after Columbus' first skirmish at the bay of Santa Cruz (now known as St. Croix and part of the modern-day cluster of the U.S. Virgin islands), one of first recorded sexual contacts between European travelers and native women ended in a rape.
Narratives of Sexual Quest and Conquest

Cuneo traveled with Christopher Columbus during his second voyage to the Americas. Cuneo would return from Cuba in 1494. While traveling in La Niña, he was able to provide a different (and lascivious) record of Columbus’ second voyage, and even show support to his childhood friend, especially since the second voyage had been more carefully organized, both in terms of personnel and of vision. That Columbus’s second voyage had become a conquering enterprise is clear. Samuel Eliot Morison, for example, points out how in the second voyage the “personnel was more carefully selected than on the First Voyage” to suit the needs of a conquering ethos (55). As part of the second voyage’s vision of conquest, representatives from military, medical, and religious circles were selected. It is not surprising that during the second voyage, native and European cultures would violently clash for the first time. Among the sailors, the following professions stand out: Francisco de Peñalosa, a servant of queen Isabella and commander of the armed forces; Diego Alvarez Chanca, a doctor from Sevilla, who also provided an account of the second voyage; Benedictine Fray Buil, in charge of the conversion of souls; and Fray Ramón Pane, of Saint Jerome’s order, who later chronicled Indian cultural practices (Morison 55-57). If quest guided the first voyage, the employment and deployment of soldiers, doctors, and clerics signaled a new order: the military, physical, and spiritual conquest of the New World.
Shortly after their arrival on November 14, 1493, Columbus and his men, including Cuneo, were part of a skirmish near the entrance to the modern Christiansted Harbor, highlighting the beginning of bellicose contacts between natives and the Spanish during the second voyage, roughly during the years 1493 and 1496. The spoils from this skirmish included mostly native Arawak men. Accounts by both Cuneo and Chanca describe the violence of the Spanish against the Arawaks. In his account of the skirmish, Chanca, for example, describes how one Indian, after having his entrails cut open, is thrown overboard and swims away. It is during his second capturing that this same Indian is finally killed by arrows, but only after being tied and thrown overboard for a second time (Morison 83-85).

Though this bellicose scene also figures in Columbus’ own account of the second voyage, the rape ensuing from this battle only remained in accounts by Cuneo. Columbus may have omitted this account from his diary because he feared reprisals from Queen Isabella especially because all native populations would become subjects of the crown. The details of the rape not only would offend Her Majesty’s sensibilities, but also would show Columbus’ brutality and disregard for the crown’s power over its new subjects. Moreover, it is possible that Columbus kept this account out of his second voyage diary to hide the excessive sexual proclivities of Cuneo and of his men. The second voyage had been marked by wars with native groups, but these wars did little to guarantee that the incipient colonizing projects of the second voyage would prevail. Upon his return to
Hispaniola, Columbus found the establishment at La natividad deserted and its Spanish settlers dead.¹²

In some fundamental ways, the search for gold and for trading routes to the East, along with lust, marked the conquest of the Americas and helped map its regions not only according to flora and fauna, but also to a carnal geography sexualized by Columbus' crew and chronicled in their travel writings. For example, while at the fortress of La natividad, each sailor took five concubines. At the same time, the sexual engagements with native bodies that marked the second voyage guaranteed that such hypersexuality would eventually result in the spread of disease and of infection, especially if Spanish sailors enjoyed sex with numerous captive Indians. Though it is not certain, on August 1493 or 1494, there is the “distinct possibility that Indian captives […] brought syphilis from America to Europe” (Flint 213). The appearance of syphilis in Europe was first recorded among the army of Charles VIII soon after his army invaded Italy in 1494; 1494 both marked the invasion of Italy and the appearance of syphilis in the Old World.

Evocations of Old World Erotic and Racial Discourses

In his description of New World female sexuality, Cuneo not only evokes European patriarchal sexualities, but also helps commence a discourse on race, and specifically, on the “whitening” of natives, and on the privileging of “white” skin that continues to dominate contemporary America’s racial relations. It is important to note that running parallel to the discourse of disease and of America’s enervation, constructing desirable racial categories became a prime objective in
the colonial foundations of the Americas. In Writing Violence on the Northern Frontier, José Rabasa notes that whether or not concepts like race or postcoloniality are recent phenomena, race as a discourse did exist in eighteenth-century America: "Because race did not exist before the eighteenth century does not mean that the categories and arguments that justified establishing hierarchies, subjugation, and the extermination of people based on physical (and not exclusively cultural) traits did not constitute forms of racism." 13 Cúneo’s travel narrative shows how race was also part of fifteenth-century colonial foundations.

Fifteenth-century travelers would come to see “white” natives as desirable, and would begin to parcel New World geography according to the preponderance of white skin among indigenous inhabitants. Morison recounts the sexual and other exploits of Columbus’ crew as they explored the islands surrounding modern-day Cuba: “Elsewhere in Cuba there was not much contact with the natives, but friendly relations were established in Hispaniola in December, where the wenches where whiter and more beautiful than those of Cuba” (Morison 206, my emphasis). In writing the history of mastery of the New World, Columbus and Cúneo could not easily disentangle sexual exploits from racial categorizations. Cúneo, both in practice and in narrative, provided a testimony of his sexual conquests. Shortly after November 14, 1493, Cúneo recounts his infamous sexual exploit after the skirmish near Christiansted Harbor. Though Bartolomé de las Casas and Francisco Clavijero would write testimonies on behalf of the victims of colonization, Cúneo is the first to write a testimony on the relations between
Europeans and native men, but especially women. Cuneo’s testimony, though ostensibly one of “witnessing,” actually enacts an instance and narrative of mastery, of bondage, and of victimization. Cuneo narrates how Columbus gave him a young native woman, and that when she resisted his sexual advances, she responded by scratching him, “me arano de tal modo con sus uñas que yo no hubiese querido entonces haber comenzado” (“she scratched me with her fingernails in such a way that I wished I had not started”). After beating her with a belt, which resulted in more howls from the native woman, Cuneo is able to convince her to have sex. After the rape, Cuneo states that the young native woman was well-versed in sexual practices to the extent that he equates her with a prostitute: “[...] os puedo decir que de hecho parecía amaestrada en la escuela de rameras” (Gil and Varela 242; “I can tell you that in fact she seemed to have been schooled in a school of prostitutes”).

Cuneo’s assessment of the rape is especially provocative, and evocative of Old World conceptualization of non-normative sexual practices. Only after reaching “a mutual agreement”—and the Indian woman has no choices since they all would inevitably lead to Cuneo’s sexual possession—Cuneo declares that the native woman seemed to “have been schooled in a school of prostitutes.” Though eighteenth-century accounts would characterize the Indians of the Americas as indifferent to sex, and Chinard points out how Buffon and de Pauw were instrumental in propagating this idea of America’s “frigidity” along with depictions of native physical weakness and male hairlessness (Chinard 36), the
earliest account of American sexuality actually supports the notion that native bodies were hyper-sexualized and seemed to have been “schooled” to perform transgressive sexual acts.

In 1516, twenty-three years after Cuneo’s second voyage, and while exploring the Isthmus of Panama, Balboa also encounters “abominable” sexual acts by native populations. As described by Peter Martyr’s Decades (1555 trans.), Balboa meets a house of chiefs engaged in sodomy of “most abominable and unnatural lechery”: “[Balboa] founde the house of this kynge infected with most abhominable and unnatural lechery. For he founde the kynges brother and many other younge men in womens apparel, smoth & effeminately decked, which by the report of such dwelte abowte hym, he abused with preposterous venus. Of these abowte the number of fortie, he commaunded to bee gyven for a pray to his dogges.” Balboa reads such deemed transgression as criminal and as subject to punishment. He orders his men to shoot all the Quarequa natives, and to have their bodies mauled by his dogs. Balboa is struck not only by the “unnatural lechery,” but also by the performance of drag, by the effeminacy of its men, and by their hairlessness. Peter Martyr describes all these unorthodox conditions as contagious and as manifesting symptoms of disease, “[Balboa] founde the house of this kynge infected with most abhominable and unnatural lechery” (my emphasis).

Though Cuneo and Balboa indeed anticipate eighteenth-century practices of power dynamics, sodomy, and other illicit pleasures as entertained by the Marquis
de Sade, their exploration accounts inscribe the New World as a *locus* where European fantasies (in this case, violently erotic and sexual) can be evoked and practiced, especially since the natives are “naturally” inclined to such lascivious excesses. European notions on the prevalence of sodomy in the New World continued with the work of de Pauw in the eighteenth century. Clavijero, for instance, vehemently reacts against de Pauw’s sentiment that “la sodomía estaba en gran boga en las Islas, el Perú, el reino de México, y en todo el Nuevo Continente” (cited in Clavijero 234; “sodomy was in great vogue on the islands [of the Caribbean], in Peru, in the kingdom of Mexico, and throughout the New Continent”). He then points out how that such excesses were also prevalent among various kingdoms of Asia and major foundational civilizations of the Old World: “[. . .] la sodomía estuvo en gran boga entre algunos antiguos pueblos de Asia, y fue muy común entre los griegos y los romanos” (236; “sodomy was in great vogue among ancient Asian civilizations, and was very common among the Greek and the Romans”).

Furthermore, Cuneo’s fascination with mapping a carnal geography for the Americas becomes exemplified in how Cuneo’s name becomes disseminated in Caribbean geography. During the second voyage, Columbus names the Cape of San Miguel after this childhood friend (Morison 158), in the southwest of Hispaniola, later renamed as the *Cabo del Tiburón* (Cape of the Shark). Equally striking is Cuneo’s own reaction to a naming project that became a sign that his religious and penal mastery now would continue after an appellative inscription.
In *Bodies that Matter: on the Discursive Limits of “Sex,”* and on a related topic on the process of naming that results in naturalizing sexual identity, Judith Butler points out that naming and interpellation establish and reinforce boundaries and norms; in fact, “naming is at once the setting of a boundary, and also the repeated inculcation of a norm.”17 When Cuneo takes possession of the island, he first names various “modes and forms” convenient for the possession of the land: “Y bajo los modos y formas convenientes tomé posesión de ella” (Gil and Varela 256; “and using convenient modes and forms, I took possession of her”). After inscribing himself in the geography of the Americas, Cuneo’s first efforts are to tame and manage nature, “arranqué yerba y corté árboles” (256; “pulled weeds and cut down trees”). Secondly, the civilizing project must include making religion an endemic part of the American landscape. Cuneo describes this process not as “bringing” the cross, but as planting the cross, “plante la cruz” (256; “planted the cross”). The cross, and the institutional power it evokes of the Church, is now conceived as an organic foundational component of the American landscape.

Thirdly, in addition to manipulating landscape and faith, Cuneo also brings to the island an emergent punitive system, “y también la horca, y en nombre de Dios la bauticé con el nombre de la Bella Saonese” (256; “and also the hangman’s noose, and in the name of God I baptized it as the Beautiful Saonese”). *La horca,* the hangman’s noose, becomes an early example of capital punishment in the Americas. Cuneo’s form of emergent colonization, one that employs both the
cross and the hanging tree, is actually a salient feature of Spanish colonization. In
the sixteenth century, for example, churches and prisons were erected almost
simultaneously throughout the Americas or, as Rabasa notes, "[i]ndeed, the
garrison was an important part of the 'frontier' conquest in California, New
Mexico, and Texas, and unlike garrisons on the U.S. frontier, there was a church
centrally located in each. Colonialism, at least in the version practiced by
Spaniards in the Americas, was not just about dominating people by the force of
arms but about transforming Indians into able bodies and obedient subjects" (19-
20).

Though his sexualized discourse on fifteenth-century America would
remain in the periphery of accounts about the New World (Columbus’ account of
the second voyage, for instance, lacks Cuneo’s graphic sexualized descriptions),
Cuneo’s testimony prefigures how issues of race and sexuality (and later of
disease) would be deployed to further the conquering ethos of Europe, especially
as flora, fauna, and inhabitants became conceptual and economic commodities for
the Old World. The specter of sexuality in exchanges between the New World
and the Old became evident during the Enlightenment, and in de Pauw and de
Buffon’s scientific enterprise to prove the enervation of American zoology and
biology. In attempting to maintain Europe’s hegemony over its enterprise in the
Americas, sexuality (and its offshoots virility, potency, and enervation) would
again be employed to further colonize the Americas.
Sexualized Evocations: De Pauw and de Buffon

In order to make sense of the sexualized discourse by Raynal, de Pauw, and de Buffon, elements of aberrant sexualities and of the fantastic in their narratives should be read as symptoms of power, political and social unrest, and of European perceptions clashing with American realities. Enlightenment evocations of the Americas as the home of "natural man," for example, would come to haunt the mother colonies. The "home of natural man, natural rights and sovereignty," identified as North American (and this cardinal point is important to note: North America may usurp European powers), would actually threaten European political and social stability. The logic works like this: If America is the "home of natural man" and of natural rights, America would then become the rightful beacon of democratic exchanges. America's attempt to translate biblical texts into native languages would become a threat to Europe, especially since it would begin to translate its reality according to American vernacular and not according to imperial languages, such as Spanish and English.

A suitable example is the attempt by North American Indians to translate the Bible into native tongues: "Madrid authorities attempted to exclude such thoughts from the colonies. Two works were banned: one, the Bible in Indian language, composed by John Eliot, prohibited in 1710; the other, a so-called Apocalypse of the supposed Iroquois chieftain, Chiokahaw, printed at Philadelphia in 1776" (Bernstein 64). The body of the colonized is not allowed to speak its own mind or translate narratives into their own vernacular. During the eighteenth
century, translation had become a one-sided enterprise, and translations of American biology and zoology could only emanate from European metropoles. Though de Pauw and de Buffon, for example, had never traveled to the Americas, their scientific translations (and reductions) of American botany and zoology became the dominant, if not encyclopedic, entry for understanding the Americas. After all, de Pauw had been asked to write the entry on “America” for the Supplément de l’Encyclopédie published in 1776 (Chinard 36).

In his Historia antigua de Mexico, Clavijero, De Pauw’s contemporary, attempted to reverse the direction of transatlantic translation. At the end of his fifth dissertation (“Quinta disertación”), Clavijero suggests that Americans writing a natural history about Europe from the New World would find similar forms of monstrosities that philosophes chronicled in their New World natural histories: “Siguiendo el mismo método de Paw, recogería lo escrito sobre países estériles del Mundo Antiguo, [. . .] cuadrúpedos irregulares, pequeños, defectuosos y pusiláñimes, gentes degeneradas, de color feo, estatura irregular, facciones deformes, mala compleción, ánimo apocado, ingenio obtuso e índole cruel” (238; “Following the same method used by de Pauw, [the American author] would collect all that has been written about the sterile countries of the Old World, [. . .] irregular quadrupeds, small, defective and weak, degenerate peoples with hideous color, with irregular stature, deformed features, bad complexion, of weak spirit, and with obtuse ingenuity and cruel nature”).
More recently, American scholarly reactions to de Pauw resurface in discourses on race, on the quincentenary of the discovery, and even in patriotic newsletters such as *Monticello*, published by the Thomas Jefferson Foundation. In his 1992 essay, “Afro-American Perspectives of the Christopher Columbus Quincentenary,” Franklin Knight brings attention to how 1492 affected “Afro-Americans, the native Americans, the Asians and all those who in 1492 found themselves outside the narrow consciousness of Columbus and his Europeans.”

In the same essay, Knight connects 1492 discoveries with narratives of encounter in the eighteenth century. For Knight, De Pauw becomes a central figure in understanding how the eighteenth century created meaning of and on the Americas. De Pauw, for example, blamed the discovery of the Americas for everything that was wrong in Europe. De Pauw blamed the Americas for Europe’s civil and political strife, economic inequality, epidemic diseases, and even social unrest (Knight 2). Soon after de Pauw’s proclamation on America’s degeneration of the Old Continent, critics from both sides of the Atlantic began to challenge this view of America as an infectious archetype.

In exploring the Americas by way of travel narratives, for he also never visited the New World, Raynal also shows a similar unease when Europe comes into contact with the Americas. In his *A Philosophical and Political History of the Settlements and Trade of the Europeans in the East and West Indies* (1798), Raynal argues that the exploration of the New World did lead to changes, and in fact in the fields of politics, economics, and nation-formation, “no event has been
so interesting to mankind in general and to the inhabitants of Europe in particular, as the discovery of the New World and the passage to India by the Cape of Good Hope. It gave rise to a revolution in the commerce, and in the power of nations; as well as in the manners, industry, and government of the whole world” (Knight 2).

Raynal was perhaps prophetic in his assessment that America, and its discovery, would revolutionize the globe’s industry and international governance: “Everything was changed, and must change again. But it is a question whether the revolutions that are past, or those which must, hereinafter take place, have been, or can be, of any utility to the human race. Will they ever add to the tranquility, the happiness, and the pleasures of mankind? Can they improve our present state, or do they only change it?” (Knight 2). Adam Smith was a bit more positive in his analysis of the discovery of the New World. In *Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* (1776), Smith states that “the discovery of America and that of a passage to the East Indies by the Cape of Good Hope are the two most important events recorded in the history of mankind” (Knight 2).

Unlike de Buffon, Raynal’s contribution to the theories of degeneracy in the Americas at least implicated Europeans since they, as well, would be affected by diminished virility and size. While in his *Historie Naturelle* (1749) de Buffon limited himself to flora, fauna, and native cultures, Raynal argued that “the race of whites transplanted from Europe” (Chinard 43) also suffered from enervation as they came into contact with the New World. Raynal’s other contribution to the theories of America’s degeneration is in his discussion of effeminacy when the
New World adopts Old World cultural practices. Raynal especially sees this in the plantation culture of the South: “They always liked to display the greatest luxury before the English navigators, whom business brought to their plantations. They always gave themselves up to the effeminacy, and to that negligence, so common in countries where slavery is established” (as quoted by Stark 29, my emphasis). The “effeminate” conditioning of the south responds to Raynal’s idea that the best possible order is one in which liberty takes place over equality (22). A slave society, for Raynal, would then not even have the precepts of liberty, since it depends on the liberty of some and the enslavement of others. In Raynal’s ideal world view, though all should have liberty, not everyone will have equality.

In his *Recherches philosophiques sur les Américains* (1770), De Pauw, like Raynal, also constructs a feminization discourse on the Americas, but the localization he expresses is not within plantation culture, but within plants themselves whose habitat created genetic mutations that affected humans, flora, and fauna. Because of the extreme heat, according to De Pauw, Floridians are known for having both sexual organs. In the fourth part of the second volume, Section III, “Des Hermaphrodites de la Floride” (“The Hermaphrodites of Florida”), he declares, for example, that extreme heat leads to “bizarre configurations” and “double organs”: “la chaleur du climat qui relâche toutes les fibres, peut facilement entraîner des configurations bizarres qui semblent annoncer réellement une confusion de sexes, & de doubles organes” (de Pauw 86; “[because] the heat of the climate that relaxes all fibers, it is easy to entertain
bizarre configurations that really seemingly announce a confusion of sexes and
double organs”). It is remarkable that Florida, and by extension the Caribbean,
already by the eighteenth century had come to signify a commonplace where
aberrant sexualities and diseases were present, echoing Cuneo’s own sexual
experience in the Caribbean three hundred years earlier. In Historia antigua de
Mexico, Clavijero had already tried to combat de Pauw’s assertion that venereal
diseases solely came from the New World, and suggested, instead, that epidemics
were best mapped in a triangulation of Caribbean, European, and African
occurrences (Ward 203). Clavijero’s triangulation, a Bermuda triangle on
epidemics, would become prophetic, since late twentieth-century medical
discourses on AIDS also tried to situate the birth of AIDS in the Caribbean and in
Africa.

Taxidermy and Enervation

In counteracting Europe’s construction of an enervated and diseased
America, taxidermy became one of many instruments of resistance against
European fantastical creations of America’s flora and fauna and against Europe’s
conceptualization of the Americas as diseased and enervated. Eighteenth-century
displays of science (taxidermy being one such display) re-imagined the Americas
as a land where large quadrupeds also signified a robust flora and fauna. The
“beef,” or more aptly the “moose,” between Jefferson and de Pauw’s mentor, de
Buffon, brought the two head to head in 1786. The spring 2002 issue of
Monticello surveys the role of diplomacy, taxidermy, and French/U.S. relations
between Jefferson and de Buffon before the French revolution. Though in *Notes on the State of Virginia* (published in 1854) Jefferson had tried to counteract the degeneracy theories of de Buffon by compiling charts and comparing animal sizes between both continents, Jefferson ultimately employed taxidermy to prove his overall thesis, namely, that the fauna of the Americas was not smaller in size and in number, and quite the contrary, that in stature and population it rivaled Europe’s. While residing in Paris as U.S. Minister of Commerce, Jefferson wrote to John Sullivan of New Hampshire on Jan. 7, 1786 to directly send him the “‘skin, the skeleton, and the horns of the Moose, the Caribou, or Elk … but most especially those of the moose’” (Wilson 1). In the same letter, Jefferson also describes the manner in which the animal should be represented: “To leave the hoof on, to leave the bones of the legs and of the thighs if possible in the skin, and to leave also the bones of the head in the skin with the horns on, so that by sewing up the neck and belly of the skin we should have the true form and size of the animal” (Wilson 1). In describing the manner in which Sullivan needs to “dress” the animal, Jefferson is aware that French naturalism of the Americas has only been based on European illustrations and discourses. With this specific mail-ordered moose, Jefferson hopes to deploy endemic animal bodies to counteract degeneracy theories.

It is not certain whether Jefferson’s transatlantic moose had the desired effect. The moose was never exhibited, and it is not known if de Buffon saw it. The moose arrived in 1787 and was sent to the King’s Garden, where de Buffon
was superintendent, with a note from Jefferson apologizing for the amount of hair missing. Not only was de Buffon sick when the moose arrived, but the French revolution would soon break out in 1789. In a letter back to New Hampshire, Jefferson shared his disappointment with Sullivan since the animal did not seem imposing for him, specially since the stuffed beast had suffered loss of hair in the face: "They were all in good enough condition except that a good deal of the hair of the Moose had fallen off" (Wilson 2).

Jefferson’s moose is an example of the degree of instrumentality by which the Old World constructed the New, and the manner in which endemic taxidermy served as a visual medium by which to counteract degeneracy theories. In order to change European theories governing taxonomies of flora, fauna, and of homo sapiens, American scholars, such as Jefferson (and Clavijero before him), needed to provide American natural histories to counter European “scientific studies,” and to bring flora and fauna specimens which showcased the stature of American nature.

The Isthmus and Disease

After the eighteenth century, notions of America’s epidemiology and the preponderance of enervating miasmas in the Isthmus of Central America continued to harken back to a trajectory already established by narratives of disease emanating from Enlightenment constructions by de Buffon and de Pauw. Echoing the colonial expeditions in the Isthmus of Panama and the subsequent construction of the Panama Canal, America’s deemed enervation continued to be
promulgated and propagated. In fact, eighteenth-century natural history finds a specific focus in the Isthmus of Panama. Disease narratives and aberrant sexual discourses play themselves out in the history, the etymology, the epidemiology of the isthmus, and in the construction of the Panama Canal. As mentioned before, while on an expedition across the Isthmus of Panama, Balboa recounts killing a group of forty royal members of a king’s household for “most abominable and unnatural lechery” (Biddick 125). Balboa’s emergent colonization of the Isthmus of Panama is symptomatic of how discourses of disease were interpolated with ongoing descriptions of the Americas as enervated, hairless, less virile, and as monstrous. In the case of Balboa, as highlighted earlier, the monstrosity he sees in the isthmus is one marked by aberrant sexuality.

According to Peter Martyr, though, in addition to the deemed crime of sodomy, Balboa was disgusted by the Quarequas’ outward appearance and what he considered to be effeminate postures, especially since their bodies were hairless (“smoth”) and dressed in drag (“& effeminately decked”): “For he founde the kynges brother and many other younge men in womens apparel, smoth & effeminately decked” (Goldberg 180). The colonial construction of the Isthmus of Panama, like travel and scientific narratives discussed earlier, shows how Europe’s encounter with New World reality continued to be conditioned by discourses on America’s enervation, sexuality, and a native Indian hairlessness and performance of “drag” that was read with criminal and homicidal intents. The Isthmus of Panama, which would later be described by Simón Bolívar as the “centro del
globo" ("center of the globe"), initially had been conceptualized as a habitat where aberrant religious and sexual practices were endemic to the elite of the New World: the men mauled by Balboa’s dogs were Quarequa chiefs. Indeed, disease and sodomy became points of origin for accounts about the New World. As Goldberg points out in chapter three of *Sodometries*, "‘They are all sodomites’: The New World," the extermination of the forty Quarequa Indians established Balboa’s power over the isthmus, and legitimated Spanish violence against the Indian since “the body of sodomite takes on the status of an origin, serving as the cause and justification for what was done to the Indians” (184). In contrast to Balboa’s maleficent reading of Panama and its inhabitants, perhaps influenced by the Church and the Inquisition’s witchcraft manual of aberrant bodies in *Malleus maleficarum* (1486), Bolívar redefined it as a site for the world’s congress.

With the “Congress of Panama” letter, Bolívar became one of the first advocates for a federation in the newly independent nations of Latin America, and a supporter for centralizing those new powers in the Isthmus of Panama. At the time of its writing, Bolívar had just been named Supreme Commander by the Congress of Peru, and José Antonio Sucre, his lieutenant, was in the midst of freeing Guayaquil and bringing political harmony to Ecuador. The letter summarizes Bolívar’s faith in a united New World, one that “would consist of independent nations, bound together by a common set of laws which would govern their foreign relations and afford them a right to survival through a general and permanent congress.” Bolívar’s Congress, though unsuccessful, stands as a
historical “forerunner of the Organization of American States, the League of Nations, and the United Nations” (Fitzgerald 74). Bolívar first mentions the Isthmus of Panama, though less enthusiastically, in the famous “Letter to a Gentleman of Jamaica” ("Carta de Jamaica," Kingston, Jamaica, 6 Sept. 1815). In it, he describes the Americas as suffering from a lack of a central power:

Supongamos que fuese el Istmo de Panamá punto céntrico para todos los extremos de este vasto continente ¿no continuarían estos en la languidez, y aún en el desorden actual? Para que un solo gobierno dé vida, ánime, ponga en acción todos los resortes de la prosperidad pública, corrija, ilustre y perfeccione al Nuevo Mundo sería necesario que tuviese las facultades de un Dios, y cuando menos las luces y virtudes de todos los hombres (51).

[Let us assume it [the parent country] were to be the Isthmus of Panama, the most central point of this vast continent. Would not all parts continue in their lethargy and even in the present disorder? For a single government to infuse life into the New World; to put into use all the resources for public prosperity; to improve, educate, and perfect the New World, that government would have to possess the authority of a god, much less the knowledge and virtues of mankind (38).]

The hopes Bolívar had for the political centrality of the isthmus in the New World began to wane, especially as Ferdinand VII had been restored to power. Bolívar was also exiled, and forced to flee to Jamaica and then to Haiti (27). The important role that the isthmus would play in the world arena, though, would ultimately not follow Bolívar’s political hopes for the isthmus.

Instead, the centrality of the isthmus would come from the construction of the Panama Canal. Business and navigation interests would come to shape the future of the isthmus. Bolívar’s vision of the Isthmus of Panama prefigures future transatlantic connections, and in the nineteenth century, Bolívar’s tenuous hope for
the construction of the isthmus came to be realized in the construction of the Panama Canal. The construction of the Panama Canal (1870-1914) became an early twentieth-century example of transnationalism in Latin America, of the simultaneous spread of technology and of disease along intersections of race, sexuality and capitalism, and of capitalism’s colonialist program to use the eradication of disease and miasmas to further guarantee the completion of the Panama Canal. For example, before beginning to re-design French existing work on the canal, American contractors decided to clean city gutters, to fight off malaria and yellow fever, and to encourage a civil war in Colombia which led to the founding of the Panamanian nation.

The Isthmus and Global Markets

Instead of proposing a new time line for demarcating the emergence of globalization in Latin America, Europe’s commerce with the Americas points out that in its emergence the New World was already transnational. Even with the advent of industrialization and transnationalism, European conceptualization of the Americas had more in common with the Enlightenment’s figurations of an enervated America, as generated by French philosophes such as de Buffon, Raynal, and de Pauw. In *The Philosophy of History*, Hegel supports discourses on America’s enervation as generated earlier by French philosophes: “America has always shown itself physically powerless, and still shows itself so.” Moreover, the discourse of American lack of physical stature, virility, and strength also finds a place in Hegel’s assessment of Native American bodies: “For the aborigines,
after the landing of the Europeans in America, gradually vanished at the breath of European activity. [...] The inferiority of these individuals in all respects, even in regard to size, is very manifest” (81). For the Americas, lack of stature also amounted to a lack of a place in Hegel’s designations of history. For Hegel, the Americas lacked geography and a time in history. America was deemed a “no-place.” To reach this assessment, Hegel differentiates between historical and philosophical senses of the present to describe America: whereas philosophy is only interested in “what is and what is eternally,” history is only interested in “what has been and must be.” As the “land of the future,” then, America has “no history” and whatever history it may have is rooted in the Old World:

> It is for America to abandon the ground on which hitherto the History of the World has developed itself. What *has* taken place in the New World up to the present time is only an echo of the Old World—the expression of a foreign Life; and as Land of the Future, it has no interest for us here, for, as regards *History*, our concern must be with that which has been and that which is. In regard to *Philosophy*, on the other hand, we have to do with that which (strictly speaking) is neither past nor future, but with that which *is*, which has an eternal existence—with Reason; and this is quite sufficient to occupy us (87, italics in original).25

Not surprisingly, Hegel’s reading of the Americas is different from Bolívar’s. For Bolívar, the *omphalos* of the world resided in the Isthmus of Panama, and this center would shape how America would come to change the Old World. In framing the Isthmus of Panama as a possible capital for the world—and in the “Congreso de Panamá” letter Bolívar had hailed the isthmus as the chosen capital “for this grand design” (Fitzgerald 74-77)—Bolívar prophetically announces the globalization of the Americas and its future influence on culture
and on politics. With the construction of the Panama Canal, Bolívar’s isthmus did come to shape transoceanic travel and therefore to globalize commerce between Europe and the Pacific Rim. The anecdotal and literary records on the construction of the canal, though, also point out that as the isthmus became a site for future commerce, this trajectory was mediated by intersecting past colonial histories of disease and of itinerant, and aberrant bodies.

Isthmus and Disease

The etymology and epidemiology of the Isthmus of Panama dramatize many of the discourses surrounding America’s enervation initially introduced by eighteenth-century European *philosophes*. The very etymology of “Panama” retains a sense of plurality and evokes a meeting place for a multitude of colonizing hosts. David McCullough points out that Panama is derived from the “Cueva Indian word [for] a place where many fishes are taken.” Historically, as well, the area came to experience a variety of colonizing hosts that included Spain (from the sixteenth century to 1821), Gran Colombia (1821), Province of New Granada (1830), and finally the U.S. (in 1903 Panama became independent from Colombia after the support, or for some, the blatant intrusion, of U.S. naval forces outside the Atlantic shores of Colombia and Panama, which pressured Colombia to grant independence to Panama). Moreover, another standard etymology and definition for Panama (in juxtaposition to the 1848 couture definition, as in wearing a “Panama hat”) was connected to disease. An 1850 entry by J.L. Tyson in *Diary of Physician in*
California recalls how the “so-called Panama fever rarely occurs, unless previous disease has wasted the powers” and by 1890, in the midst of the canal’s construction, Billing’s *Natural Medicine Dictionary* (vol. 2) defines the word “Panama” as synonymous to “Panama fever. Sometimes malarial and sometimes yellow fever” (this usage would continue until the early 1940s).28 At the turn of the century, therefore, Panama had become a free-floating synecdoche standing for pecuniary gains (as in “Gold Fever”), for a variety of colonizing hosts, and ultimately for disease. Panama and its isthmus became associated with malaria and yellow fever.

Due to the high traffic of gold and riches across its territory, for example, Panama and its isthmus came to be known in 1519 as the *Castilla de Oro* (Frederick 4). It was the gold, or the promise of transporting riches, that continued to place the Isthmus of Panama as a desired piece of realty during colonial times, and especially during the nineteenth century. This sixteenth-century “Castile of Gold” would once again recover its “golden” place on the world map as entrepreneurs from the Eastern U.S. rushed to take part in the California “Gold Fever” at the end of the 1840s. Though Rhonda Frederick describes the many factors leading to the canal’s construction, she reaches one conclusion: “Many events contributed to the desire for quick passage across the isthmus, but none more pressing than the 1849 discovery of gold in California” (13). The gold rush of 1849 came to be understood as a malady, as a gold fever, and it was this fever that catapulted the isthmus once again onto the world map. The etymologies for
the isthmus described above ("gold," Panama as a name for a nation and as synonymous with malaria) will be revisited as the actual canal is constructed by French, and later by U.S. forces. By the end of the nineteenth century, the epidemiological underpinnings of the isthmus will also be revisited with a variety of racial and prejudicial permutations.

By the beginning of the twentieth century, the Canal Zone, site of construction where mostly immigrants would be employed, the specter of "gold" would again surface in the isthmus. The difference then was that "gold" reflected the emergent racism and capitalism of the Canal Zone. If disease was again mentioned in the literary and historical archives surrounding the construction of the Panama Canal, it was no longer mentioned as merely endemic to the area, but as a condition for industrialization and an excuse for separating ailing day workers (mostly black Caribbean immigrants) from their white, and better paid, bosses.

Soon after the California Gold Rush of 1849, the rhetoric surrounding the development of the Panama Canal changed. The isthmus was no longer viewed just as medium to access the Western longitudes of the American/U.S. landmass. Instead, the isthmus would additionally encompass north and south latitudes and thus allow for global connections. Even the name of the first contractor for the canal reflected the globalizing discourse surrounding the construction of the canal: the first French contractor was not only designated as "interoceanic" but also "universal." With his *Compagnie Universelle du Canal Interocéanique*, Ferdinand de Lesseps would manage the construction of a sea-level canal from
1881 to 1888. At the heels of de Lesseps, President Roosevelt summarized the new globality of the Isthmus of Panama as coinciding with the manifest (and global) destiny of the U.S.: “first, last and always . . . the vital—the indispensable—path to a global destiny for the United States of America” (250, McCullough’s emphasis).\textsuperscript{29} The French were less nationalistic in their architectural engagement, and promoted their enterprise (lasting from 1881-1894) as “something valuable to the world” (8).

What the French brought to the Panama Canal was their flair for using international past engineering triumphs to guarantee success in the Americas. The main engineer, de Lesseps, was riding high on his successful promotion of the Suez Canal (1854/1859-1869) that united Africa and the Middle East and he “sought similar success—for himself and France—in Central America” (15).\textsuperscript{30} He supported a Suez style sea-level canal though it was known that a lock-type canal would be more economical and easier to construct in Central America (15). Moreover, French engineers were too eager to insert Old World technologies without closely studying New World environs. The results were obvious when the French discovered that sea-level architecture, though successful in Egypt’s Suez Canal, would not agree with Panama’s swamps and meandering causeways. When U.S. engineers took over French construction, they returned to the lock-type blueprints, and completed the canal as a lock-type causeway.
The salient feature behind the construction of the canal was not only the rhetoric of internationalism, but also the global make-up of its labor force. While technologies came from French and U.S. engineers, workers came from all over the world. From 1850 to 1881, Caribbean workers had been employed in the construction of the Panama railroad, but soon the French realized that more workers were needed, especially since Jamaican laborers were few and "nomadic" in their work ethic. Ultimately, workers from China, Europe, and India were recruited when the Compagnie Universelle was no longer happy with the 'nomadic' nature of Jamaican laborers. This tactic backfired, however, as the relatively small number of Asian and European laborers were practically wiped out by suicide and disease (Frederick 16). By the time the canal was finished, a total of ninety-seven countries represented the labor force in the canal. Regardless of the work force's international demographics, racism and xenophobia were not any less prevalent: it is important to note that the majority of menial jobs were nevertheless delegated to unskilled pick-and-shovel black workers first from Barbados, and later from Jamaica (McCullough 471-72). Black workers were at the front lines, where they were more susceptible to landsides and especially to exposure to deadly reptiles and malaria/yellow fever mosquitoes.

Panama Canal Fevers

Though internationally the isthmus came to be regarded as "one of the most unhealthy places on earth, particularly [in] the coastal areas" (Frederick 14, n. 22), French and U.S. contractors continued to be indifferent to the epidemiological
health of workers. Even though U.S. contractors had medical knowledge of the existence of the malaria-carrying mosquito, not even a medical doctor was placed on the U.S.-funded Isthmian Canal Commission's staff (I.C.C.): "Once the immediate goal of securing rights to build the Panama Canal was achieved, the I.C.C. considered the canal an engineering rather than a medical problem: [...] the presence on the commission of a physician or of someone experienced in sanitation had not been deemed essential, so none had been named" (McCullough 407). Though many attributed the failure of the French to build a canal to their disregard of sanitation and of vaccination for workers, the I.C.C. also initially maintained the notion that epidemiology was not an important factor in the successful completion of the Panama Canal (Frederick 29). U.S. and French contractors' indifference to worker health points out the ambivalent connection which capitalism has when it encounters disease, and when its financial success depends on the humane negotiation between capital and health.

U.S. and French contractors seem to consider their own economic enterprise as immune to disease. Even if workers do suffer from malaria and yellow fever, capitalism as a process remains free from contagion. In "Querying Globalization," feminist critics Katherine Gibson and Julie Graham remark on this very same condition of capitalism's relationship to representations of disease in times of discourses on globalization, especially when capitalism itself can be read as one of many infectious diseases:
It is perhaps not surprising that capitalism is represented as a body that invades and infects, but is not itself susceptible to invasion or infection. [...] The locus and agent of universalizing intercourse is "the market," which continually seeks new arenas/bodies in which to establish a medium, or circuitry, through which contamination by capitalism may flow. Globalization discourse highlights the one-way nature of this contamination and the virtual impossibility of immunity to infection. But markets/circuits cannot control what or who flows through them. The market can, in fact, communicate many diseases, only one of which is capitalist development.\footnote{32}

In the contractor's approach to disease, the Panama Canal, like Gibson and Graham's analysis of the "market," also strived to remain immune from infection, but the canal/market would eventually help transport disease to surrounding cities of the Panama Canal. The canal itself generated disease and became an embodiment of one of its predicaments: how to fight off fevers in all living quarters of the Canal's surrounding areas.

The contractor's indifference to basic health conditions extended beyond the Canal Zone to include the urban periphery, locales where most black Caribbean workers lived. Cities, like Colon and Panama City, did not have "proper sewage systems, paved streets, or sidewalks; in addition, available apartments were often crowded and overpriced" (Frederick 20). It is not surprising, then, that death rates among blacks continued to increase. During the French phase of construction of the canal, the mortality rate for black workers peaked at 71 per 1000 in 1885, with a slight decline in 1888 (44 per 1000 employees). The French attitude toward disease was in keeping with an epidemiological \textit{laissez-faire} since "high mortality among workers was not considered a problem because replacement labor could easily be recruited from the
Caribbean” (27). Racially, the mortality divide was also segregated: between 1906-07, the death rate per 1000 employees was 16 for whites and three times the rate for blacks, roughly 46 per 1000 (Frederick 21). The mortality rate among blacks did decrease between 1907-1908 from 46 to 20 per 1000 thanks to a newly appointed Chief Sanitary Officer for the I.C.C., William C. Gorgas, who “took steps to eliminate yellow fever and malaria in Panamá. Hired after he successfully controlled yellow fever in Cuba, Gorgas was responsible for coordinating efforts to locate and eliminate mosquito-breeding areas” (22). The control of pestilence, as both examples first in Cuba and then in Panama show, is closely tied to programs of invasion. Both imperialism and epidemiology become partners in regimenting and in bringing a new world order in the Americas.

Chapter 2, “Disease in Luna verde by Joaquín Beleño and in Paisaje con tumbas pintadas en rosa by José Ricardo Chaves,” will demonstrate, in both the creation of the Panama Canal and novels emanating from the isthmus, how disease was used to monitor discourses of power based on race, class, and sexual difference. The presence of disease, as well as European imaginings of America’s diseased and aberrant bodies, as in de Pauw’s hermaphrodites, resurfaced again in the literary record surrounding the history of the canal and of the isthmus, and became symptomatic of social unrest and of conflict in the isthmus. In the eighteenth century, Europe’s attempt to be the authorial voice for America reveals more about Europe than it does about American physical realities. In writing and illustrating American natural histories, Europe’s construction of New World
zoology and biology harks to a fiction on monstrosity arising from enervating habitat and disease. It seems that Europe's dwindling time and place in history could only be salvaged by guaranteeing that in comparison to Europe's waning metropoles, the American colonies suffered from a confluence of enervated, hybrid, and ultimately monstrous bodies.
NOTES


6 French spelling has been normalized, in “Discours Préliminaire,” part of Cornelius de Pauw’s *Recherches philosophiques sur les Américains, ou mémoires intéressants pour servir a l’histoire de l’espèce humaine. Par Mr. De P***. Avec une dissertation sur l’Amérique & les Américains, par Don Pernety* (London, 1770) xiii, imprint by *The Eighteenth Century Research Publications* (Rochester:
University of Rochester Library). All future citations of de Pauw are from this edition.


8 I take these designations for primal cultural encounters between Europe and the New World from the formative lexicon offered by Professor Djelal Kadir in his seminar, “Worlding America,” Comparative Literature, The Pennsylvania State University, Fall 2002. See <http://complit.la.psu.edu/faculty/kadir/Worlding.html> for seminar syllabus.


14 Cuneo’s account of the rape is detailed in a letter addressed to Jerónimo Annari, an Italian nobleman, and edited by Jual Gil and Consuelo Varela, in *Cartas de particulares a Colón y Relaciones coetáneas* (Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 1984) 242. Original source of the letter can be found in *Raccolta di Documenti e Studi pubblicati dalla R. Commissione Colombiana*, bk. III, ch. ii (Roma 1892-94). All citations, though, are taken from Gil and Varela. All translations of Cuneo are mine.

15 Translation has not been normalized. Cited in Jonathan Goldberg’s *Sodometries: Renaissance Texts, Modern Sexualities* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1992) 180, from Peter Martyr’s *Decades* (1555). Citation also in Kathleen Biddick’s *The Shock of Medievalism* (Durham: Duke UP, 1998) 125. In the same chapter, “The Devil’s Anal Eye: Inquisitorial Optics and Ethnographic Authority,” Biddick also examines an illustration of Balboa’s expedition in Panama rendered by Theodore de Brye’s *America* (1594), and concludes how native bodies were interpreted as demonic, and in being confused with witches, as
described in the Inquisition’s handbook, *Malleus maleficarum* (1486), dramatized the breaking down of dividing lines between domination and subordination (127).

16 In n. 37, Gil explains how this cape was later renamed “Cabo del Tiburón” (Cape of the Shark). In *Admiral of the Ocean Sea*, Morison’s map of southeastern Cuba and Jamaica positions the Cape of San Miguel (Cabo del Tiburón) in the southwest part of the island of Hispaniola (124-25).


18 For an exploration of *zoe* and *bios* as both pertaining to functions of life as sacred and biologically determined by the state, see chapter 3 and its discussion of Giorgio Agamben’s *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1998).


21 Simón Bolívar, “Invitación a los gobiernos de Colombia, México, Río de la Plata, Chile y Guatemala, a formar el Congreso de Panamá,” 7 Dec. 1824, letter 157 of *Cartas del Libertador*, ed. Vicente Lecuna (New York: The Colonial P, 1948) 11: 270-72. All references to Bolivar’s letters in Spanish are derived from this collection. English translations of Bolívar’s “Congreso de Panamá” and

22 According to Fitzgerald, Bolívar’s lieutenant’s name is José Antonio Sucre (74).

23 Source is draft of a letter prepared by Bolívar in Lima on Feb. 1826. In it, he outlines a total of 13 pointers that will foster freedom and peace between the New World and Great Britain. The British presence in the Caribbean and the Isthmus accounts for this open letter to Great Britain.


25 Also recently quoted in "‘¿Modernidad periférica’ versus ‘proyecto de la modernidad’? Experiencias epistemológicas para una reformulación de lo ‘pos’moderno desde América Latina” by Hermann Herlinghous and Monika Walter in *Posmodernidad en la periferia: Enfoques latinoamericanos de la nueva teoría cultural*, eds. Herlinghous and Walter (Berlin: Astrid Langer Verlag, 1994) fn. 4, p. 12.


out the etymology in n. 12 of her chapter II, "The Crossroads of the World":

Making Panamá and the Canal."

28 "Panama." OED, for all etymologies and definitions, v.

29 United States also claimed a moral dimension on the creation of the Panama Canal: "The United States claimed moral and, importantly, legal justification for building a canal in Panama by loosely interpreting the 1848 Bidlack Treaty with Colombia, an agreement intended to ‘curb U.S. freedom of action’ in Panama. This treaty, specifically Article XXXV, gave the U.S. exclusive ‘right of transit’ across the isthmus, ‘upon any modes of communication that now exist, or that may be, hereafter, constructed’ (McCullough 32), but ensured Colombian sovereignty over the territory. The U.S. government, completely ignoring the issue of sovereignty, took this to mean that it could ‘proceed to construct the canal... and ‘fight Colombia if she objects’ [McCullough 341]" (quoted in Frederick 11).

30 Ferdinand De Lesseps received official concession by the Egyptian government on November 30, 1854. Construction of the Suez Canal did not begin until five years later on April 25, 1859. The Canal was finally opened for navigation on November 17, 1869. From "Suez Canal Notes"

31 In “El problema racial en Panamá,” Ph.D. diss., Florida State U, 1997, Watkins points out the historical divide between the two waves of Black migration to the
isthmus: the Afro-Hispanic in colonial times and the Afro-Antillean during the beginning of the nineteenth century. The Afro-Hispanic became part of the colonial miscegenation program and Spanish language instruction, while the Afro-Antillean retained their protestant background, including Anglo names and culture (10-11).

Chapter 2

Disease in *Luna verde* by Joaquín Beleño and in *Paisaje con tumbas pintadas en rosa* by José Ricardo Chaves

Having examined the location of disease narratives in the Caribbean, and in the Isthmus of Panama, chapter 2 will analyze literary narratives reflecting the construction of the Panama Canal and the appearance of AIDS in the neighboring country of Costa Rica. *Luna verde* (1950) by Joaquín Beleño provides a literary account of the life of migrant workers from around the world living in the Canal Zone. Beleño himself had worked in the last stages of the canal’s completion, and brings to the novel first-hand experience about the connections between the canal’s construction and the prejudicial treatment facing its labor force. As *Luna verde* reveals, in the history of the isthmus and in the creation of the Panama Canal, disease was used to regiment discourses of power based on race, class, and on sexual difference. The chapter ends by examining José Ricardo Chaves’ *Paisaje con tumbas pintadas en rosa* (1998). While showing the effect AIDS has on middle-class characters, *Paisaje* chronicles the emergence of AIDS in Costa Rica. In fact, *Paisaje* is one of the first novels to chronicle the emergence of AIDS in Costa Rican literature. *Paisaje* illustrates how AIDS is represented in seemingly democratic nations in the Americas to keep dissident and sexualized bodies incarcerated or exiled. Moreover, *Paisaje* reveals how the emergence of AIDS in Costa Rica challenged democratic ideals and the incorporation of homosexual citizens within its growing middle class. Both novels illustrate how
diseases in the isthmus echo colonial accounts of race and of sexuality present in the history of the Americas.

The enterprise of eradicating yellow fever first in Cuba, and later in Panama, links U.S. medical practices with imperialism in both the Caribbean and the Central American isthmus. *Luna verde*, for instance, chronicles the final stages of the canal’s construction, a time period coinciding with World War II. When the first-person narrator of *Luna verde*, the French-Panamanian Ramón de Roquebert coming to work in the Panama Canal in order to prove his commitment to the emergent nation, first receives his vaccination report, he comments on the close link between being healthy and becoming part of a U.S.-sanctioned “democracy”:

> Cuando me entregaron la tarjeta de ‘elegible’ supe que era un hombre sano. El Gobierno de los Estados Unidos, al hacerme firmar una declaración de fidelidad incondicional a la Democracia, lo hacía sabiendas de que no había sífilis ni malaria en mi sangre, ni tuberculosis en mis pulmones, ni pus ni albúmina en mis riñones […] Era un hombre sano para derribar piedras, para levantar sacos de cejas, derrumbar montes y romper el concreto con ‘yacaman’. Como broche de seguridad, me vacunaron contra la viruela.¹

[When they presented me with the card stamped “eligible,” I knew that I was a healthy man. The United States Government, in making me sign a declaration of unconditional loyalty towards Democracy, did it knowing that there wasn’t any syphilis or malaria in my blood, nor tuberculosis in my lungs, nor pus or albumin in my kidneys […] I was a healthy man for knocking down rocks, lifting sacks of weeks, demolishing mountains and breaking up concrete with *yacaman*. As a seal of security, they vaccinated me against smallpox.]

Unhealthy bodies, then, are not part of U.S. democracy in the zone, because they cannot contribute work for the Panama Canal. Work and trust in the a
“democratic” government are closely linked to a person’s viral load: “El Gobierno de los Estados Unidos, al hacerme firmar una declaración de fidelidad incondicional a la Democracia, lo hacía sabiéndose de que no había sífilis ni malaria en mi sangre, ni tuberculosis en mis pulmones, ni pus ni albúmina en mis riñones” (“The United States Government, in making me sign a declaration of unconditional loyalty towards Democracy, did it knowing that there wasn’t any syphilis or malaria in my blood, nor tuberculosis in my lungs, nor pus or albumin in my kidneys”). It seems that being part of a “democracy” is doing state-sanctioned work, and being disease-free marks you as an honest worker. Only under the leadership of William C. Gorgas, Chief Sanitary Officer for the Isthmian Canal Commission (I.C.C.), did canal workers begin to be treated for malaria, but as with any pharmakon, it was a double-edged sword. The daily doses of quinine used to relieve malarial symptoms also caused loss of hearing among some of the labor force (Frederick 22).

As previously discussed in chapter 1, “Potency and Enervation: Sexualized America,” the foundational myths surrounding the isthmus reflected the perception of this landmass not only as a place of pestilence, and of gold, but also of consolidating power, at least in Bolívar’s enthusiasm for defining the canal as the center for commerce, or as the omphalos of the New World. Though Latin America’s own omphalos, according to Bolívar, would be in the Isthmus of Panama, it was not impervious to outside influence and prejudice. Those living in the canal, from workers to medics, would come to be infected by the racial ideals
and prejudices of French and of U.S. contractors. Capitalist and racist attitudes by French and U.S. contractors would shape the Canal Zone and render its “civilized” *omphalos* inhumane and segregated. The nineteenth-century racist American South, for example, would be reconfigured in Panama well into the twentieth century. While visiting the construction site, an American journalist once remarked that “Panama is below the Mason-Dixon line” (Newton 131 quoted in Frederick 23). And Panama’s configuration as the South was not only an impression. During and after its construction, the law system for the canal (and eventually for the completed Canal Zone) was based on the South’s jurisprudence to a degree that “law and court systems were American and their implementations were reminiscent of Deep South standards.”

As R.S. Bryce-Laporte points out, despite its non-agricultural capital (its capital being in maritime yields and not in crops), the Canal Zone was “a closed system reminiscent of the plantation estate which once dominated socio-economic life in most of the Circum-Caribbean” (105). *Luna verde* shows how racial categories were instituted to create distinct lines between Anglo bosses and the migrant labor force, even if some workers, like Ramón, could “pass” for white: “Ramón de Roquebert. Descendencia . . . francesa. [...] Blanco, pelo liso rubio, [...]” (29; “Ramón de Roquebert. Descent . . . French. [...] White, straight blond hair, [...]”). His friends remind Ramón that though “white,” in the canal’s social hierarchy he is as “brown” as any other black worker: “Y por eso nos reímos de ti. Porque aquí los gringos te han convertido en brown” (29, italics in
And that’s why we are laughing at you. Because the gringos have made you brown).

The plantation system’s segregation also affected social services (such as access to hospitals) and was reminiscent of similar color-line segregations in the South’s recent past. Whites, and some lighter-skinned Panamanians, had access to the privileges of the “Zone”:

Many [Canal Zone workers] lived in the terminal cities of Panama and Colon just outside its usually unmarked borders. Even these people were not fully outside the embrace of the Zone—they all treasured and utilized their “privileges” as employees to shop at its cheaper stores, to attend its more efficient and modern hospitals, to use its cleaner toilets. The Zone then was not only closed but it was also exclusive and prized (Bryce-Laporte 105).

Moreover, the Canal classified all of its workers from birth according to a measure of whiteness and U.S. nationality. In fact, Ramón confesses in Luna verde that sickness, unwillingness to cure ailments, hunger, and lack of education became tools for ensuring eugenics, a state-sanctioned selected “parenting” that favored whites: “Eugenesia sin pan, con enfermedades, sin doctores, sin escuelas [. . .] Eugenesia de gringos, contribuyendo con su dinero a la prostitución y con ella la sífilis y la venereal” (188-89; “Eugenics without bread, with illness, without doctors, without schools [. . .] Gringo’s eugenics, contributing their money to prostitution and with it, syphilis and venereal diseases”). Ramón reveals that hunger and disease became legitimate ways of breeding out non-Anglo minorities from the canal’s population. The form of eugenics practiced here is not by selective parenting, but by creating a habitat that would ensure the starvation and
the sickness of less desirable minorities. Interestingly enough, in the history of eugenics, Charles Darwin's cousin, F. Galton (1822-1911), who pioneered the study of eugenics, or the improving of "physical and mental makeup of the human species by selected parenthood," believed that habitat, or environmental factors, had little to do with the evolution, or survival, of a species. Ramón's usage of "eugenics" points to a "natural" breeding out of undesirable elements by "natural" conditions (lack of food and of medical institutions, for instance). In the canal, the U.S. bosses of the isthmus defined natural selection. White Americans were considered masters, as "superordinates" of all other colored peoples, regardless of nationality, age, or years of service (105). From its very construction, the canal (and later the urban Canal Zone) collapsed the classification of race and of skin color with capital. White Americans were paid in gold coins, while non-Americans received silver coins. Workers were thus known as white or "Gold Roll" employees, while "Silver Roll" employees were mostly of color.

Equally problematic was the impact that this localized segregation had on citizens of the Caribbean and how it thwarted their return to their native homes. After each wave of immigration for the various projects (Panama Railroad, French and American Canals, United Fruit Company Railroad, Third Locks Project), it was expected that Caribbean workers would return to their homelands. For those immigrants who stayed within the Canal Zone, like West Indians, assimilation, though, was partial: West Indian education did not prepare them for "upward socio-economic mobility or increased participation in the power structure of the
Zone” (115). In essence, the situation of West Indians during the canal’s early twentieth-century history is one of classical colonial enslavement. West Indians experienced their own version of a Caribbean Diaspora: the body of the worker could not return “home,” and in their adopted nation, immigrants could not become part of democratic processes. At the beginning of Luna verde, Ramón, who is a Panamanian native, is oblivious of the misery facing other nationals working in the isthmus: “no consultaba la derrota en esos nicas, colombianos, cubanos, jamaiquinos y nativos tan pobres como nosotros mismos” (17; “I did not see defeat in those Nicaraguans, Colombians, Cubans, Jamaicans and natives who were as poor as we were ourselves”). By the end of the novel, Ramón becomes disillusioned of a transnational public-works project that promoted the exclusion of international workers. After the completion of the Panama Canal, immigrant workers found themselves as citizens of a literal dystopia, a “no place” of degradation for émigrés.

Ports of Entry

As a port of entry to the world’s navigational cultures, the canal exercised a totalizing power over the body of its employees and residents. As connector of two major bodies of water, the canal, at least in the early part of the twentieth century, could only function by governing its enterprise along strict homogeneous and heterosexist regiments. The variety of cultures and products the canal transported through its locks contrasted with the canal’s own homogeneity. American construction of the Panama Canal recalled its colonial encounters with
sexual and later with religious heterodoxy. In the 1500s, Balboa’s encounter with “younge men in womens apparel, smoth & effeminately decked,” resulted in the mauling of those Quarequa chiefs. Such views against deemed sexual abnormality also would find a place in the construction of the canal, though in the specific history of the canal, manifestations of heterodoxy were lumped together and preferably excised from the community. Delegated to the margins, bodies considered “not popular” by Canal Zone officials included sexual deviants (both homosexual men and “loose” women) and heretics (those who practiced native religions): “Then there were those who had both ‘no’ prestige and ‘no’ popularity, such as effeminate men, suspected male homosexuals, girls [presumably black] believed to be promiscuous with white men, alleged stoolpigeons or ‘squealers,’ prisoners, and openly practicing lay members of ‘spirit’ churches” (Bryce-Laporte 108). In Luna verde, though, sexual deviance, such as prostitution, had a positive function for the Anglo culture of the isthmus. Prostitution, according to Ramón, allowed middleclass women (and their sisters) to keep their virginity, because the canal’s soldiers would satisfy their lusts on “loose” women and not on the women of the “so-called middle class”: “¿Acaso no necesita el Gobierno de la prostitución? […] Además, cómo defenderían su virginidad y su reputación del empuje bestial de la soldadesca gringa, las hermanas y mujeres de la clase llamada media [?]” (52; “Maybe did not the Government need prostitution? […] Moreover, how would the sisters and women of the so-called middle class defend
their virginity, and their reputation, against the bestial thrust of the gringo soldiery [?]”.

In short, sexual and religious heterodoxy became the measure for incarceration and for medical treatment. Homosexuals, black “nymphomaniacs,” lawless figures, and heretics were all lumped as criminals. Those prisoners and “spirit” churchgoers presumably lived normative heterosexual lives, and at least their crime to the state was explicit and punishable by explicit means (e.g., incarceration and the interruption of church events). Homosexuals and promiscuous figures were more threatening: their “crimes” were performed privately and not explicitly against the state. Of course, bodies have always been the business of the state, either medically, politically, and more recently, in speech acts. In chapter 2 of Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative, “Sovereign Performatives,” Judith Butler argues that while the state continues to govern dissident bodies in figures of speech, “the historical loss of the sovereign organization of power appears to occasion the fantasy of its return—a return, I want to argue, that takes place in language, in the figure of the performative.”

Because the state’s medical board approved their bodies as resistant to fatigue, the non-Anglo workers in Luna verde are best suited for hard labor. Speech acts, such as these medical categorical “certifications” of strong “brown” bodies, guarantee that non-Anglo bodies will be figured only as beasts of burden: “Sus cuerpos aprobados por la Clínica de la Central Labor Office no se rinden al cansancio del
músculo” (97, English in original; “Their bodies, approved by the Clinic of the Central Labor Office, do not succumb to muscle fatigue”).

The construction of the canal, both as the historical and the fictionalized record show, could not escape from the history of the isthmus as a site of disease. With the construction of the canal, though, disease was connected to the urbanization of worker’s neighborhoods. In Luna verde, disease came to be linked not just to place, or habitat, but also to habitude, or the customary conditions linked to lower classes: “Deprimen esas construcciones iguales, de barracas contagiosas […] Camas de esprines oxidados de orín y tuberculosis […] Miseria, chisme, enfermedades, sexo y ropas de mil colores. Eso es un barrio proletario” (13; “Those identical constructions, their contagious barracks, are depressing […] Beds with springs rusted by urine and tuberculosis […] Misery, gossip, sickness, sex and clothing with thousands of color. That’s a proletariat neighborhood”). In connecting multiple and heterogeneous foundational mythologies of fever and gold, of disease and capital, of race and sexuality, the historical and fictionalized archive surrounding the construction of the Isthmus of Panama is symptomatic of the ways in which disease connects and infects a variety of discourses, such as class issues, race, and sexuality. This discursive backdrop of disease in the isthmus provides a base on which to contextualize how contemporary literary manifestations of disease in the Americas interrogate such deemed pestilent and foundational pasts, especially as AIDS becomes emergent and generates states of emergency in neighboring Costa Rica.
AIDS and Exile

Chavez's *Paisaje con tumbas pintadas en rosa* chronicles the emergence of AIDS in Costa Rica, the rest of the isthmus, and throughout the Americas. Chaves, though born in San Jose, Costa Rica, has spent the last fifteen years in Mexico, where he obtained a Masters in Comparative Literature at the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM) and began work on a doctorate on the theme of androgyny in the nineteenth century.

When AIDS appears in *Paisaje* there is an almost schizophrenic catalogue of international repressions surrounding AIDS with all the expected newspaper clippings from foreign papers. Moreover, *Paisaje* does not shy away from naming the nature of the disease affecting Costa Ricans and other Latin Americans. The un-naming of AIDS in fiction, or the inability for certain authors to use the Spanish acronym for AIDS, SIDA (S.I.D.A., Sindrome de Inmunodeficiencia Adquirida), is underscored in fictional works by Reinaldo Arenas and by Severo Sarduy. These Cuban authors resist the creation of a normative sense for queerness, or for maladies associated with the queer. For Arenas, especially, expressing a Latino queer subjectivity becomes a problem, since such subjectivities have been traditionally mapped if not by academia, then by elite white and well-intentioned queer, activists. For Arenas and Sarduy, a Latino queer subjectivity may not even be desired, either sexually or politically. The work of the exiled Arenas testifies to his resistance to Anglo hegemonic ideals of gay subjectivity and inclusion within national projects, like U.S. gay rights, same-
sex marriages, and coming out, for example. For Arenas, la loca (the effeminate male homosexual), can only survive free in a state of exile from nationalistic discourses, and especially, from designations of queer subjectivity as stable and monolithic. La loca, like "queer" in English, is a subversive and itinerant term which disrupts time and space, or as Eve Sedgwick aptly defines it, "queer" becomes "the open mesh of possibilities, gaps, overlaps, dissonances and resonances, lapses and excesses of meaning when the constituent elements of anyone’s gender, or anyone’s sexuality aren’t made (or can’t be made) to signify monolithically" (emphasis in original). In “Locas, pájaros y demás mariconadas: el ciudadano sexual en Reinaldo Arenas,” Carmelo Esterrich summarizes Arenas’ exile from the nation state and argues that Arenas’ pejorative and homophobic use of “la loca” resists normative constructions of Latino queer subjectivity:

El pájaro, la loca, el partido, el marica—como en realidad se le debe llamar en la obra de Arenas—no promueve su inserción ni en la nación ni en el Estado. [. . .] El sujeto abyecto areniano no busca en ningún momento ser incluido en la comunidad—ni siquiera pide clemencia reconocida oficialmente o la creación de un espacio legítimo propio para el—sino que se mantiene al margen de los parámetros definibles de la nación, y fuera del Estado.9

[The fairy, the queer, the homo, the faggot—as they should really be called in Arenas’ work—does not promote their inclusion neither in the nation nor in the state. [. . .] The Arenas abject subject does not search at any moment to be included in the community—not even does it ask for officially recognized clemency or the creation of its own legitimate space—and instead, maintains itself on the margins of the definable parameters of the nation, and outside of the state.]

As Foucault had already noted in History of Sexuality, silence about a topic does not negate the system of beliefs that make that silence possible. For these
authors, un-naming AIDS is a strategy that discloses the various repressions exercised on aberrant sexualities; un-naming is not tantamount to “silencing” the existence of the disease. Rather, the un-naming allows for interrelated discourses (gender, class, and race, for example) to become an “integral part of the strategies that underlie and permeate discourses” on disease:

There is no binary division to be made between what one says and what one does not say; we must try to determine the different ways of not saying such things, how those who can and those who cannot speak of them are distributed, which type of discourse is authorized, or which form of discretion is required in either case. There is not one but many silences, and they are integral part of the strategies that underlie and permeate discourses (27, my emphasis).

In addition to novels, this un-naming trait also appears in Chicano and Latino plays and poetry. In “Testimonio sobre el SIDA,” Héctor Santiago explains how never mentioning the name “AIDS” opens the field of interpretation to include all manner of injustices formalized by ignorance of disease, in general:

In my plays, I never mention the disease by name; I show instead its social and human repercussions. I wanted to leave behind a testimony about the plague in different milieu, how human beings are affected and deal with it, how they survive and condemn ignorance, the same ignorance that not long ago forced lepers to clap boards in the streets.  

The un-naming of AIDS in some fiction belies the material impact that the disease has had upon Latin America, though, and in the case of Chaves, upon Costa Rica, the locale for Paisaje. By the end of 1999, it was estimated that about 12,000 adults and children lived with HIV/AIDS in Costa Rica (total population, to date, is close to four million). As with any AIDS reporting, it is important to condition the accuracy of statistics by considering the time dislocation of the HIV
virus (for example, one could test negative and still be a carrier) and the 
hermeneutics surrounding AIDS testing, reporting, transmission, and viral loads. 
In reporting modes of transmission in Costa Rica, for example, a 1996 study 
showed that 504 homosexuals and bisexual men reported infection, while in 1999 
that number dropped to 12 men. If we transfer this information to the general 
population, a total of 900 men and women contracted AIDS in 1996 to 19 in 1999 
(last year of reporting took place in April 1999). The epidemiological fact sheet, 
as collected by the UNAIDS, is clear in pointing out that AIDS statistics in 
developing countries is a hermeneutic act filtered by a country’s medical 
technology and by its own definitions for AIDS. In reading epidemiological fact 
sheets it is not always discernible whether HIV carriers are lumped with AIDS 
patients:

Reporting rates vary substantially from country to country and low 
reporting rates are common in developing countries due to weaknesses in 
the health care and epidemiological systems. In addition, countries use 
different AIDS definitions. A main disadvantage of AIDS case reporting is 
that it only provides information on transmission patterns and levels of 
infection approximately 5-10 years in the past, limiting its usefulness for 
monitoring recent HIV infections.

AIDS monitoring, as the UNAIDS reports, is subject to a time 
differentiation. The “present” can only be “known” as a foreshadowing of events 
that may span five to ten years of an individual’s past and future. Drawing on Ota 
Yoko’s *City of Corpses* (a novel on the aftermath of the atomic bomb in 
Hiroshima and connecting it to accounts of AIDS carriers), William Haver also 
points out the “temporal aporia” resulting from the impossible historicization of
mourning since both past and future are apocalyptic in relation to the present, a condition akin to diagnosing and interpreting present AIDS statistics. In relation to the five-to-ten year diagnostic lapse, the presence of AIDS is only knowable as an estimate of past elapsed time, and of past sexual behavior:

What amounts to is, registered in and as the material existence of the hibakusha or HIV seropositive, is the intuition of the temporal aporia of the event in its uncontainable, unbounded extension. And it is this that makes the historicization of the work of mourning impossible, for both “past” and “future” become essentially indissociable from an apocalyptic present (which is, as such, of course essentially ungraspable, essentially absent). Here, then is a temporal destitution, the indifferent ground of the whenever.\(^{12}\)

Equally important is to note that this uncertainty inherent in present AIDS statistics (even if encouraging, say, in having fewer numbers of infected in the U.S. homosexual population) indicates potential tragedies. Mary Fisher, AIDS activist and artist, recently declared in \textit{A & U: America's AIDS Magazine} that the “worst is yet to come,” and blames contemporary racist complacency on ethnic infection (due in part to stable rates of infection among whites, though as of 2000, blacks and Hispanics show the highest rate of infection). For Fisher “‘what we see in Africa today is the future of AIDS for us all.’”\(^{13}\)

In Costa Rica, more specifically, the disease was first detected in the early 1980s (1983 according to most public records).\(^{14}\) The high rates of recorded AIDS transmissions peaked in the middle 1990s. The appearance of Chaves’ \textit{Paisaje} in the late 1990s, therefore, coincided with new awareness surrounding AIDS in Costa Rica. By virtue of the five-to-ten year detection lapse, any numerical
stability in AIDS infection (in Costa Rica, homosexual or bisexual AIDS
infections stabilized in the early 1990s) or, for that matter, the disastrous peak of
such numbers (as we currently see with straight married women and children in
Costa Rica), only provides a potential representation of reality. Collecting and
interpreting AIDS statistics, even in a small country like Costa Rica, shows how
studying the pandemic, like the very virus it strives to chronicle, is subject to a
variety of scientific and socio-political definitions. One of the letters embedded in
Paisaje, dated 1984, laments the fact that in addition to contending with AIDS as a
bodily illness, the sick have to react to “aspectos sociales y políticos como el
amarrillismo de los medios de comunicación y la intolerancia fortalecida por
figuras retardatarias como Reagan y el Papa” (Chaves 99; “social and political
aspects such as the yellow press in the media and the intolerance fortified by
retardatory figures like Reagan and the Pope”).

In addition to the disease’s dislocation of time and inherent statistical time
incongruencies, AIDS statistical reporting in Latin America shows how difficult it
is to designate homosexual or bisexual subjectivity for those affected by AIDS.
Homosexual, bisexual, and heterosexual are defined only according to their
physical engagement with members of the same, or opposite, sex. The United
Nations AIDS statistics, for example, define “homosexual” by frequency of sexual
acts with members of the same sex. In this way, sexual orientation is defined as
praxis, and not necessarily as a way of being. One is “heterosexual,” for example,
only in the act of being sexual with members of the opposite sex. One is
“homosexual,” for example, only when one is practicing same-sex acts. In defining sexuality as only emanating from situational practices, categorical imperatives are resisted (people may not be necessarily “gay” because they practice same-sex acts, for example). Such a situational-practice definition for sexuality has its risks, though. In creating targeted-awareness programs surrounding AIDS, it would be difficult to differentiate among those who do consider themselves “gay” and those who only make it a practice. It becomes increasingly difficult, therefore, to tailor awareness programs to the specific needs of pockets of sexualized citizens in Latin America.

The limits of homosexual identification and identity in a Latino setting are present in Chaves’ *Paisaje*, especially since the novel’s protagonists contest the usual frame for most AIDS texts (the set up usually includes hemophiliacs, promiscuous characters, love/lust triangles, scenes of *anagnorisis* as HIV is diagnosed, and of *rigor mortis* as AIDS takes its toll). Vignettes detailing the political, social, and cultural situation of Costa Rica and of Central America during the 1980s compose the backdrop for *Paisaje*. Especially relevant and revealing is the inclusion of the Sandinista revolution as a turning point for the first person narrator, Oscar, to experience not only political insurrection, but his first erection as “compañeros” (“comrades”) huddle to celebrate the anniversary of the Sandinista revolution in 1981’s Managua. The Sandinista anniversary celebrations in Managua facilitate one of Oscar’s first same-sex experiences with Mario, a university professor: “Era excitante esa cercanía de ascética lujuria,
sobre piso de tierra, entre los ronquidos de los ‘compañeros’, compás durmientes, y mientras Oscar fingía estar dormido, la mano de Mario se deslizó y acarició su brazo desnudo, tibiamente húmedo por el calor tropical de la noche de Managua. Oscar sintió la caricia filosa de un ángel” (‘On the dirt floor, among the snoring of comrades, a sleepy compass, that ascetic lascivious closeness was exciting, and while Oscar pretended to sleep, Mario’s hand slipped and caressed his naked arm lukewarm and beaded with sweat by the tropical heat of the Managua night. Oscar felt the sharp caress of an angel’). In Paisaje, deemed political liberations become a conduit for quenching homosexual libations.

In Paisaje, the main character, Oscar, falls in love with Mario, a professor at his university who has an open relationship with his long-time lover, David. Oscar is also interested in Javier, but Javier later sets house with Martín (a “straight” man with wife and kids). Javier is a hemophiliac. Toward the end of the novel, though, all characters that have been involved in the exchange of bodily liquids, either for medical reasons, such as with Javier’s hemophilia, or for pleasures from unprotected sex, as with Mario, all become infected with AIDS and die. The topos of an AIDS death is now a commonplace in literature, since bodies that come into contact with blood or semen will die. Though the love triangles (Oscar-Mario-David and Oscar-Javier-Martín) are perhaps a bit melodramatic, the novel is significant since it is the first to trace the appearance of AIDS in Costa Rica, a feature that has not been without critics. Writing in one of the papers with widest circulation in Costa Rica, La Nación, Juan Luzio takes to task the plot-
driven text, regardless of its importance in narrating Costa Rica’s early AIDS history:

Es verdad que una novela no es sólo forma, como verdad es que tampoco puede evitarse en su valoración el alcance de su contenido. El libro de José Ricardo Chaves se deja leer y es, desde luego, innovador en la literatura del país por el tema que asume y por la franqueza con que se representa el asunto de la homosexualidad masculina en el medio nacional del presente, aunque se ha repetido con justicia que la franqueza no es necesariamente un valor literario.17

[It is true that a novel is not only form, as it is also true that it cannot be avoided that its valorization cannot but include its content. José Ricardo Chaves’ novel is readable and is, of course, innovating in the nation’s literature due to the theme it assumes and for the candor with which it represents the case of male homosexuality in present national media. It has been repeated with justice, though, that frankness is not always a literary value.]

Without entering into a debate on the politics of frankness, or returning to a debate on veracity and realism, this contemporary condemnation of frankness as "un-literary" is a manifestation of censure, especially when a text’s contents provide alternative histories to Costa Rica’s first AIDS decade, roughly starting in the 1980s. Similarly, in “Teatro y SIDA,” Jorge Merced argues that the appearance of AIDS tends to coincide with a rise of censorship, and as I will discuss in chapter 3, “Bared Life of AIDS,” with the emergence of AIDS wards that function as prisons: “With AIDS, the majority of manifestations of oppression lead to censorship and negation; this oppression happens in our own community. And that’s when art comes into the picture.”18

Taking into account that homosexuality is still a relatively taboo topic in the Americas, Paisaje challenges Costa Rica’s democratic ideals as it incorporates
its homosexual citizens. In a country that prides itself on the rights of its middle class, its high literacy rate, the abolition of its army in 1948, and its electoral system (with power shared by various oligarchic coffee plantation families), throughout the early 1980s Costa Rican police forces carried out raids against gay bars which resulted in arrests and jail sentences. Not unlike other countries, transvestites (more performatively visible queer bodies) were especially targeted. In the Americas, and starting with Balboa’s first excursion into Panama in 1513 and his encounter with a “native” form of transvestism, the history of repression against transvestites has always been global, socially sanctioned, and criminally punishable. Early reports indicate that Costa Rican police officers especially targeted transvestites since they could be more easily sexually exploited and incarcerated. The spread of AIDS in Costa Rica provided a justification for repressions that already existed within a culture of homophobic Catholicism.19 Hence, the naming of AIDS in Paisaje, and the inclusion of homosexuals as active members of Costa Rica’s Catholic middle-class, becomes an important anti-homophobic project, especially since AIDS in Costa Rica, like in the U.S., will be misread with “criminal strength.”20 Ultimately, Costa Rica’s on-going confrontation with homosexuality and with the AIDS epidemic will test its democratic ideals.

Moreover, in a short review of the novel in Ancora, the literary supplement of Costa Rica’s La Nación, an anonymous critic actually places the representation of homosexuality as secondary to the “sexual terrorism” that the spread of AIDS
incites within Costa Rica’s democracy: “Más que centrarse en la homosexualidad, *Paisaje con tumbas pintadas en rosa* apunta a la irrupción del SIDA y al contexto terrorista e intolerante que lo acompaña en sus inicios, en pleno corazón de una sociedad democrática” ("More than focusing on homosexuality, *Paisaje con tumbas pintadas en rosa* signals the emergence of AIDS, and the terrorist and intolerant context that it brings with its inception in the heart of a democratic society"). The *Ancora* book review, “Terrorismo Sexual” ("Sexual terrorism"), suggests that the appearance of AIDS in Costa Rica made possible a new militancy in talking about issues surrounding homosexuality and sexuality.

From the very title of Chaves’ novel, the naming of AIDS is both explicit and allegorical in *Paisaje*. The title, *Paisaje con tumbas pintadas en rosa* ("Landscape with tombs painted pink") alludes not only to “pink” as signifying homosexuality, but also to what was briefly designated in Spanish-speaking countries as the “cáncer lila” ("lilac cancer") of the early 1980s (Chaves 124). Also revealing is the book’s cover. In the foreground we see a tombstone depicting a muscular Indian with raised elbows, hands to his neck, chest delineated by pink hues, and in the background a multicolored twilight. If the naked Indian suspects the arrival of death or imminent unity with God (as in the crepuscular poetry of San Juan de la Cruz), he does not show it: the Indian’s pose, with hips and buttocks thrust backwards, and uncut penis not invisible, suggests that homosexual erotic unions prefigure death. Early in the twentieth century, Thomas Mann’s *Death in Venice*, or even Sigmund Freud’s *Three Essays on the Theory of*
*Sexuality* dramatized the interrelation between homosexuality and *thanatos.*

Death is, of course, indiscriminate about sexual orientations, and scholars have also associated death and eroticism with heterosexuality.

Though perhaps outdated in times of post-Freudian/Lacanian analysis, and before contemporary discussions about theorizing the body, Norman Brown's *Life against Death: The Psychoanalytical Meaning of History* (1959) articulates how literature, while representing the nexus between culture and the arts, also dramatizes the body's will for pleasure and death:

Freud's two instincts—Eros and Death—are fundamental hypotheses as to the general character of the repressed forces inherent in human nature by virtue of its connection with a body. Though repressed and unrecognized, these are the energies which create human culture, and to recognize their existence is to reinterpret human culture. Human culture is then reconnected with the human body. Eros creates culture, and Eros is the bodily sexual instinct.

Moreover, in using a biblical epigraph to introduce the novel (from Job I. 19), Chaves stresses how the Bible itself has archived past pestilences as part of biblical mythologies. A biblical epigraph also gives credibility and purpose to rendering accounts, "dar noticia" ("give news"), for all who have died: "y vino del otro lado del desierto un torbellino y conmovió las cuatro esquinas de la casa, que cayó sobre los jóvenes, y han muerto. Yo solo he escapado para darte la noticia" (n. pag.; "and the whirlwind came from the other side of the desert and shook the four walls of the house that fell over the young people, and now they have died. I alone escaped to give you the news"). In *Luna verde,* the importance of giving an account about life in the canal, though, is not completely objective since Ramón,
its narrator, can only provide, as he admits, a partial narration of events. Too many other secrets, or too many other events, may alter the hierarchy of events: “Hago relato de todas las cosas que van sucediendo con claro temor y vaga sospecha de que alguien pueda leer esto. Lo que escribo sólo tiene de sincero el afán de ocultar con otras cosas menos importantes los hechos ciertos ocurridos, [. . .]” (68; “I give an account of all things that go on happening with a certain fear and with a vague suspicion that someone will read this. What I write is only sincere in my eagerness to hide with other less important things the actual events that occurred [. . .]”).

One of the salient characteristics of Paisaje is the chronicle of abuses related to AIDS not only in Costa Rica, but also in transnational locales. The narration detailing the love vicissitudes of Oscar is interrupted by a myriad of publications, news sources, and of personal letters: letters from friends living in the U.S., homophobic sermons, letters composed by legislators defending civil rights for persecuted homosexuals in Costa Rica, and newspaper clippings reporting the AIDS epidemic around the globe.

The following gloss of journalistic intertextualities appearing in Paisaje demonstrates the transnational backlash against queer and deemed diseased bodies: Mexico and the threat of “cáncer lila” (124); East Germany and the incarceration of AIDS victims and criminal prisoners forced to retire from communal works due to their high risk of sexual contact (125); Ecuador and witch hunts of homosexuals (126); Colombia and the tacit societal approval for killers
suspected of murdering homosexuals (127), reminiscent of *Fuente Ovejuna* by Lope de Vega, where the mob has the moral right to kill and be exonerated from communal guilt; Brazilian hairdresser almost burned alive by the mob. The mob burned everything that the suspected carrier had come into contact with and owned. Because he had lived in New York for eleven years and because he had lost weight, the mob decided that the hairdresser had AIDS (130); Mérida and the targeting of drag queens in schools with support by Catholic parent groups (136-37); Acapulco and the panic experienced by bathers in a river after it was known that a homosexual used to swim its waters. After his death from AIDS, his body was cremated by officials without the family's consent (156); Reagan's policy of obligatory testing for all foreigners in the U.S. (160); Germany and the obligatory testing of all homosexuals, drug addicts, prostitutes, prisoners, foreigners and government job applicants; Soviet Union and foreigners and Russian citizens punished for having AIDS and intentionally spreading it, at least according to officials (164); and finally on the list, Cuba and the quarantine of all AIDS patients (164-65), a topic that will receive more attention in chapter 3, "Bared Life of AIDS."

The function of interjecting international newspaper clippings within the fictional narration suggests the impossibility of avoiding, in fiction, the material reality of the disease. And because AIDS repression is based on medical fictions, AIDS literature, at least in *Paisaje*, cannot escape from the reality of AIDS. The novel also critiques the homogenization (synonymous here with cosmopolitanism)
of homosexual identities around the globe, especially in the globalization of gay tourism and gay nightlife. For Mario, all the gay bars are the same regardless of geography. As he remarks, “Lo mismo en San José que en San Francisco. Lo mismo en París que en México: un bar gay es lo mismo en todos lados. Esto piensa Mario que acaba de ponerse a bailar con uno de sus amigos. No cosmopolitismo, sino supranacionalidad” (128; “The same in San Jose as in San Francisco. The same in Paris as in Mexico: a gay bar is the same in all places. This is what Mario thinks about as he begins to dance with one of his friends. Not cosmopolitanism, but supranacionalism”).

Paisaje ultimately provides a fatalistic view of AIDS and of homosexuality in Costa Rica: its protagonist, Oscar, flees from Costa Rica to Rome (in Mann’s Death in Venice, Italy already signified disease and death, while the Italy Oscar hopes to find is one that can offer rebirth). There is some hope for a return, though, if not to Costa Rica, to Oscar’s connection with Costa Rica, and the isthmus, as he tries to escape from AIDS after the death of his lovers and of friends due to AIDS. While visiting the Vatican museum, Oscar meets Eloy Gurría, a Mexican who is also living in Rome. Eloy points out that he finds Oscar adrift, “—Estás sin norte, Oscar. Se te perdió la brújula” (176; “You are without a north, Oscar. You have lost your compass”). By the end of the novel, the Mexican/Costa Rican expatriates find each other holding hands as spring’s red sun shines in Rome, “Un sol rojo brillaba en Roma primaveral” (176; “a red sun shone in spring-time Rome”). Like Clavijero’s eighteenth-century “conceptual
museums" of curiosities, museums once more provide ex-patriots with a way of connecting with the Americas.

Chapter 2, “Disease in Luna verde by Joaquín Beleño and in Paisaje con tumbas pintadas en rosa by José Ricardo Chaves,” demonstrated, in both the historical record surrounding Panama Canal and in novels emanating from the isthmus, how disease was used to regiment discourses of power based on race, class, and sexual difference. The dissertation has examined the historical background and the etymologies surrounding the Isthmus of Panama and how the eventual construction of the Panama Canal used disease and fear of aberrant bodies as part of the canal’s operations. *Proliferation of Disease in Iberoamerican Fiction* explores how colonial configurations of “disease” become an emergent metaphor in describing, policing, and in regimenting sexual, racial, and political difference. In this regard, *Proliferation of Disease* reveals how dissident, sometimes queer, bodies come to be regarded as viral and vital threats to the state and how such an internalization of illness comes to be resisted in AIDS narratives. The following chapter, “Bared Life of AIDS,” further explores what happens when clinics and hospitals become an extension of the state’s will to categorize diseased bodies as criminal and as subject to imprisonment. In the Americas, and Cuba being its main example, the onset of AIDS in the early 1980s amalgamated three perceivably distinct institutions (the clinic, the prison, and the concentration camp) into one overarching material and metaphoric site, the AIDS medical ward.
This ward functions as both a figurative and physical holding cell for incarcerating the "incurable" and for *maintaining* non-normative sexualities linked with disease.
NOTES

1 Joaquin Beleño, *Luna verde: Diario dialogado* (Panamá: Editora Panamá América, 1951) 28. All translations are mine.


5 “Spirit” churches combined a myriad of African and Western cults and traced their roots in “... an Afro-Christian revival group which was founded in Jamaica around the beginning of the twentieth century. The practices and paraphernalia of the Isthmian cult seem to approximate African-oriented West Indian cults such as myalism, kumina, convince, and pocomania” (Bryce-Laporte 112).


7 A list of Chaves’ non-academic writing includes *La mujer oculta, Los susurros de Perseo, Los hijos de Cibeles*, and *Cuentos tropigóticos*. After the publication
of *Paisaje*, he began work on a new novel based on fantastic and gothic
literature of the nineteenth century, but with a "modern perspective." From a 1998
interview in *Revista Viva* with María Montero in "Libertad bajo palabra: José
Ricardo Chaves regresó a recoger dos premios a su afán literario," in *La Nación


9 Carmelo Esterrich, “Locas, pájaros y demás mariconadas: el ciudadano sexual en

10 Héctor Santiago, “Testimonio sobre el SIDA,” *Ollantay Theater Magazine* 2.2

11 “Costa Rica: Epidemiological Fact Sheet on HIV/AIDS and Sexually
Transmitted Infections,” 2000 Update by the UNAIDS, the Pan American Health
Organization, and the World Health Organization

reporting that includes lesbian Latinas is entirely lacking. The traditional
explanation is that lesbians are silenced by patriarchal powers, and by heterosexual
women who see lesbianism as a threat to marriage and to reproduction.

12 William Haver, *The Body of This Death: Historicity and Sociality in the Time

(February 2001): 40.

Gisela Herrera, Director of the Department of AIDS Control of Costa Rica (*Departamento de Control del SIDA*), remarks in an interview on the changing face of AIDS in Costa Rica, a change that is equally seen in other nations of the globe: “Estamos en una etapa de transición. El grupo homosexual-bisexual llegó a estabilizarse en el número de casos. Ahora crece la población heterosexual y los niños nacidos de mujeres infectadas” (“We are in a time of transition. The homosexual-bisexual group stabilized its number of [AIDS] cases. Now the numbers increase in the heterosexual population and in children born from infected mothers”), in “A la vanguardia contra el SIDA” by Marielos Campos, *Perfil* (1996): 54-56.


19 The work of Jacobo Schifter, current Regional Director of ILPES (The Latin American Health and Prevention Institute), parcels the many levels in which homosexuality and homophobia is constructed in Costa Rica. Especially revealing is his book on “cacheros,” heterosexual male prostitutes, who only have sex with men, in *Lila’s House: Male Prostitution in Latin America*, trans. Irene Artavia Fernández and Sharon Mulhere (New York: Harrington Park, 1998).


22 Editions of *Drei abhandlungen zur sexualtheorie* continued to be published from 1905-1942. The first English translation appeared in 1910. Freud’s categorization of same-sex behavior used a three-tier system of “inversions.” He therefore did not employ the term “homosexual,” and instead, qualified them as

Chapter 3
Bared Life of AIDS

The emergence of AIDS in Latin America harkens to an already-established colonial triangulation of disease in U.S., Caribbean, and in European geographies. The establishment of AIDS wards in the Americas, and the incarceration of AIDS bodies across the globe, responds to debates on America’s epidemiological place in history, the lasting effects of colonization, and the state’s manipulation of histories of disease to legitimate medical imprisonments. Using Giorgio Agamben and Michel Foucault as bases for analyzing biopolitical discourses on “life,” I will argue how more recent institutionalizations of queer identities and of AIDS bodies respond to cultural and institutional establishments of imprisoning clinics and of hospitals. The onset of AIDS in the early 1980s amalgamated three perceivably distinct institutions (the clinic, the prison, and the concentration camp) into one overarching material and metaphoric site, the AIDS medical ward. This ward functions as both a figurative and physical holding cell for incarcerating the “incurable” and for maintaining non-normative sexualities linked with disease. In emphasizing the word “maintain” the many valences of the Spanish “mantener” highlights, at a semantic level, the biological and state functions of a medical ward: to keep alive by way of sustenance, to hold or restrain, and colloquially, at least in Central America, to designate individuals as leeches or dependents of social welfare; for example, “es un mantenido del Estado” (“he/she is a leech of
This chapter will first examine official descriptions of AIDS wards in Cuba, along with a representative short story emanating from a compendium written by HIV-positive Cubans who were subjected to Cuba's AIDS quarantine. Moreover, for the quarantined AIDS patients who attended the workshops, writing AIDS was considered as important as their periodic medical treatments. The chapter concludes with an analysis of AIDS wards manifestations in novels by Severo Sarduy and Juan Goytisolo. Their novels reveal that such wards are viable for the state insofar as they can sustain these ailing bodies that are "maintained" by way of hospital care and with prison-like rigors.

Agamben briefly remarks that one of the first concentration camps to appear was in the Americas: in 1896, the Spanish created the "campos de concentraciones" ("concentration camps) in Cuba. In *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, Agamben presents a careful philological and philosophical study on Greek perceptions of "life." As exemplified in both fiction and autobiography in works by Sarduy and Reinaldo Arenas, the life of an individual with AIDS is socially and medically constructed, depending on how that "life" is read, interpreted, made criminal, and rendered medically. In his introduction, Agamben highlights two interconnecting definitions for "life" operating in ancient Greece: zoē/life as the bared qualities of life in all creatures, and bios/life, a manifestation of an individual’s life in a group. Basing himself on Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*, Agamben defines zoē as the sacred component in all "life" since all creatures (and Agamben includes "animals, men, or gods") share the singular act
of living. The singularity of *zoe* is furthermore stressed in its own etymon: the
term *zoe* appears only in singular form and lacks a plural in Greek: defining life as
*zoe*, therefore, renders all life as inherently singular, sacred, and “*bare*.”

Whereas defining life as *zoe* locates the singularity of life in nature, in
defining life as *bios*, the biopolitics of the state begins to emerge and to manage
*bare* qualities of life. In defining *bios* as the social management of “life,”
Agamben distinguishes between sacred life and qualified social functions of life
rendered by the state. For example, individuals residing in the *polis* of ancient
Athens would not have employed *zoe* *politikē* to speak of their life as citizens.
Instead, their concept of life would be best described as an engagement in *bios
politicos* (1). Therefore, this definition of life as *bios* is a contractual expression of
the stately functions in the *polis*. For Agamben, the need to scrutinize these
permutations of *zoe* and *bios* in defining “life” indeed becomes a matter of life and
death, especially in confronting contemporary emergences of totalitarian states and
of their management of prisons, insane asylums, and of concentration camps.
Even Foucault’s work on investigating “processes of subjectivization,” as
Agamben points out, failed to acknowledge and confront modern biopolitics of the
concentration camp. In a chapter entitled “The Politicization of Life,” Agamben
envisions a trajectory for these “processes of subjectivization” whose beginnings
and endings are terminal, whether in treating terminal illnesses or in terminating
life as justified by totalitarian ideologies: “The inquiry that began with a
reconstruction of the *grand enfermement* in hospitals and prisons did not end with
an analysis of the concentration camp” (119). In including AIDS as a contemporary grand enfermement, and in considering the global proliferation of AIDS and its impact on worldly conditions for life, the institutional and cultural treatment of AIDS becomes yet another avatar for analyzing the state of modern imprisonments, and the preservation not of life but of thanatos (what Agamben calls the rise of “thanatopolitics”: “If there is a line in every modern state marking the point at which the decision on life becomes a decision on death, and biopolitics can turn into thanatopolitics, this line no longer appears today as a stable border between two clearly distinct zones” [122]). Though AIDS clinics and hospitals have continued to fundamentally function as sites for the “spatialization and verbalization of the pathological” (italics in original), to borrow Foucault’s assessment of eighteenth-century science,³ AIDS wards have also become holding cells for the criminilization of diseased bodies. The medical gaze maintained in these AIDS holding cells begins to scrutinize the viral states of individuals as subject to the state’s inspection.

In The Birth of the Clinic: An Archaeology of Medical Perception, Foucault is preoccupied not only with the medical “gaze,” but also with how that gaze has power over marginal urban bodies that are primarily defined in their biological relation to the state. After the French Revolution, hospitals became social experiments funded by rich benefactors who promoted state-sanctioned construction of clinics. In short, hospitals became centers for heuristic studies of epidemiology. Marginal bodies become the primary texts from which regulatory
medical practices would be written on and about. For Enlightenment physicians, such as Pomme, these bodies became organic texts, and in the eighteenth century, the scientific gaze was distorted by textual sources not always originating from scientific conventions. For instance, when Pomme finished the autopsy of a woman suffering from hysteria, he saw in her nervous system "membranous tissues like pieces of damp parchment" (as quoted in Foucault, ix). Pomme's use of autopsy suggests that the emergence of the hospital came at the expense of two vital needs: to cure, and to understand how disease was closely tied to an economic enterprise. While ailing and marginal bodies provided vital knowledge on disease, hospital financiers capitalized on a "vital interest" that collapsed the pursuit of wealth and capital with the study of vital processes or life functions (vita is, after all, life, but for the rich, life is capital). In other words, hospitals began to capitalize on life (ζωή), especially since rich benefactors invested resources and paid the poor to be specimens of study:

In a regime of economic freedom, the hospital had found a way of interesting the rich; the clinic constitutes the progressive reversal of the other contractual part; it is the interest paid by the poor on the capital that the rich have consented to invest in the hospital; an interest that must be understood by its heavy surcharge, since it is a compensation that is of the order of objective interest for science and of vital interest for the rich. The hospital became viable for private initiative from the moment that sickness, which had come to seek a cure, was turned into a spectacle (85, italics in original trans.).

The hospital, and its teaching component the clinic, rendered the sacred materiality of all life (its "ζωή") into a medical spectacle closely tied to the state by economic and political contractual pressures when life is solely defined by its
biological reaction to disease and dying. In *Homo Sacer*, Agamben, by way of Foucault and Arendt, and informed by the atrocities of Nazi scientists and their military, interrogates the nexus between life, death, and the *polis*: “Placing biological life at the center of its calculations, the modern State therefore does nothing other than bring to light the secret tie uniting power and bare life, thereby reaffirming the bond (derived from a tenacious correspondence between the modern and the archaic which one encounters in the most diverse spheres) between modern power and the most immemorial of the *arcana imperii*” (6). The bonds between life, death, and the *polis* were revisited as Cuba initially tried to maintain its AIDS epidemic. Specific to Cuba, though, the hospital and the clinic began to adopt “talleres literarios” (“literary workshops”) as one more permutation in which regimens of biopower could bond the relationship between the life of the AIDS patient and the vitality of the state.

**Writing AIDS: Literary Workshops & Sanatoriums**

For its notoriety and contemporaneous practice, the more egregious example of containment and incarceration of AIDS victims in medical camps, though not the only one in the Americas, is Cuba’s establishment of the Villa Los Cocos sanatorium in Santiago de Las Vegas, a suburb of La Havana. Even though as of June 2001 fifteen sanatoriums existed in Cuba, the Los Cocos locale incorporated in 1992 a series of “talleres literarios” (“writing workshops”) as part of the medical, psychological, psychiatric, and social programs for Cubans quarantined with AIDS. The first writing workshop was created in 1992 at Los
Cocos, and aptly named “La montaña mágica” (“the magic mountain,” after
Mann’s own sanatorium novel, Der Zauberberg/The Magic Mountain [1924]).
From this workshop, eighteen short stories were published in a collection entitled
_Toda esa gente solitaria: 18 cuentos cubanos sobre el SIDA_ (“All the Lonely
People: 18 Cuban Short Stories about AIDS”), after John Lennon and Paul
McCartney’s 1966 hit song “Eleanor Rigby”: “Ah, look at all the lonely people”
(quoted in Spanish translation in the prologue).

Naming a Cuban literary workshop after Mann’s _The Magic Mountain_ is
not gratuitous. Linking American epidemiology with Europe’s reflects its
constant transatlantic epidemiological exchange underscored by colonial and
French Enlightenment natural histories. For Hans Castorp, the object and subject
of Mann’s novel, the International Sanatorium Berghof provides a forum by which
the state’s discourse on disease (tuberculosis in the case of the Swiss sanatorium
and AIDS in the Cuban clinic) could be mapped onto its patients as science
without disclosing apparent ideological narratives. In _The Postmodern Condition:
A Report on Knowledge_, Jean-François Lyotard recognized the ideological
composition of any scientific discourse, especially when scientific knowledge is
made variable by media, scientists’ personal sentiments, and the state’s
manipulation of scientific knowledge as a modern form of the “epic”:

[Scientists] recount an epic of knowledge that is in fact wholly unepic. They play by the rules of the narrative game; its influence remains considerable not only on the users of the media, but also on the scientist’s sentiments. This fact is neither trivial nor accessory: it concerns the relationship of scientific knowledge to “popular” knowledge, or what is left
of it. The state spends large amounts of money to enable science to pass itself off as an epic: the State's own credibility is based on that epic, which it uses to obtain the public consent its decision makers need.\textsuperscript{6}

The outstanding question in discussing novels about disease is the extent to which literature reifies scientific knowledge of disease, what Lyotard calls the "epic of knowledge," and whether it is able to challenge official discourses on disease. In the case of Mann's novel, the social aspects of the disease are stressed, and it is not clear whether the affluent suffering from tuberculosis wanted to challenge their medical care, given their comfortable surroundings. Moreover, Jo Colston, a investigator at London's National Institute for Medical Research, explains in "Descending the Magic Mountain: How Early Clinical Trials Transformed the Treatment of Tuberculosis" that a salient feature of Mann's novel is in describing not the disease itself, but instead—in the Greek sense of epic as "narrative"\textsuperscript{7}—the social narrative of disease, the "epic" of tuberculosis: "The Magic Mountain explores the relationship between love and life in an atmosphere of sickness and death; it is also part of twentieth century social history, describing the everyday life within an institution which was commonplace in its day, the tuberculosis sanatorium."\textsuperscript{8}

As Castorp himself experiences in his seven-year treatment, the sanatorium at Berghof is a place where understanding the social repercussions of disease becomes more important than the study of tuberculosis. Naming the Cuban writing workshop after Mann's novel highlights two integral parts in Cuba's containment of disease: the state needs to create a metaphoric space to speak
about disease as a form of fiction or as inhabiting an other-worldly space separate from the health of the nation; furthermore, the state also needs to legitimize the spatial isolation of diseased patients. In Mann’s novel, the geographical placement of the Swiss sanatorium beyond the general population stresses that the sequestering of diseased bodies away from the *polis* is deemed necessary to be cured. Han’s cousin, Joachim, confesses that “‘our sanatorium lies at a higher altitude than the village. [. . .] The highest of the sanatoriums is Schatzalp, across the way, you can’t see it now. They have to transport the bodies down by bobsled in the winter, because the roads are impassable.’”9 In short, the state would like to disseminate the notion that isolation leads to cure, as suggested by Mann’s fiction, and by the Cuban government’s quarantine of PLWAs (people living with AIDS).

In Mann’s *zoē/bios* sanatorium dialectic, early medical treatments of life depended on erasing the singularity of life and on stressing the close relationship between *bios* and the state’s construction of tuberculosis. The novel suggests that the social interactions of the diseased with doctors lead to knowledge on tuberculosis. In *The Magic Mountain*, the social and *bios* functions of disease (how the diseased life interacts with doctors, for example), rather than epidemiology, resulted in knowledge about the disease. For example, consumptive dead bodies did not prompt medical scrutiny, and instead, were discarded “by bobsled in the winter.”

Unlike Pomme’s use of autopsy, in Mann’s novel dead bodies did not provide new knowledge on the nature and treatment of tuberculosis. Autopsies
were therefore irrelevant; in fact, knowledge of disease was constructed by way of social interactions. Joachim indifferently tells Hans that the living body *per se* does not yield to knowledge: “It doesn’t matter to the bodies” he replies with a shrug, and then explains that even the body really does not matter to the sanatorium’s physicians, especially to the chief assistant, Krokowski, since “He dissects the patients’ psyches” (9). Even though this scene of “psychic dissection” ends in laughter for Hans and Joachim (“Psychic dissection had finished the job, and he bent over and laughed” [9]), Mann’s novel provides a blueprint for studying how authors and their fiction stage disease, and how writing has material relevance and impact on actual medical discourses.

The prologue to *Toda esa gente solitaria* is especially resonant in assembling, for political and sanitary purposes, medical and fictional narratives on disease. Naming their AIDS workshop after Mann’s novel on tuberculosis dramatizes, even if in name only, the conflation of cultural and medical narratives. The *taller* was composed of HIV+ writers who were there as part of their medical assessment and as part of the quarantine’s social policing: the workshop provided an artistic outlet for writers deemed a viral threat to others and to the Cuban state. In *The Magic Mountain*, Settembrini concluded that literature and its metaphors are not at odds with disease, and that literature can be a vehicle where science and fiction inform (and form) each other and, to borrow from a pertinent discussion on science and literature in Londa Schiebinger’s *Nature’s Body*, where “metaphors and analogies are themselves constitutive elements of science.” For Settembrini,
then, literature complemented a multivolume work on the "science" of dying,
which he entitled *The Sociology of Suffering*, along with its encyclopedic
compendium, *Sociological Pathology*:

This immense work does not wish to see *belles-lettres* neglected, either, at
least to the extent that they speak of human suffering. Literature is
therefore to have its own volume, which is to contain, as solace and advice
for those who suffer, a synopsis and short analysis of all masterpieces of
world literature dealing with every such conflict (243).

Translating the workshop’s name from the German *Der Zauberberg* to the Spanish
"La montaña mágica," and including the writing workshop experience as part of a
cadre of medical therapies, dramatizes the convergence of literary and scientific
narratives surrounding AIDS.

In the prologue to *Toda esa gente* terms like "inmate," "AIDS patient" or
"HIV-positive," lose historical specificity, reflecting Cuba’s on-going history of
physically isolating all bodies linked with disease and with sexual and political
heterodoxies. Take, for example, Cuban work camps erected in 1965 by the
UMAP (Military Units to Aid Production) that in the late 1970s punished citizens
deemed homosexual and/or radicals. In *Significant Violence: Oppression and
Resistance in the Narratives of Juan Goytisolo, 1970-1990*, Bradley Epps also
connects these forced labor camps, at least in their deployment of manual labor as
a form of social and sexual reformation, with European concentration camps. The
UMAP’s slogan, "Work Will Make You Men," echoes the motto of "Work Will
Set You Free" emblazoned on the entrance to Auschwitz. Moreover, though
work camps had closed under national and international pressure by the late
1970s, by 1986 AIDS sanatoriums opened in Havana, which included mandatory testing, forced isolation, and quarantine (Epps 408).

In discussing Cuba’s imprisonment of AIDS bodies, it is especially important to historicize Cuba’s reaction to AIDS and Cuba’s relative understanding of AIDS as not strictly a homosexual disease, a stark contrast to the U.S.’s earlier, and ongoing, punitive misreading of AIDS as a “gay cancer.” In Machos, Maricones and Gays, Ian Lumsden argues that there is little evidence to support that the Cuban government “exploited homosexuals as scapegoats for the epidemic”; moreover, even though their AIDS-prevention literature is heterosexist in approach, the Ministry of Public Health promulgated the fact that “‘AIDS is not something exclusive to homosexuals’” (164). Though the enforced quarantine of AIDS victims in Cuba was criticized abroad, not everyone on the island considered this quarantine as a shocking approach to controlling epidemics. It is fair to add that the Cuban government had consistently promulgated quarantines in major national epidemics, including dengue and African swine fever, and that the quarantine of AIDS victims become one more example of such medical approach. Because of this history of quarantines, Cubans were more likely, according to Lumsden, to “submit to the dictates of medical officers who ‘know what is best for them.’”

In contrast to this public and seemingly un-homophobic approach to AIDS as supported by Lumsden, Cuba’s recent history of incarcerating political and sexual dissidents (starting in the 1960s) does highlight that imprisoning
metaphors, and their material realization, continued to exert influence as AIDS emerged in Cuba. Cuba's history of practicing quarantines resurrected again with AIDS, though in the case of AIDS, this reincarnation would be singularly medical and penal: the urge to imprison and to cure is perhaps a new reaction by states that link individual viral loads to a nation's health. Thus, in promulgating quarantines, the state has its own health and its own secrets to maintain since viruses lay bare epidemiological, social, and political conditions. In short, manifestations of disease break silences and open up secrets.

Writing AIDS: Prophylactic Prologues

In analyzing the companion prologue to the short stories in *Toda esa gente*, attributes germane to medical wards functioning as clinics, prisons, and concentration camps begin to emerge. Such attributes will be revisited again when Sarduy and Goytisolo write accounts of AIDS wards in their own novels, and how medical and penal responses to the pandemic are subject to a variety of scientific, moralistic, and ideological narratives. The prologue of *Toda esa gente* by Lourdes Jomolca and José Atanes deserves attention because it inhabits a liminal space between fiction on AIDS and HIV clinical treatments. Moreover, demarcations in the prologue between fiction and science also begin to show how the state is careful to control fictions emanating as a result of the pandemic, both artistic and scientific.

The prologue describes the surrounding areas of the clinic, officially known as the Santiago de Las Vegas Sanatorium, as appealing to tourism for its
"incredible beauty and popular imagination." The prologue's description, while outwardly objective, serves to justify and intertwine the legacy of colonial leper sanatoriums with the contemporary construction of AIDS colonies. Thus, the construction of the AIDS sanatorium at Los Cocos stresses a history of Cuban epidemics that have always quarantined the sick and isolated the ill from general populations:

> It is then that the Cuban state, and perhaps because of the circumstantial panic, adopts one of the most controversial decisions in the history of the nation's health: to halt the scourge of AIDS in a radical and timely manner, the obligatory internment of all carriers of the virus is put into effect. 

Thus, on April 30, 1986, a sanatorium is created on the outskirts of Santiago de Las Vegas (a suburban neighborhood of the capital) bearing the name of “Villa Los Cocos,” after the name of the attractive manor house that existed there for many years past. This site—with antonomastic touristy appeal—is very close to the aging city of Bejucal, known for more than a century for its traditional festivities or charangas, as they are also known for their spectacles of great beauty and of popular imagination. But
closer still—geographically and spiritually—and not even a mile away, the large house of El Rincón, a shelter for a nineteenth-century leper colony annexed to the Church of San Lorenzo (known as Babalú-Ayé in Afro-Cuban Santeria rituals), the Patron Saint of those with the most externally repulsive illness on the surface of the planet: the lame, the purulent, the deformed, among others.

This description of the sanatorium’s history is notable in its efforts to point out a specific date for the “birth of the clinic” and of AIDS, “el 30 de abril de 1986” (“April 30, 1986”). Earlier, Jomolca and Atanes had described the appearance of AIDS as “publicly flowering in Cuba during the year, of our Lord?, 1986” (11, question mark in original). In this case, the “birth” of the clinic is made synonymous with the appearance of AIDS. The prologue also strives to collapse variant epidemiological histories: the sanatorium’s AIDS quarantine history is verbalized as following the adjacent leprosarium’s colonial foundation. For an AIDS ward to be viable, its space must be naturalized as a locus for the containment of epidemics. In his preface to The Birth of the Clinic, Foucault argued that medical language becomes a medium for rational discourse and for embedding what cannot be medically seen into what can be described as seen. Therefore, “the articulation of medical language and its object will appear as a single feature” (xi). In the case of description of the leprosarium’s proximity to the AIDS ward at Los Cocos, medical and folklore enunciations embedded in the prologue’s quote serve to adjoin three narratives into a single and purportedly “objective” description: the environs of Los Cocos, known for its “touristy appeal” (“This site—with antonomastic touristy appeal”) [my emphasis],
juxtapose the history of musical performances of charangas, which in turn describes the leper colony near the church of San Lorenzo. Thus, tourism, folklore and the surrounding areas of the AIDS sanatorium all contribute to making Los Cocos the endemic space for quarantines: this is the perceived historical space where the ill come to reside, and where doctors provide medical care.

Indeed, and borrowing Foucault’s terminology, the “verbalization” of pathology in this neighborhood of Santiago de las Vegas serves to justify its “spatialization,” the presence of the AIDS wards on the outskirts of La Havana: “We must place ourselves, and remain once and for all, at the level of the fundamental spatialization and verbalization of the pathological, where the loquacious gaze with which the doctor observes the poisonous heart of things is born and communes with itself” [italics in original] (xi-xii). The prologue’s description of “geographic and spiritual” proximity ("But closer still—geographically and spiritually—") of the historical leprosarium to the AIDS sanatorium seems to justify the continued “spatialization” of a quarantined space at Los Cocos. Though the 1986 presence of an AIDS sanatorium was naturalized in space and in time to the former colonial leprosarium, in its encroaching geography and continued emotive appeal, Los Cocos was also deemed, in social practice, to be the interstitial space where marginal and sick bodies have always resided. Even in mentioning “San Lorenzo” (“Saint Lawrence”), the prologue’s deployment of Christian iconography turns to disease and its cure, an iconographic maneuver that will be examined in chapter 4, “Queer Iconography,” especially
because authors adopt another plagued saint, Saint Sebastian, as an icon for curing AIDS and for representing queer dissidence against state and church regimens.

The prologue stresses, for example, how Saint Lawrence has been linked with the sick and with miraculous cures for leprosy, "San Lorenzo [...] Santo Patrón de los enfermos más externamente repulsivos de la tierra: lúanse baldados, purulentos, contrahechos y demás" (12; Saint Lawrence [...] the Patron Saint of those with the most externally repulsive illness on the surface of the planet: the lame, the purulent, the deformed, among others”). Since his death in the second century, Saint Lawrence has become one of the most honored martyrs of the Roman Church. In 258 C.E., Roman Emperor Valerian issued an edict commanding all church officials to be persecuted. Saint Lawrence was the seventh and the last deacon to be captured.14 Since then, Saint Lawrence’s iconography as a “plague saint” has appealed to the poor, to the disabled, and to the sick.

The prologue’s syncretism, in its efforts to collapse different epidemiological genealogies, to link leprosy and AIDS for example, is also made apparent when both authors mention that the patron saint of the locale where the sanatorium is located, Saint Lawrence, is both a Christian icon and an African deity, popularly known in santería as Babalú-Ayé. Moreover, the epidemiological history recounted in the prologue traces a historical trajectory of past hospitals, and collapses any differentiation between religious devotion, leprosy, colonial histories, or AIDS. In the prologue, for example, the localization of the sanatorium is contextualized within a colonial sphere when charangas (masked
carnivals) provided moments of unorthodox religious outlets during colonial times.

The prologue’s passing mention of the charangas quite literally masquerades the fact that past colonial histories of quarantining lepers are used to legitimize modern sequestering of AIDS patients. The suburb of Santiago de las Vegas had been a main hub for charangas street performances, which took place before major Christian holidays, namely the December 24th high mass, also known as la misa de gallo (“cockerel mass” or midnight mass). La Jiribilla, an online Cuban literary magazine, describes the charangas as springing from the Spanish colonial presence in Cuba. They acted as a carnival before high holy days. One of the more important neighborhoods for the charangas performance had been in Santiago de las Vegas, where the AIDS sanatorium was first erected:

Nos referimos a las llamadas parrandas que se desarrollan en las zonas centrales del país y las charangas de la provincia La Habana (Bejucal), que, aunque con menos esplendor y trayectoria en el tiempo, también se efectuaron en Santiago de las Vegas. […] y, por otra parte, el hacer jolgorios en las iglesias los días festivos fue costumbre que de la propia España pasó a Cuba, donde en algunas ocasiones hubo necesidad de prohibirlos cuando éste subía de tono, como hizo en el siglo XVIII el obispo Vera Calderón.15

[We are referring to the so-called celebrations that developed in the central zones of the country and the charangas of La Habana province (in Bejucal), that, though with less splendor and history, they also took place in Santiago de las Vegas. (...) and holding carnivals in churches during holy days was passed on from Spain to Cuba, though on some occasions there was a need to prohibit them when they became excessive, something that bishop Vera Calderón did during the eighteenth century.]
Moreover, in earlier times the *charangas* became a form of resistance to orthodoxy: the on-line journalist for *La Jiribilla* remarks how though *charangas* were initially part of the church festivities, "el hacer jolgorios en las iglesias" ("and holding carnivals in churches"), they were also prohibited during the eighteenth century by the Church. To what extent is Los Cocos a space where the state continues to manage the free movement of bodies deemed anomalous to religious practice, in the case of the eighteenth-century *charangas*, or to state health, in the case of late twentieth-century PLWAs? As the prologue to *Toda esa gente solitaria* dramatizes, any knowledge of AIDS emanates from a variety of knowledge narratives: official medical knowledge; societal interpretations of these medical dictums; how doctors react to their own reading of societal norms related to AIDS; and how this reaction influences medical decisions. Overall, the prologue to *Toda esa gente solitaria* serves to naturalize the physical and metaphoric space of the AIDS ward so that it conflates the neighborhood’s colonial leper legacy with that of the Santiago de las Vegas sanatorium’s "ongoing" history as the site for AIDS quarantines.

The end of the prologue is also a testament of patriarchal and heterosexist and *machista* readings of AIDS in Cuba. Though both Jomolca and Atanes comment on the lack of women authors in the collection of stories, they point out that it is the male anatomy that has been besieged by prophesies of death from AIDS. Both observe, for example, how AIDS has plagued "la parte (más débil) del sexo (más fuerte)" (23-24; "the weakest part of the stronger sex"): 
Se extraña también ¡y de que forma! la presencia de mujeres en la muestra. No tenemos respuesta para una ausencia tan notoria, [. . .]

Por último, valga subrayar, que si el SIDA fue considerado en su ignoto principio como la vigencia contemporánea del Apocalipsis para la parte (más débil) del sexo (más fuerte), la Historia trajo de inmediato su propia y definitiva versión de este conflicto. En breve las aguas tomaron su nivel y hoy día en el mundo casi cualquier tipo de contacto (salvando quizá los políticos y los deportivos) es valedero para la transmisión de la enfermedad. Podemos evadir o asediar con innumerables precauciones un rostro bello—de distinto canon o género—y tener el virus aguardando a la vuelta de la esquina, en el altruismo de una trasfusión sanguínea o en el disloque de una jeringa compartida hacia la busca de la infinitud cósmica (23-24, my emphasis).

[The presence of women, and how! is missing from the compendium of short stories. We do not have an answer for such a notorious absence, (...]

Lastly, it’s worth emphasizing, that if AIDS was considered in its unknown beginning as the contemporary force of the Apocalypse against the weakest part of the stronger sex, History immediately offered its own and definite version of the conflict. Soon the waters returned to their level and today in any part of the world any type of contact (except perhaps political and athletic ones) is a conduit for transmission. We can evade or besiege with innumerable precautions a beautiful face—of distinct canon or genre—and have the virus waiting for us just around the street corner, or in the altruism of a blood transfusion, or in piercing the skin with a shared needle, in search of a cosmic infinitude.]

In the rhetoric of a healthy nation, the presence of AIDS cannot co-exist with a nation’s patriotism, and hence two icons of Cuban national pride, politicians and athletes, “salvando quizá los políticos y los deportivos” (“except perhaps political and athletic ones”), are the only contacts, according to Jomolca and Atanes, who remain “AIDS-free.” On a relevant and related topic on nationalism and disease, Thomas Yingling, a prominent AIDS critic who died from the disease in the late 1990s, argues that nationalism (referring to American
jingoism) excludes AIDS from the national body, and therefore "scribes disease as foreign and allows AIDS to be read therefore as anti-American."\textsuperscript{16} Except for supporters of Cuban politics and its sports programs, the above quote also suggests that the only safe communal and national contact in a time of AIDS is found in the citizen's incorporation of political and athletic icons in the bodily politics of individuals. In order to resist the threat of AIDS, individuals must in-corporate (must quite literally embody) safer contacts through connections with the state and with a state-sanctioned physicality, namely politics and sports. The citation also suggests that in order to defend the state, political and athletic discourses should be recuperated, especially since the end of the prologue, excluding the case of hemophiliacs, sexualizes and criminalizes pleasure, eroticism, and non-normative sexualities.

The end of the prologue suggests that AIDS infections result from desires linked to sex and prostitution, "un rostro bello" ("a pretty face"); or the imp of prostitution "a la vuelta de la esquina" ("around the street corner"); and finally, to drug habits, "disloque de una jeringa compartida" ("or piercing the skin with a shared needle"). Furthermore, this vision of AIDS as inhabiting spaces of desire that must be contained by the Cuban state had a real material realization: the sanatorium at Los Cocos was first administered by MINFAR, Cuba's Ministry of Defense, and the sanatorium infrastructure initially was "surrounded by a high concrete wall" (Lumsden 163). Furthermore, the defense of the state came at the heels of medical-ward spaces that were verbalized as hospitals, but functioned as
prisons. Not only was there a *calabazo* ("a prison cell") at the AIDS sanatorium of Santiago de las Vegas, but also any internees that tried to escape were sent to the clinic’s east corner, a jail known as the *Combinado del Este* (163; "East Cell Prison"). The viral, and vital, security of the island was preserved not only by a staff of doctors, and at least initially, by prison-cell wardens.

In their prologue to *Toda esa gente solitaria*, Jomolca and Atanes vindicate and justify a Cuban history of quarantines and social excommunication based on social and moral conduct. In the case of medical treatments offered at the Santiago de las Vegas sanatorium, the implementation of a character and behavior analysis as part of a medical treatment, "un análisis integral de la conducta" (14; "an integral analysis of behavior"), suggests that a "cure," or at least the chance to leave the clinic, depended on first adjudicating moral guilt as a precursor to social and medical well-being. Internalizing this "guilt" also became apparent in many of the short stories emanating from the *talleres literarios*. Jomolca and Atanes, for example, stress the fact that during the first ten years of the clinic, patients could only receive visitors. Eventually, patients were allowed to leave the institution followed by "un acompañante" ("a companion"). After passing merits for "buena conducta" ("good conduct"), inmates would receive the coveted certificate of "trustworthiness" ("de ‘confiabilidad’," in the original):

Para ellos (y he aquí otra perpetua fuente de problemas) los contactos con el exterior—aparte de las reglamentadas visitas de familiares y amigos—se redujeron durante una buena parte de estos diez años a los exiguos paseos periódicos siempre a la sombra de un inapelable acompañante designado por el centro o el logro del apetecido status de “confiabilidad”, especie de
certificado de buena conducta concedido o negado por una Comisión creada al efecto, tras proceder con periódicidad a un análisis integral de la conducta del seropositivo y a la asunción madura de su papel como posible ente contaminante (14, my emphasis).

[For them (and hence the on-going source of problems), contacts with the outside world—apart from regimented visits by family members and friends—were reduced during a good first part of these ten years to the periodic and exiguous exit permits, but always shadowed by an unnamed companion designated by the center, or by obtaining the coveted status of trustworthiness, a type of certificate for good conduct granted or denied by a Commission created just for this purpose, and only after proceeding with regularity to an integral analysis of the behavior of the HIV-positive patient and with the mature assumption of their role as possible contaminating agent.]

If the implementation of the “good conduct” test strives to prevent further contamination during those first ten years of the existence of the quarantine (starting in 1986), the prologue also maintains this rhetoric of quarantine in the “preventive,” self-diagnosed role of the compendium’s prologue: the index to the *Toda este gente solitaria* gives the title for the prologue as “Palabras preventivas, Lourdes Zayón Jomolca y José Ramón Fajardo Atanes/Pág. 9” (191; “Preventive Words, Lourdes Zayón Jomolca and José Ramón Fajardo Atanes/p. 9”). The index title indicates that without a “preventive” prologue the short stories would be all too germinal (to follow the Deleuzian rhizome), and all too contagious. In general, the function of prologues is as “preface or introduction to a discourse or performance,” and by adding the adjective “preventive” (“Palabras preventivas”), Jomolca and Atanes strive to inoculate readers from a reality that continues to plague Cuban society and literature. In the case of literature, the prologue suggests that literature in the time of AIDS can function both as a carrier
of AIDS histories and as a safe exposure to AIDS narratives. In short, the Jomolca and Atanes prologue functions as a prose prophylactic. In the case of Toda esa gente solitaria, the prologue functions not only as “before the word” (pro-logos), but also as the seemingly curative and moralistic preface before infectious words and tales come into contact with the reader.

Paradoxically, the efforts to prevent the intimate contact between AIDS inmates and the Cuban community may actually foster the spread of disease in the population at large. The prologue to Toda esa gente is especially illuminating about the contradictions inherent in the creation of viral scapegoats. The endnote to the following passage (in the original, endnote 3) suggests that obtaining freedom from the clinic depended on how the examining authorities interpreted the inmate/patients’ morality, rather than their knowledge of safe sex: “Y también una forma subjetiva de ascender en la escala de valores de las autoridades competentes, lo cual—como se dice en el pueblo—uno nunca sabe cuando y para qué le va a hacer falta” (footnote 3, 14; “And also, another subjective way of ascending in the scale of values generated by competent authorities, one which—as is colloquially known—one never knows when and for what it is going to be needed”). AIDS activists may agree that a discussion of safe sex, for example, is one important facet of containing the disease. From both this passage and its endnote, it is unclear whether safe-sex guidelines became part of the character analysis imparted in the initial ten years of the quarantine.
It is also less clear whether such safe-sex guidelines were given as AIDS inmates were allowed more freedoms to travel outside of the clinic. In the case of Los Cocos, the examination of conduct inscribes disease not within medical dictums of safe sex or abstinence, but under an ambiguous and extremely subjective “escala de valores” (“scale of values”) inscribed by “autoridades competentes” (“competent authorities”). In this regard, AIDS patients who do leave the clinic may not be empowered with the tools, such as condoms, if available, or the knowledge, to prevent the spread of AIDS, since the rhetoric of the quarantine only stresses that its inmates are the only carriers. Lumsden points out that the quarantine system “may foster a false belief that sexual partners outside the sanatoriums are free from the disease. Cubans as a group still have little knowledge about AIDS” (170). The “scale of values” also does not prevent the wider community from empowering themselves to prevent infection, since only a minority of individuals are perceived as the sole carriers.

At Los Cocos, Agamben’s distinction between life as zoē and life as bios is especially relevant to understanding the dynamics that help justify incarceration of life when the state faces epidemiological crisis. On the one hand, the life/zoē of AIDS bodies at the sanatorium of Santiago de Las Vegas is inscribed as singularly unique on account of their HIV status. Because of their HIV status, singular treatments were instituted that reflected Cuba’s epidemiological history of quarantines. On the other hand, the life/zoē of these AIDS bodies is influenced by medical policies and politics that condition AIDS, and the bodies it inhabits, as
subject to moral and penal pressures. The title itself, "Toda esa gente solitaria" ("All the lonely people"), highlights the loneliness that bodies with AIDS face in reality and in this literary compendium. Additionally, the state’s compassionate understanding of AIDS is at best momentary, as the end of the prologue itself suggests: "Por el momento hagamos compañía en el camino a toda esa gente solitaria" (24; "For the time being, let’s keep all those lonely people company"). "Compañía" ("company"), while meaning companionship, can also stand for the aggregate, the company, and the corporation. In the fiction emanating from Toda esa gente solitaria, bodies with AIDS continue to have an uneasy pilgrimage since they can never be fully incorporated into the body politic, and literature of the nation.

The prologue of Toda esa gente also takes advantage of fiction written by its own AIDS inmates to justify their physical and artistic containment, and as many of the stories show, to promote safe-sex campaigns while victimizing those who did not follow the state’s protocol on deemed safe sexual contacts. The short story, “No le pidas al diablo que llore” ("Don’t ask the devil to cry") by David Díaz Hernández, encapsulates the general dynamics of the compendium: it addresses questions of coming out, of sexual positions, of “top” and “bottom,” of safe sex, of the dangers of bare sex ("barebacking" designates the practice of not using condoms), and of the relationship of the Cuban state to the sick.

In this epistolary short story, the narrator, Román, writes from beyond the grave and leaves a letter for Daniel, a heterosexual friend, explaining how he came
in contact with AIDS, and because of his HIV diagnosis, how he decided to break up with his own boyfriend so as to not subject him to “los malos momentos que depara el posterior avance de la enfermedad” (94, “the bad times that the future will bring with the advance of the illness”). Moreover, the story ends with slogans on safe sex, and because of the solemn narration throughout the short story, the following slogans reflect an earnest trust in safe sex campaigns. The story also does not escape from easy binary designations for those dying from AIDS. While the healthy may end up in heaven, the sick may have to settle for hell:

Recuerda:  
Los condones no se inventaron para ser inflados.  
¡CUIDATE!  
Hasta que nos volvamos a encontrar  
yá sea en el INFIerno  
o en el PARAISO  
Román (94).

[Remember:  
Condoms were not invented to be only inflated.  
Take care of yourself!  
Until we see each other again  
either in HELL  
or in PARADISE  
Román.]

Román’s other-worldly voice suggests that even in his own death from AIDS, Román must testify, as criminals would, how he came to have AIDS, and how he satisfied pleasures deemed illicit for the state, especially since an HIV-positive soldier of the state was responsible for Román’s AIDS. In short, he must confess his guilt in contracting the disease.
In Román’s case, lust for an officer of Fidel Castro’s army prompted Román to accept a stranger’s sex offer after stepping down from their guagua (Cuban for bus): “Yo sólo alcancé a sonreír, y flechado por el natural proceder de aquel robusto oficial de nuestras Fuerzas Armadas no pude negarme a tan gentil proposición” (92-93, “I only managed to smile, and infatuated by the natural demeanor of that robust official of our armed forces, I did not deny such a genteel proposition”). Though the short story would suggest that the Cuban state itself is not impervious to disease, it is Román who ends his letter (and his lifespan of narration) with a safe-sex crusade. Even though an officer of Fidel’s army was the HIV carrier, the responsibility and guilt is reserved to the queer body. Even if the state could be upfront about its viral load, the hint of queerness would usurp the “robust officials” and its patriarchal and machista performance of power.

The source of the short story’s title is especially suggestive in creating spaces divided by health and viral status. From the ultra tumba, Román reminds Daniel that he should remember their favorite proverb, “En tierra de Dios, no le pidas al Diablo que llore” (“In God’s country, don’t ask the Devil to cry”). Román justifies his closeted status because “In God’s country” such identity is not possible: “En ese momento no podía permitir que ni tú, ni nadie descubriera mi inclinación sexual” (91, “In that moment, I could not permit even you, or anyone else, to know my sexual inclination”). The expression “En tierra de Dios” is especially troublesome because anything that is not godly, becomes unorthodox, aberrant, diabolic, and diseased. The story suggests that hell is designated for
those who are aberrant, both in their sexualities and in their epidemiology. Hell, in short, is now shared by moral sinners and by PLWAs alike. The story’s title suggests that people with AIDS, like the devil, cannot bring their woes, or their tears, to the “godly” land. Though they cannot participate in “the land of God,” victims of AIDS in the netherworld must still write narratives of redemption (supporting safe sex, for example) in order to do right for their misdeeds. If the stories themselves begin to generate accounts of people with AIDS as victims of their own pleasures, the prologue and the short stories in the compendium serve to legitimize in fiction the “scientific reasons” for isolating those with AIDS.

Sanatoriums and Literary Responses

In this section, the overall argument is that the AIDS wards and prisons in the novels by Sarduy and Goytisolo not only reflect the reality of AIDS wards in Iberoamerican fiction, but also show how medical and penal responses to the pandemic are subject to a variety of scientific, moralistic, and ideological narratives. In reading together the Cuban Sarduy’s Pájaros de la playa, and the Spaniard Goytisolo’s Las virtudes del pájaro solitario, hospital/prison metaphors construct fictional medical and penal spaces. In addition, these authors resist in their novels the easy collapse of penal and of medical histories and practices.

In Las virtudes, Goytisolo makes a direct plea against the incarceration of homosexuals in Cuba. The novel narrates the contamination, identification, and persecution of dissident bodies, but especially queer entities described as “rare birds.” This fragmentary novel explores the confluence of Christian and Sufi
mysticism as these “birds” countenance the decomposition of the human body and its ultimate death. As Bradley Epps points out, Las virtudes also conflates classical texts dealing with the divine and the queer. Especially notable are the twelfth-century Persian mystical poem, The Conference of the Birds by Farid ud-Din Attar, and the lost sixteenth-century treatise, Las propiedades del pájaro solitario (“the properties of the solitary bird”), by San Juan de la Cruz (Epps 381).

In Las virtudes, these queer “pájaros” (“birds”; in Spain, a slang both for homosexual and phallus) are being jailed by Fidel Castro, also described as another possible queer bird: “ese pájaro sutil, incoloro, asexuado, tiene algo que ver con los que el regidor de nuestra muy fiel isla de Cuba [que] hizo prender y enjaular recientemente en La Habana?, qué nexo hay entre los adeptos a la noche oscura y esa turba de pájaros capturada en sus guaridas nocturnas y cuya ejecución reclama a voces el público en el estadio”18 (“does this subtle, colorless, asexual bird have anything to do with the ones that the governor of our very faithful island of Cuba recently had arrested and put in jail in Havana?, what connection is there between the adepts of the dark night and that bunch of queer birds nabbed in their nocturnal lairs, whose execution the public in the stadium is screaming for?”).19 If the spectacle of autopsy had become the legitimizing force of eighteenth-century medical practices and biopower, in Las virtudes the spectacle of public immolations and hangings became, for contemporary states, yet another display of that biopower.
Goytisolo, for example, describes the incarceration and death of all heretical bodies in public pyres and in prisons, which included “alumbrados, poetas, dexados, místicos, hechiceros, judaizantes, nefandos?” (85; “illuminati, poets, unbelievers, mystics, sorcerers, Judaizers, those guilty of the abominable sun?” [80]). In juxtaposition, in Sarduy’s Pájaros heretical bodies die in isolated clinics ruled with penal rigor. Pájaros, like Goytisolo’s Las virtudes, recounts the ravages inflicted on the body by the passing of time and by the emergence of disease. In the novel, an aging woman, Siempreviva (“always living”) searches for a cure for the unnamed disease. Coming to her aid are theriomorphic impostor medics named Caballo and Caimán, “horse” and “alligator,” respectively. The novel ends with an account by a Cosmologist who begins to prefigure in his astronomical observations a close link between astronomy and epidemiology.

Finally, Pájaros examines the impact that pandemics have on the homosexual body, on writing, and on the connections between bodies and texts. It is not always easy, or possible, to isolate the author’s own diseased body from fictional works on disease, or how an author’s last work may affect the reading of the author’s entire corpus. In the case of Pájaros, the connection between the author’s biology and his work of fiction is terminally dramatized: the publication of Pájaros in 1993 coincides with Sarduy’s death that same year due to AIDS complications. The novel also marks Sarduy’s departure from prior novelistic work before the publication of Pájaros.
In *La ruta de Severo Sarduy*, Roberto González Echevarría remarks on the deliberate superficiality of Sarduy’s earlier texts, on the lack of authorial contestations, on the arbitrariness of language, and ultimately, on the nonexistent “stream of consciousness”: “Esto se observa en una gran ausencia en Sarduy: el flujo de conciencia. No hay representación del flujo de conciencia autorial o de personajes que pretenda mostrar la conciencia antes del lenguaje, ya sea mediante rupturas sintácticas, reiteraciones, o cualquiera de los recursos legados por la modernidad, sobre todo siguiendo los modelos de Joyce y Faulkner”

The following is observed as a great absence in Sarduy: the stream of consciousness. There is no representation of the authorial stream of consciousness or by characters that pretend to demonstrate consciousness before language, either by way of syntactic ruptures, reiterations, or any of the tools left by modernity’s legacy, especially following models by Joyce and Faulkner”.

Standing apart from such later works as *Colibrí* (1984), *Pájaros* is published in 1993, five years after the publication of *La ruta de Severo Sarduy*. The analysis in *La ruta*, therefore, cannot include the variant turn in *Pájaros’* style of narration and of content. Unlike earlier fiction by Sarduy, neither the male transvestite nor the literary ephebe dominates the narration in *Pájaros*. In *Pájaros*, homosexual characters are also absent, both as specific themes and as embodiments of desire. An analysis of *Pájaros* reveals that AIDS becomes, for Sarduy, a conduit to his literary past. The appearance of AIDS allows Sarduy to
return to earlier themes, or to reject them, as he does with the disappearance of the homosexual body from his last novel.

In this novel, Sarduy distances the homosexual body from the unnamed disease, and thus resists the objectification of the homosexual body as the only receptacle for the pandemia: in Pájaros, all youth suffer from the unnamed disease and "eran jóvenes prematuramente marchitados por la falta de fuerza, golpeados de repente por el mal" (20; "were youth prematurely wilted by lack of strength, suddenly struck down by the disease"). In Pájaros, the apparent stylistic fireworks and the baroque approach to writing homosexual desire is occluded, as in his collection of poems, Un testigo fugaz y disfrazado, in which "[...] el amor homosexual viene a ser aquí metáfora de todo eros, de todo deseo, lectura radical de la tradición petrarquista que llega a su cenit con Góngora y Quevedo. Todo amor, aunque da vida instantánea, es para la muerte" (González Echevarría 223; "[...] the homosexual love comes to be here a metaphor for all eros, for all desire, a radical reading of the Petrarchan tradition that reaches its zenith with Góngora and Quevedo. All love, though it give instantaneous life, is for death").

In Pájaros, homosexual desire is no longer the only emblem for Eros, death, and sex. Desire, thanatos, and sexual drives are also mediated through epidemiological discourses. Though the specific sexual identities are not disclosed in Pájaros, all the characters residing on the island suffer from a common ailment, "el mal" (in Spanish, meaning both illness and "evil"). The islanders, for example, though young in age, appear old, and are described as
viejos caquéxicos, amarillentos y desdentados, las manos temblorosas y los ojos secos, los que, envueltos en anchas camisolas, estaban sentados en los bancos de hierro adosados a las paredes del pentágono"21 ("decrepit old men, yellow and toothless, with trembling hands and dry eyes, and those wrapped in wide night shirts, were seating in iron benches against the walls of the pentagon"). Along with Goytisolo’s Las virtudes, Pájaros situates a discourse that continues to associate disease, death, desire, and thanatos with marginal bodies. The young/old men in the above citation share the same fate of dying too young, and of living isolated outside the walls of a pentagon, the site both of their treatment and of their incarceration. Both works reveal much about how the state manipulates the qualities of life as zoë and bios to implicate, medically and criminally, diseased bodies.

Furthermore, Pájaros is Sarduy’s reaction to Cuba’s quarantine and incarceration of AIDS bodies. The novel begins with a description of the clinic’s interior. The description oscillates between images of hospitals and of fortresses. This initial description of the clinic dramatizes the confluence of two worlds, the penal and the medical: “Por uno de los cinco pasillos de mosaico blanco y paredes encaladas que conducen al jardín, avanza como una sonámbula una niña despeinada y rubia; cuando se acerca, greñosa y calva. Lleva lentes muy gruesos y una bata de casa rafda y roja. Parece muy ocupada, concentrada en alguna idea o en un recuerdo lejano que intenta en vano revivir” (19; “Passing through one of the five halls made of white marble and of jagged walls that lead to the garden, a
girl with disheveled blond hair advances like a sleepwalker; but when she approaches, she is filthy and bald. She wears very thick glasses and a worn red housecoat. She seems occupied, concentrated on some idea, or some distant memory that in vain she tries to relive.

At the end of this passage, the omniscient narrator describes once again the clinic, and its garden, as a pentagon: “El jardín central es, por supuesto, un pentágono; isósceles de cristal arman el techo; el ensamblaje es dorado” (20; “The central garden is, of course, a pentagon; a crystal isosceles forms the roof; the structure is golden”). The utilization of space as a material application of ideology is reminiscent of totalizing structures in “La biblioteca de Babel” by Jorge Luis Borges. The library of Babel is deemed to hold all human knowledge within an all-encompassing hexagonal structure. Both pentagons and hexagons signify spaces in which universes can be ordered: “El universo (que otros llaman la Biblioteca) se compone de un número indefinido, y tal vez infinito, de galerías hexagonales, con vastos pozos de ventilación en el medio, cercados por barandas bajísimas” (85; “The universe [which others call the Library] is composed by an indefinite, and perhaps even infinite number of hexagonal galleries. In the center of each gallery is a ventilation shaft, bounded by a low railing”).

Since all human experience is preserved in the library of Babel, it is not surprising that disease underscores the exultation, maintenance, and the exegesis of its books. Moreover, hexagons in “La biblioteca de Babel” and pentagons in Pájaros hold within their structures diseases that can decimate entire populations:
“Yo conozco distritos en que los jóvenes se prosternan ante los libros y besan con barbarie las páginas, pero no saben descifrar una sola letra. Las epidemias, las discordias heréticas, las peregrinaciones, han diezmado la población” (94; “I know districts in which the young people prostrate themselves before books and like savages kiss their pages, though they cannot read a letter. Epidemics, heretical discords, pilgrimages that inevitably degenerate into brigandage have decimated the population” [118]). Both in “La biblioteca de Babel” and in Pájaros, literature provides possible avenues for archiving the ravages of disease, and for condemning institutions seeking to isolate bodies based on their viral status.

Especially in the Americas, the U.S. Pentagon, the headquarters of the Department of Defense, is a more contemporary manifestation of the state’s multidimensional powers. This geometric formation is known more for its hidden, secret, and bellicose machinations. In the case of Pájaros, the sunning area for all the young, bald, and old men is an imprisoning garden, reminiscent of MINFAR’s own prison cells at Los Cocos. One such lad is also described, as he is sunning himself, as being bald, “Tendría unos treinta años, pero ya no le quedaba pelo” (21; “He would be close to thirty-years old, but he no longer had any hair”). It is interesting that the hirsute discourse, used to describe America’s enervation during colonial times, returns again in Sarduy’s AIDS novel to describe the debilitating effects of the unnamed disease upon the inhabitants of the island’s clinic. Like colonial interpretations of hairlessness as signifying physical or sexual impotency,
men and women are rendered weak by their viral state, and their hairlessness begins to signify the ravages of "el mal" ("the illness").

The insistence on the pentagon shaping the garden also stresses the power embedded in confining space according to specific domains, and points out how geographies are naturalized in space to serve ideological functions. Since the roof is made from crystal, but the walls are golden, the only view possible in this garden is by peering above the walls of the pentagon. In this case, the golden pentagon is described as an endemic feature of the island. In its dimensions and golden exterior, the garden, while designating a place for convalescence and for taking fresh air and sun, "...la luz cura. Hoy se han hecho visibles sus siete colores" (21; "sunshine cures. Today, its seven colors are visible"), also describes the stately rigidity of a pentagon. In the Americas, the life and work of Reinaldo Arenas confronts the material realization of the state’s power as it strives to isolate, and exile, not only political dissidents, but also queer ones.

In *Leprosorio*, his response to his prison experience in Cuba, Arenas reminds us that naming the surface-area dimensions of Cuba allows the state to govern its boundaries with the aid of seemingly objective statistics and demographic figures. For Arenas, to speak of official figures, such as dimensions, is to validate the actions of the state against individual rights, and to show how even an "objective" statistic (the area of an island) sustains alternative histories of disease in an avowed space of objectivity. At the end of *Leprosorio*, we read that the island measures "111,111 kilómetros cuadrados / (cifra del ejército,
naturalmente) / de leprosorio”24 (130; “111,111 square kilometers / (figure by the military, naturally) / of leper colony”). Not unlike Sarduy’s account of the fictional and diseased island in Pájaros, in his poetry collection, Leprosorio, Arenas’ describes Cuba as an infected site, a leper colony, what he calls a leprosorio. In narrating his forced exile, Arenas tries to escape from a variety of societal controls, including Cuba’s quarantines and prisons, and described as “Contaminando de virus, bacterias, resoluciones, propaganda, / cárcel, resentimientos, odios y pantanos / correr” (129; “Contaminating by virus, bacteria, resolutions, propaganda, / prisons, resentments, hatred and swamps / to run”). Arenas’ years in prison are a testament to the risk that civilians continue to encounter when military intelligence dictates the lives of citizens and adjudicates punishment based on sexual, political, and on epidemiological dissidence. Arenas’ experience with military intelligence resulted in exile.

Ironically, although Cuba itself enacted programmatic isolations based on the viral status of its citizens, in its relationship to the U.S., Cuba itself has been more recently deemed a viral pariah, a biological threat to the U.S., adding to Cuba’s isolation from international discourses and from monetary benefits. Discourses on disease either internally, or internationally, are again adopted to police international differences and to maintain U.S. hegemony over nations considered a threat to national security and health. In a May 2002 speech that received criticism both from the White House, Democrats, and of course Cuban officials, then Undersecretary of State John Bolton argued that Cuba was indeed a
biological threat to the U.S.: "Cuba’s threat to our security has been
underplayed"; Bolton goes on to declare that along with Libya and Syria, Cuba
also "has at least a limited offensive biological warfare research and development
effort (and has) provided dual-use technology to other rogue states."

This proclamation of Cuba’s status as a biological threat also needs to be
examined for its economic repercussions both for Cuba and for the U.S.,
particularly since Cuba’s technological advance and profits in bioengineering
continue to grow, to encompass global markets, and to compete with the U.S.’s
financial hegemony. The financial threat to U.S. commerce in bioengineering is
considerable, especially since Cuba sold in 1995, for example, $125 million-worth
of bioengineered products such as recombinant streptokinase (for heart-attack
victims) and a variety of immunization vaccines. Globally, in late 1999 Cuba
entered an agreement with SmithKline Beecham, the British-American health care
group, to test and market, according to Miller, a “new Cuban meningitis vaccine,
first in Europe and eventually in the United States.” On account of the U.S.-Cuba-
Europe kinships with biotechnology and the revenue that biotechnology will
continue to generate for these sectors, it is difficult to discern when nations are
considered “biological threats” due to financial reasons, to political differences, to
international viral stability, or to the importation (and loss of revenue for U.S.
manufactures) of cheaper vaccines from countries deemed a threat, as in the case
of Cuban meningitis vaccines coming to the U.S. What is certain, though, is that
viral discourses (including Internet viruses), and their inoculations, will continue to impact the global economy and the world’s public health.

**Bared Bodies & Scatology**

In Goytisolo’s novel *Las virtudes*, as in Sarduy’s *Pájaros*, the sacred and scatological qualities of life are stressed. Concentrating on the most scatological descriptions of the diseased body renders it subject to medical scrutiny and to penal institutionalization. In *Pájaros*, the pandemic renders the body a *locus horribilis*. This apocalyptic view of the body is especially stressed at the end of the Cosmologist’s Chapter 15. The corporeality of the body is only discernible by its most base scatology, a dictum that is reminiscent of Francisco Quevedo and that now resurfaces in the time of the AIDS pandemic: the Cosmologist states that without the social protocol governing the body, the body is “un saco de pedos y excrementos. Un pudridero” (166; “a sack of farts and excrement. A rotting cesspool”).

In his critical collection of essays, *Disidencias*, Goytisolo’s discussion of Francisco de Quevedo’s baroque deployment of scatology is especially resonant in analyzing *Pájaros*, especially since Sarduy himself defined the baroque as the queer, the outsider, and the kitsch.27 In *Barroco*, Sarduy assesses the various negative definitions for baroque, and determines that like “queer,” baroque stands outside normative sensibilities (or sexualities) and assembles “lo estrambótico, lo excéntrico y hasta lo barato, sin excluir sus avatars más recientes de camp y kitsch” (16; “the bizarre, the eccentric and even the cheap, without excluding more...
recent avatars of camp and kitsch”). Both the baroque and the queer are heterogeneous in scope. In his reading of “The Queer Politics of Foucault,” David Halperin suggests that decentering the definition of “queer” from its sexual-identity origins (“queer” as relating only to gay, lesbian, bisexual studies, for example) better contests power relations:

‘Queer,’ in any case does not designate a class of already objectified pathologies or perversions; rather, it describes a horizon of possibility whose precise extent and heterogeneous scope cannot in principle be delimited in advance. It is from the eccentric positionality occupied by the queer subject that it may become possible to envision a variety of possibilities for reordering the relations among sexual behaviors, erotic identities, constructions of gender, forms of knowledge, regimes of enunciation, logics of representation, modes of self-constitution, and practices of community—for restructuring, that is, the relations among power, truth, and desire.28

In Pájaros, as the body is ravaged by disease, excessive descriptions of scatology, like power disruptions offered by “baroque” and “queer” scopes, also contests the biopower relations enunciated among patients, medics, and the state.

The insistence in Pájaros on the corruptibility of the diseased human body challenges discourses and processes alienating the subjectivity of the PLWAs. Such processes tend to only highlight the bared qualities of biological functions. To borrow from Goytisolo’s assessment of Quevedo’s scatology as “[la] respuesta del cuerpo mortificado al proceso alienador que lo sublima”29 (“[the] answer to a mortified body by the alienating process that sublimes it”), the diseased body in Pájaros suffers a similar alienation as it becomes institutionalized in AIDS ward regimes of examination. In the case of the diseased in Pájaros, the process of
alienation is exemplified by the close scrutiny of biological byproducts. The body in *Pájaros* must lay bare the extent of its fetidness:

Pasaban los practicantes el tiempo escrutando orines y excrementos, sudor y saliva. Una meticulosa ciencia de los signos, que excluía la lectura de la sangre no consideraba más que ciertas materias, el color, la fetidez y la precipitación, les permitían determinar sin vacilaciones qué había que dar y a quién, pero sobre todo—éste, decían, es el principio de toda cura—cuándo y cómo (101).

[The practitioners passed the time analyzing urine and excrements, sweat, and saliva. A meticulous science of signs, and excluding the reading of blood, since they did not consider anything but certain matters, the color, the odor and the precipitation, allowed them to determine without vacillation what had to be administered and to which patients, but above all else—this, they said, is the beginning of all cures—the when and the how.]

In dramatizing the bared quality of life, Sarduy’s *Pájaros* further collapses definitions of life as *zoē* and *bios*. In *Pájaros*, diseased life is presented in its bared physicality (*zoē*), as in its scatological reductions, but when the cure depends on the public and stately scrutiny of biological residues, that life is defined solely as *bios*. While in Goytisolo’s reading of Quevedo the bared and scatological view of life is precipitated by repressed sexual desires, in Sarduy’s treatment of scatology AIDS contests the parceling of singular and of social definitions of “life.” As in the study of tuberculosis in *The Magic Mountain*, societal interpretations of ailments become the principles for curing disease. Societal and biological functions of life (*bios*) help generate treatments, if not cures, and in turn, help assess how the bared qualified of that life (*zoē*) will be made singular. The dark side of this manipulated medical discourse is that anyone
who does not believe in the principles generating the cure will not receive any type of medical treatment, and will likely die.

In Pájaros, for example, Caimán and Caballo, animal personifications of lovers and medics in the text, would deny treatment to skeptics of their profession and of their self-imposed regimens: “Se excluyeron los escépticos—relegados al rango de retrógrados, enganchados a la química o simples vejesterios flojos [...] Sólo se beneficiaban de la savia los adeptos al Caimán bienhechor y a su cómplice equino” (100-101; “The skeptics were excluded, delegated to the rank of idiots, hooked on chemistry or simple lose red garments [...] The only beneficiaries of the salve were those believers of Caimán the good-doer and of his equine accomplice”). Science, and its regimens, depends on establishing a structure of belief systems—and the promise and grand narrative of Caimán’s “science” is finding the cure—and becoming the “church of salvation” in contemporary times. Therefore, resistance to “science” becomes a form of medical heresy. The process of interpreting disease, and of delegating its “cures,” increasingly becomes difficult for those affected by disease. Sarduy especially contests the power dynamics of medical regimens in their localization of illness and of cures.

The thrust of the hermeneutic process of locating illness and cure dramatizes Sarduy’s conflicted view of the diseased body. The risk for the diseased body is that it necessarily becomes an object for medical scrutiny, and may lose the subjectivity and agency of the individual’s life. Likewise, for Sarduy’s Cosmologist there co-exists a resistance among processes of
objectification and subjectivization. Because his profession is astronomy, the
Cosmologist relates the objectification of the body with instruments common to
his profession, for example, telescopes:

Estar enfermo significa estar conectado a distintos aparatos, frascos de un líquido blanco y espeso como el semen, medidas de mercurio, gráficos fluorescentes en una pantalla.

La cura es una ruptura de amarres, de nexos; el cuerpo es libre y autónomo, arrancadas las sábanas.

Los astrónomos veían cuerpos celestes, esferas incandescentes o porosas, recorridas por cataclismos de nubes carbónicas, rodeadas de anillos, espléndenes o vidriosas; para los Cosmólogos fue como para los enfermos: nos conectaron con aparatos en que los astros son cifras que caen, invariables y parcas noticias del universo (109).

[Being sick means being connected by distinct apparatuses, jars of a white and thick liquid like semen, measurements of mercury, and fluorescent graphics on a screen.

The cure is the rupture of knots, of connections; the body is free and autonomous, the sheets pulled away.

The astronomers would see celestial bodies, incandescent and porous spheres, etched by cataclysm of carbonic clouds, surrounded by rings, splendid and transparent; for the Cosmologists it was the same as for the ill: they connected us to apparatuses in which the stars are statistics that fall, with invariable and with fateful news of the universe.]

In conflating discourses on illness and on astronomy, macroscopic phenomena (those that occur in the expansive blackness of space) can only be
discerned with external aid. Likewise, a microscopic phenomenon, as in the study
of the human body, equally depends on augmentative visual instruments.

Furthermore, both macro- and micro-visions of matter (human and celestial)
depend on the interpretative signs provided by instrumental agents. It is not so
much that the telescope or the microscope allows us to see what is “free in nature,”
but that they shape what the human eye can see. The human eye depends on the
arbitrariness of instruments that allow it to see what is beyond (the macrocosms)
and what is within (the microcosm). In Pájaros, the chaotic view of the
macrocosm with “cuerpos celestes, esferas incandescentes o porosas” (“celestial
bodies, incandescent and porous spheres”) summarizes the human condition after
illness, a condition, if it is AIDS, which is riddled with cell mutations, with
immune deficiency problems, and with certain decomposition, what Siempreviva
expressed as life following a process “que es ir, aún en vida, hacia la pudrición”
(67; “that leads, even in life, towards putridness”). Moreover, what is apparent in
this citation is the return of the anatomical gaze in the inculcation of medical
regiments and in the containment of disease.

For Sarduy, writing provides one possible escape from the anatomical
gaze, though the process of writing itself becomes symptomatic of the virus:
“Nuestra escritura, por ejemplo, antes equilibrada y uniforme, en la que el
pensamiento se encadenaba sin esfuerzo, legible como la partitura en el fraseo de
un gran pianista, hoy se desvía de la línea, tiembla, exagera puntos, acentos,
banderines y tildes” (Pájaros 134; “Our writing, for example, balanced and
uniform before, one in which thinking created links without effort, legible like the
phrasing in the sheet music of a great pianist, today deviates from the straight line,
trembles, exaggerates points, stresses, diacritics and accents”). Moreover, the
spread of the virus is compared with the act of writing itself, and thus Sarduy turns
from diagnosing symptoms (which is, after all, a metaphoric strategy) to fusing the viral with the act of writing, a process I am defining as “escrito-viral” (“viral-script”).

The *escrito-viral* process entails the “contamination” of meaning of one word by another and the flux of interpretations that each passing word brings to the word preceding and following it (e.g., as the reader advances from one word to another, meaning continues to change, and similar to the actual spread of HIV, as meaning changes it mutates words and concepts). The Cosmologist describes this viral-script writing by personifying it as a contaminated bird. The “bird” is both viral and *escrito-viral*: “Todo es borrón, tachonazo incongruente, sanguinaria ballesta. Las letras ameboides surgen solas, sin mano que pueda moderar su aceitosa expansión. Un pajaro de presa, ávido de nuestro propio desperdicio, se esconde en cada trazo” (134-35; “Everything is smudged, incongruent markings, bloody crossbow. The amoeboid letters rise alone, without a helping hand to moderate their oily expansion. A bird of prey, avid for our own wastefulness, hides in each stroke”).

AIDS is the ghost lurking in each act of writing, a “pájaro de presa, ávido de nuestro propio desperdicio” (a “bird of prey, avid for our own wastefulness”), hiding in “cada trazo” (“each stroke”), as the body’s demise approaches. *Escrito-viral* writing, then, is a specter knowable in its absence and its presence, reminiscent of Sarduy’s own formulations concerning baroque writing, but especially its metallurgic poetry: “en la poesía barroca, las palabras que designan
los materiales canónicos de la orfebrería no funcionan como signos plenos, sino,
en un sistema formalizado de oposiciones binarias—la antítesis es la figura central
del barroco—, como ‘marcadores’ afectados de un signo positivo o negativo, es
decir, como puras valencias” (Barroco 22; “in baroque poetry, the words that
denote canonical materials of silver smithing do not function as plain signs, but as
a formalized system of binary oppositions—the antithesis is the central figure of
the baroque—like ‘markers” affected by a positive or negative sign, in other
words, as pure valencies,” emphasis in original). Balancing the deadly effects of
the virus is the figure of writing as a “bird of prey,” a bird which can sustain, even
in hiding, AIDS narratives and testimonies.

Both Sarduy and Goytisolo find affinity in the transubstantiating power of
the written word. The escrito-viral writing is both viral and vital for the survival
of AIDS histories and for the preservation of the sacredness of the body with
AIDS. In discussing Goytisolo, Epps emphasizes the close interplay between
words and bodies, both sick and healthy: “I take seriously, perhaps all too
seriously, the interplay between books and bodies, the extensions between the
word and the flesh” (Epps 438). In the time of the pandemia, the interplay
between literature and bodies must include illness as mediating discourses of
biopower, the word, and the flesh. In Pájaros and in Las virtudes there is an
attempt to distinguish illness from individuality so that the curative or prying
instruments do not subsume the individual’s body and its singular bared qualities
with AIDS. In the end, though, the corporeality of life must be evidenced,
referenced and exalted, for in this artistic and political maneuver, AIDS narratives recuperate the sacred component in all life, but especially in lives that were considered criminal due to their HIV status.
NOTES

1 "Mantener" ("to maintain"), according to the *Diccionario de la Lengua Castellana por la Real Academia Española* (Madrid: Imprento de los Sucesores de Hernando, 1914), retains these valences, especially in definition no. 1, "Proveer a uno del alimento necesario" ("to provide the necessary sustenance"), and in definitions no. 2, "conservar una cosa en su ser" ("to conserve a thing in its self"), which reads as a form of quarantine in keeping with Cuba's efforts to isolate the diseased, and in definition no. 3, "sostener una cosa para que no caiga o se tuerza" ("too hold a thing straight and unbent"), which reflects the impetus of the state in "straightening out" aberrant sexualities [651]. In Cuba's employment of sanatoriums, these last two interpretations of "mantener" are useful in imagining how the state governs its AIDS bodies by simultaneously providing needed health care and isolating social misfits. "Mantener," therefore, works on the heteronormative principle that a maintained body, while free from disease, must also be heterosexual.


From 1986 to 1993, fifteen sanatoriums were created in Cuba, with two in La Habana on account of the high number of AIDS cases, in “Baja en Cuba la propagación de la enfermedad, aseguran” (“Spread of the illness diminishes in Cuba, officials assure”), *La Jornada* (5 June 2001): no pp. As of 1998, a year after the publication of *Toda esa gente solitaria*, though, thirteen sanatoriums were catalogued, “Seleccionadas de la salud, 1998” *InfoMed* <http://www.sld.cu/anuario/anu98/UC27.html>.


Lyrics:

Ah, look at all the lonely people
Ah, look at all the lonely people

Eleanor Rigby, picks up the rice
in the church where a wedding has been
Lives in a dream
Waits at the window, wearing the face
that she keeps in a jar by the door
Who is it for

All the lonely people
Where do they all come from?
All the lonely people
Where do they all belong? [. . .]


“Epic,” from Greek, meaning “word, narrative, song” (OED).


10 All prologue and short story citations are taken from Toda esa gente solitaria: 18 cuentos cubanos sobre el SIDA by Lourdes Zayón Jomolca and José Ramón Fajardo Atanes, eds. (Madrid: Ediciones La Palma, 1997) 92-93. All translations mine.


15 “Parrandas y Charangas,” La jiribilla (2001):


16 Thomas Yingling, “Wittgenstein’s Tumor: AIDS and the National Body,” first delivered as a paper at Columbia University (January 1992), collected in AIDS and


19 All English translations of *Las virtudes del pájaro solitario* are from *The Virtues of the Solitary Bird*, trans. Helen Lane (London: Serpent’s Tail, 1991) 88.


21 Severo Sarduy, *Pájaros de la playa* (Barcelona: Tusquets, 1993) 20. All English translations are mine.


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29 Juan Goytisolo, Disidencias (Barcelona: Editorial Seix Barral, 1977) 128.
Chapter 4

Queer Iconography

"Não é tragédia nenhuma, Eduardo, é a necessidade que todos temos de religião. Homem e mulher se casam na igreja e têm a união consagrada pelo padre, uma bicha não. Bicha é como prostituta. Tem de se agarrar a um santo.”
—Silviano Santiago, *Stella Manhattan*¹

["It’s no tragedy at all, Eduardo, it’s the need we all have for religion. Men and women get married in church and their union consecrated by a priest. Faggots have none of that. *Queers* are like prostitutes; they have to seek out a saint to intercede on their behalf.²]

Queer iconography permeates contemporary discourses on disease, on the close connections between the political and the erotic, and on the state’s fear of homosexual bodies. This chapter discusses the colonial reincarnations of Saint Sebastian in the Americas, and specifically in South America. His “reincarnation” in the New World signals many of the narratives connecting discourses of disease and of sexuality as constructed by European colonial enterprises. Though the origins of Saint Sebastian in Christian iconography will be contextualized as it reveals the saint’s connection to disease and to sexuality in Europe and in colonial South America, this chapter examines how contemporary avatars of this Roman soldier in the Americas begin to reflect late twentieth-century concerns on religious and sexual heterodoxies, on safe sex, and on the on-going representation of homosexuals as diseased and as dangerous to the state. Whereas chapter 3, “Bared Life of AIDS,” examined the resistance to statist medical treatments and quarantines, chapter 4 argues how Reinaldo Arenas (*El color del verano o Nuevo jardín de las delicias*, 1990, Cuba) and Silviano Santiago (*Stella Manhattan*, 1985,
Brazil) use religious iconography, especially located in homoerotic sacred and hypersexualized images, to challenge the mechanisms that keep queer bodies only as spectacles of the state. Whereas Chapter 3 examined the quarantining of PLWAs, and the attempt to make queer bodies invisible through incarceration, as in Cuba’s use of AIDS sanatoriums, chapter 4 examines how homosexuality and hypersexualized queer bodies are made visible in a patriarchal society to manipulate politically heteronormative operations. When represented as hypersexualized, the queer body in the fiction of Arenas and of Santiago becomes “diseased.” In short, whereas earlier chapters have examined how the Americas has been constructed as a site of disease and of sexual enervation, this chapter argues how such sexualized discourses are overturned by Arenas and by Santiago to challenge oppression and homophobia. The end of the chapter also examines how U.S. and Spanish critics canonize authors, such as Foucault, Sarduy, and Arenas, to situate homosexual bodies with AIDS as having sacred lives, a condition that will be explored further in Chapter 5, “Pájaros and Tombs: AIDS Takes Flight.”

For the queer body, though, the succor that a saint, such as Saint Sebastian, may bring borders on fetishism: even for the drag queen narrator of Stella Manhattan, the queer (“a bicha”) “is like a prostitute” who has to get a hold of the nearest saint. The figure of the saint, therefore, can signal heteronormative institutions, as in the “necessidade que todos temos de religião” (212; “[the] need we all have for religion” [159]). Moreover, the need for religion is codified as
strictly heterosexual. Bringing only men and women together, "Homem e mulher se casam na igreja" ["Men and women get married in church"], religion becomes a conduit for heterosexual reproduction. Operating within Christian reproductive regimes, the figure of the queer saint, though, can also be used to project hyperhomosexual drives that contest oppressive state regimes in Cuba and in 1960s' Brazil.

*El color del verano o nuevo jardín de las delicias* by Reinaldo Arenas and *Stella Manhattan: Romance* by Silviano Santiago provide examples of homosexual dissidence. In *Verano*, Arenas recounts the sexual adventures of drag queens as they try to escape from a hypersexualized depiction of Cuba. Arenas, for example, considers Fidel Castro (a character he calls "Fifo"), a queer character as well: "¿No sabías que Fifo también es loca?" (118; "Didn't you know that Fifo was a fairy, just like us?"). In *Stella Manhattan*, a drag queen, issuer of passports for the Brazilian embassy in New York in the 1960s, becomes involved with dissident political figures and is later murdered. In both novels, homosexuals become martyrs as they face dictatorships in Cuba and in Brazil. The figure of the martyr has been linked with sexuality and with death, and in the time of AIDS, to use religious iconography to free PLWAs from the emotional and social baggage imposed by the church's condemnation of AIDS and homosexuals. The homosexual characters in *Verano* and *Stella Manhattan* provide narratives of subversion: the homosexual body is deemed dangerous to the state for its sexual, political, and even its "viral" dissidence. Accounts by AIDS inmates in Cuba's
quarantines showed the importance of keeping homosexuals, political dissidents, and PLWAs separate from the operations of the state. As Eve Sedgwick points out in a chapter on “Nationalisms and Sexualities in the Age of Wilde,” there continues to be a strong linkage between the construction of the Other and the creation of nationalism: “The *topos* of the creation, reification, and expulsion of the Other, and signally the Orientalized other, in the emergence of the modern European state, has become a central tool of liberal analysis; and it is the explanatory aegis of the Other or Othered that has, for the most part, allowed people of variant sexualities, along with non-Christian, non-white, and medically-disadvantaged people, to become visible in liberal narratives about the origins of nationalism.”5 In works by Arenas and by Santiago, the other becomes a homosexual who weaves inside and outside the mechanisms of the state, and who interrogates how such borders are created, maintained, and policed. In following Sedgwick’s genealogy of the “origins of nationalism” as allowing for the inclusion of “variant sexualities,” the homosexual body, the *locas* and *bichas* in the work of Arenas and Santiago (the queer, in Spanish and Portuguese, respectively), also becomes crucial in understanding how state is constructed and maintained.

**Fabled Saint Sebastian**

Before becoming a Christian, Saint Sebastian had worked as a Roman soldier and had been considered an enemy of the Roman state due to his support of Christian prisoners. He later became associated with curing the plague in Medieval times. His curative powers, as will be discussed shortly, also made it to
the New World, but the Peruvian figure of Saint Sebastian during the fifteenth century was also linked more closely to averting communal shortages, such as famine. In February 1582, for instance, a frost threatened to destroy the harvest in Carabuco, a town on the eastern coast of Lake Titicaca. Two saints were called upon to “cure” the earth from that frost: Saint Sebastian and the Virgin of Copacabana.6

The life of the European Saint Sebastian is one mired in political intrigue, anti-state maneuvers, and gruesome deaths, but as Louise Marshall points out in “Manipulating the Sacred: Image and the Plague in Renaissance Italy,” Saint Sebastian also became during the fourth century the “preeminent saintly defender against the plague.”7 According to his fifth-century biography, Saint Sebastian had become a valued member of the Praetorian Guard for two emperors, including Diocletian (254-313 A.D.). Because of his freedom and position as a Roman soldier, he had access to Christian prisoners, and according to some romances, had the ability to “strengthen them in their faith” (488). After being called a “Christian” and refusing to apostatize, he was sentenced to death. His Passio describes initial representations of Saint Sebastian’s body as covered with countless arrows, “so that he was prickly, as if he were a hedgehog so to speak, by the blows of the arrows”: “ut quasi ericius ita hirsutus ictibus sagittarum” (Latin cited in footnote 16, Marshall 489, my trans.). The Passio also narrates how Saint Sebastian came back to life, and, instead of fleeing Rome, he sought Roman Emperors in order to testify against their crimes towards Christianity.
Sebastian’s second attempt at life also ended in a gruesome death: he was beaten to death and his body thrown into a sewer (Marshall 489).

Saint Sebastian’s cycle of death and resurrection appears in most accounts of his saintly life. His veneration as a plague saint, though, is a later development. Specifically, the History of the Lombards by Paul the Deacon (c.720-797) is one of the first narratives to connect Saint Sebastian with epidemic cures. According to Paul the Deacon, the erection in Pavia of an altar dedicated to the saint (c. 680) led to the abatement of the city’s epidemic. Early accounts of the curative powers of Sebastian seem to be localized among the usual fare of saintly tasks: healing widows, children, the lame, and the sick. Marshall points out that in order to explain Sebastian’s close link with pestilence, other sources are useful, especially those that connect Classical and pagan deities with Christian divine figures (492). If the erotic genealogy and representation of Sebastian was founded in Christianity’s confrontation with pagan sex and violence, the saint’s manifestation as a plague saint also harks back to Greek pagan traditions. Medical historian Henry Sigerist, for example, argued that Sebastian’s role as a plague healer fuses the cult of Apollo with this fledgling Christian figure (Marshall 493). In Greek mythology, Apollo, the archer god, along with his sister Artemis, was known to use arrows of pestilence against insolent subjects. Though arrows connect Sebastian with earlier Greek traditions of vengeful Gods, the trial by arrows, as Marshall argues, needs to be understood “as a real martyrdom from which he was resurrected by divine power. [...] In direct analogy with Christ’s redemptive
death, Sebastian’s martyrdom by the arrows of the plague becomes a vicarious sacrifice offered up to God. Christ-like, he takes the sins of humanity upon himself and makes restitution for these sins with his own sufferings” (495).

A later development on Sebastian’s role as a plague saint takes an interesting and surprising turn, and heralds the manner in which Saint Sebastian will be reconfigured in the Americas. Thirteenth-century versions of Saint Sebastian show how questions of public health and policy became part of his saintly duties: Saint Sebastian, along with local city saints, and later incarnations of plague saints, such as the city of Montpellier’s Saint Roch (1295-1327), becomes a “celestial health inspector” for the state specifically in matters dealing with sanitation, state defense against the plague, and its management. If not Saint Sebastian, local saints also figured as district attorneys pleading for the welfare of their subjects to a divine court:

Despite Sebastian’s popularity, however, alternative sources of heavenly protection were not neglected. Throughout the pandemic, for many towns the first line of supernatural defense remained the local patron saint. At the heavenly court, the local saint could be relied upon to plead the community’s cause with all the vigor and passion of a citizen on an urgent embassy to a foreign dignitary. So a fresco commissioned from Fiorenzo di Lorenzo by the city authorities of Deruta (Marches) depicts the local saint Romanus on the left, successfully petitioning the divine judge on the city’s behalf (Marshall 500).

The mobilization of a local saint as defender of the state is clear. He is a citizen and an integral part in the dynamics of power of the city. The saint has transformed himself into an ambassador, and takes “a leave of absence” from his residence to plead his case in foreign lands. The saint becomes the embodiment of
the city-state. His success in the “divine court” will lead to the continuous growth and preservation of the state. Recently, and in a curious twist on the saint’s representational reincarnations into contemporary biomedical discourses, an image of Saint Sebastian by Perugino (ca. 1450-1523) was used as the poster campaign for a 1990 international conference on “Tratis de Perversions dans les structures cliniques,” directed by the *Fondation du Champ Freudien*, France’s organization for Lacanian therapists (Kaye 90). This 1990 conference points out how the representation of Saint Sebastian’s naked body continues to be associated with disease (in this case, the mentally ill) and with perversions. A plague saint no longer, Saint Sebastian, at least in the use of his “logo” for the 1990 Lacanian conference, is now a contemporary saint of perversions and of psychoanalysis.

In the Americas, the proliferation of New World hagiography of Saint Sebastian is apparent in Peru, one of the main colonies of the Spanish empire. The currency of Peru in European constructions of the New World had been apparent to *philosophes*, such as de Pauw, especially when Peru was considered, like other New World geographies, to be populated by sodomites: “sodomía estaba en gran boga en las Islas, el Perú, el reino de México, y en todo el Nuevo Continente” (cited in Clavijero 234; “sodomy was in great vogue on the islands [of the Caribbean], in Peru, in the kingdom of Mexico, and throughout the New Continent”). In fact, two saints represented the Pre-Hispanic foundations of the Inca capital in Cusco: Saint Jerome represented the Orco Indians and Saint Sebastian the Ayamarca Indians. Both factions were expelled from Cusco by the
twelfth-century arrival of the Incas. In the 1671 Corpus Christi celebration of Santa Ana church in Cusco, for instance, the image of Saint Sebastian represented a combination of European and Inca traditions. Among the smaller saints carried in the streets of Cusco in 1671, a canvas represented the figure of a martyred Saint Sebastian shown tied to a tree, with a dozen exotic South American birds painted all around him. Dancers, called “Chunchos,” also enacted traditional Inca dances around the litter carrying the canvas. A closer inspection of the painting also revealed, in addition to the emphasis given to South American flora and fauna, the tenuous relationship of the saint with interconnected histories of New World sexuality, martyrdom, and the pre-Hispanic foundation of Cusco (Harris 154). In addition to the reference to New World environs, the litter carrying the canvas connected the saint with sexual desire: “At each of the four corners of his [Saint Sebastian’s] golden litter sat a carved bust of a bare-breasted woman with a painted feather headdress” (Harris 157). As ethnographer Max Harris points out in “Saint Sebastian and the Blue-Eyed Blacks: Corpus Christi in Cusco, Peru,” bare-breasted women, live parrots and “wild, dancing Chunchos are not part of the traditional European iconography of Saint Sebastian” (159).

An explanation of the presence of the four naked women may be better explained with a more contemporary rendition of the story of Saint Sebastian in modern-day Peru. In collecting ethnographies surrounding the festival of Corpus Christi, a native woman from Cusco tells Harris during the 2001 celebrations an alternative story about the New World martyrdom of Saint Sebastian: “Sebastian,
she said, was a Spanish soldier, seduced by Indian women and filled with arrows by their men” (166). In short, the four emblems of bare-breasted women forming the posts of the litter make sexuality, and Peruvian resistance to Spanish oppression (not defense of Christianity), the cause of Saint Sebastian’s martyrdom. According to Harris, this story “rejoices” in the guile of natives in seducing the Spanish and in defeating them with primitive weapons. In short, Saint Sebastian becomes a defeated Spanish soldier rather than a Christian martyr. This is a different reading from the traditional European representation of Christian martyrs who lost their lives in the pursuit of Christian proselytizing: “martyr” and “saint” used to be synonymous terms.

In “Colonial Saints: Gender, Race, and Hagiography in New France,” Allan Greer points out that as the definition of sainthood was “broadened to embrace other forms of religious heroism, martyrdom staged a comeback in the early modern centuries as Catholics set out to combat heresy in Europe and to convert the unbelievers of Asia and the Americas.”11 Even in configuring the Americas as a place that needs to be converted, the image of the Peruvian Saint Sebastian reflects how sexuality was used to challenge Spanish oppression of Peru. The naked sexuality of four bare-breasted women told the story during the Corpus Christi celebrations that sexuality could be a tool of resistance against Spanish oppression, a marked difference from Cuneo’s sexual exploitation of Caribbean women. In Cuneo’s case, sex was an instrument of Spanish colonization in the fifteenth century.
In contemporary popular culture, the figure of the saint no longer reflects just the European baggage of being a curative, or “plagued,” saint. Narratives on Saint Sebastian that first began as “diseased,” as in his status as a plagued saint, begin to be associated with narratives of aberrant sexuality. Like earlier representations of disease in the Americas discussed in chapter 1, “Potency and Enervation: Sexualized America,” discourses of disease now configure other kinds of deemed monstrosities, such as a priest’s active sexuality. Sexuality itself becomes “diseased” in contemporary Internet accounts of the saint, as will be examined in the next section. In contemporary accounts of Saint Sebastian and of queer bodies like him, sexuality and queerness itself becomes “diseased,” and must be imprisoned, quarantined, or destroyed. Sexuality itself is depicted as monstrous and as dangerous to the state.

Virtual Saint Sebastian

When Andrew Sullivan, a gay conservative columnist and former editor of *The New Republic*, revealed in the 2001 *Times* lecture that he practiced anal and oral sex without condoms, and earlier he had posted on-line his preference for rough sex and for men who, like himself, are HIV positive, the June 2001 *Village Voice* paper considered his confession a “brush with martyrdom.” Richard Goldstein’s article goes on to state that despite Sullivan’s initial resistance to answering questions about his private life, “Sullivan repeatedly alluded to the bare-backing furor in his remarks. It was like watching a pumped-up Saint Sebastian shoot the arrows while posing as their target.” The title of Goldstein’s
article, “His Private Life is None of our Business, His Public Life Certainly Is. The Real Andrew Sullivan Scandal,” appearing on a special installment called the “Queer Issue,” highlights the degree to which homosexuality continues to be closely linked to binary constructions of public and private, and to intersections among the pubis, the publicus and the polis, and to depictions of homosexual bodies as heretical and mystifying to the state due to “scandalous” sex.

This very narration of contemporary rough sex harks back to Saint Sebastian’s erotic representation (both Medieval and Renaissance) as a body writhing in mystic and erotic pain. “For two thousand years,” as Camille Paglia reminds us in Sexual Personae: Art and Decadence from Nefertiti to Emily Dickinson, “the torture of martyred saints, as well as of Christ, has filled [the] western imagination with sadomasochistic reverie.” Saint Sebastian’s aesthetic pleasures also notably appear in Confessions of a Mask (trans. 1958) by Yukio Mishima, and presumably reflect the author’s own actualized pleasure from seeing such bare depictions of the saint. Even Marcel Proust is known to have left his self-imposed exile in his Paris apartment to visit a friend’s private collection of Saint Sebastian paintings by Mategna (ca. 1431-1506), or by Gustave Moreau (1826-1898). In Confessions, Mishima’s young narrator experiences his first orgasm upon seeing a portrait of Saint Sebastian by Italian master Guido Reni (1575-1692). More importantly, Mishima tries to explain the reason behind the narrator’s (and perhaps his own) attraction to this representation of Saint Sebastian. The narrator finds that along with pain, it is mortality and fleeting
youth which mark the saint as a figure of melancholy. Saint Sebastian’s status as figure of melancholy is realized in Confessions through agony and ecstasy:

> It is not pain that hovers about his straining chest, his tense abdomen, his slightly contorted hips, but some flicker of melancholy pleasure like music. [...] The arrows have eaten into the tense, fragrant, youthful flesh and bare about to consume his body from within with flames of supreme agony and ecstasy, but there is no flowing blood, nor yet the host of arrows seen in other pictures of Sebastian’s martyrdom. Instead, two lone arrows cast their tranquil and graceful shadows upon the smoothness of his skin, like the shadows of a bough falling upon a marble stairway.\(^{15}\)

Mishima’s description of the youthful and unblemished skin of the martyr continues to echo Saint Sebastian as a martyr associated with a purity of heart, of spirit, and of body, and hence, his curative connection with AIDS narratives. For Paglia, though, the erotic body of Reni’s sixteenth-century Saint Sebastian, not its quality as healer or mystic, better reflects how pagan mysteries imbued Christian iconographies with sex and violence (246).

> A more contemporary reincarnation of Saint Sebastian and the Christian acculturation of “sex and violence” in hagiography is the now defunct Internet “support group for Gay Religious Brothers and Clergy of the Roman Catholic Church” called St. Sebastian’s Angels. Due to its strong sexual content detailing the sexual lives of priests, the web page was officially closed some time in the year 2000. Though closed by the Roman Catholic Faithful, an orthodox group from Petersburg (Illinois), a ghost shell of the webpage currently remains (February 2003).\(^{16}\) The website describes itself as "an area where men in orders and/or vows can share their lives and talk about their problems, concerns, joys and
sorrows. It also seeks to be that place for spiritual as well as for relational friendships. It understands that the Roman Catholic Church is struggling with the issue of homosexuality and the teachings of Christ as understood by the Roman Catholic Church. 17

Though some degree of religious fervor is expressed by members of this website, and members included all ranks of the Catholic Church around the world (from California to South Africa), the St. Sebastian's Angels’ website also disclosed, as the Allyson Smith notes in her article “Poor Saint Sebastian: Roman Soldier Icon for Gay Priests Group,” a spectrum of sexual preferences, from sadomasochism to vanilla sex practiced and fantasized by Church officials: "Several friends are heavy in to leather, S&M and MORE. Me, I like gentle, warmth and no pain, with or without leather to set the mood. But some men want (need) the whipping boy and crisco. Not I" (Smith, caps in original).

The hypersexualized content of the website for St. Sebastian’s Angels is foregrounded by an air-brushed figure of a young and tanned Saint Sebastian appearing at the top header of the index page. This Saint Sebastian figure, unlike his Medieval and Renaissance counterparts, is depicted sitting down, already canonized by displaying a halo that contrasts the chiaroscuro background. Though the website does raise some fundamental problems in the Catholic Church as it continues to interpret the sexual lives of Christian homosexuals and of homosexual priests, the figure of Saint Sebastian here points to how religious iconographies are deployed to decentralize myths of power. In the case of the
website, the figure of Saint Sebastian, while representing the Church’s resistance to early Roman massacres of Christians, also helps localize homosexual desire in a recognizable, and iconographic, Christian figure.

In addition to the erotic element, and because some of the work by members of St. Sebastian’s Angels did include community work, such as AIDS awareness programs, open mass for homosexuals, and condom distribution services, the figure of Saint Sebastian intersects Church and sexual politics. Moreover, the web site challenges the Church’s homophobic views on AIDS, and strives to represent canonical saints, such as Saint Sebastian, as amicable to homosexuals and to AIDS prevention. For St. Sebastian’s Angels, even the figure of Christ must be redefined to include all “human elements” of a Christian, including sexual urges. An anonymous chatroom writer defends this sexualized approach to Catholicism since “[w]e are not defined by what society says, or even some of the Church stuff. Our struggle with the Church goes beyond who I go to bed with. As we look at how Christ is working in our life—whether we’re impatient, whether we're horny—then we can deal with all the human elements” (Smith, n. pag.). Passion, both erotic and religious, intersects the figure of the saint, and informs how queer critics and writers are read. Despite their resistance to easy categorizations, Foucault, Arenas, and Sarduy received canonization for their work, and sometimes, even for their own sexual lives.
Queer Hagiography

The visibility of queer bodies depends on the agenda of the state. Queer bodies can be rendered invisible, as in the case of the sanatoriums, and for purposes of deemed public health. The queer body, as well, can actually be exalted in a patriarchal society in order to promote heteronormative processes and to uphold white hegemony. As sexuality becomes diseased and punishable, homosexuality becomes sanctified in the work of theorists and of novelists. A response to the narratives of enervation can be contested by transforming that disease as a badge of honor.

Reminiscent of colonial discourses on America’s enervating diseases as presented by Raynal and de Pauw, the death of Foucault raised questions about the “New World” origins of AIDS. Unlike colonial and Enlightenment narratives of America’s enervation, disease in contemporary America is marked by a queer hagiography intersected by aberrant sex (as the priestly sex discussed earlier), and by rough sex. David Halperin, for example, has called Foucault a “fucking saint”: “As far as I’m concerned, the guy was a fucking saint.” 18 Foucault’s biographers were also keen in setting a time and a place in the Americas for Foucault’s first contact with AIDS. In Saint Foucault: Towards a Gay Hagiography, Halperin hazards a guess as to why Foucault’s first biographer, Didier Eribon, touched briefly on Foucault’s deemed sexual exploits in New York and in San Francisco, “chiefly because California, Eribon casually implied, was where Foucault
contracted AIDS—as if what Eribon elliptically calls the ‘new plague’ (French law made it risky to be explicit about Foucault’s cause of death) could not possibly have originated in a civilized place like Paris or been transmitted to Foucault there” (Halperin 152).

In *The Passion of Michel Foucault*, a 1993 biography which tries to resolve Foucault’s life with his scholarly work, James Miller disturbingly connects in Foucault’s life the American origin for his AIDS contagion, his sojourn to bathhouses, his scholarship (especially his interest in sadomasochism as it reflected, for Miller, theories raised in *Discipline and Punish*, and quoted in the following citation), and Foucault’s deemed self-appointed AIDS martyrdom:

The conditions were chilling. Still, in some bathhouses in San Francisco in the fall of 1983, in the eyes of someone disposed to see matters in this light, the scene on some nights may have strangely recalled that conjured up by Foucault ten years before, in his account of plagues and the macabre carnivals of death that medieval writers imagined to accompany them: “Laws suspended, prohibitions lifted, the frenzy of time that is passing away, bodies mingling together without respect, individuals unmasked, abandoning their statutory identity and the figure under which they were recognized, allowing an entirely different truth to appear.”

Miller then goes on to ask, “But why was Michel Foucault there [at the bathhouses]?” (29), and provides a bizarre answer: “Was this perhaps his own deliberately chosen apotheosis, his own singular experience of ‘The Passion’? Does his conceivable embrace of a death-dealing ‘disease of love’ reveal, as he implied it would, the ‘lyrical core’ of his life—*the* key to his ‘personal poetic attitude’?” (29, emphasis in original). In the pursuit of pleasure, AIDS, for Miller, becomes a form of suffering and of apotheosis. Though Halperin attacks Miller’s
facts and inference regarding Foucault’s bathhouse experience, “it is highly
doubtful that Miller has ever seen the inside of a gay bathhouse in San Francisco,
or elsewhere, let alone in the fall of 1983. [. . .] All that, it turns out, has to be
inferred—not to say fabricated—from Foucault’s texts” (170), Miller’s
approximation to a queer hagiography illustrates how AIDS begins to filter
discourses on the afterlife of AIDS, and how heteronormativity continues to
inform how AIDS is strictly read as a “gay disease.”

In considering Foucault a “fucking saint,” Halperin attains a more
measured estimation of a queer hagiography based on Foucault’s scholarship and
engagement to queer politics. When it came to understanding regimes of
biopower, Foucault’s History of Sexuality was prophetic “specifically on the
state’s administration of the technology for producing and regulating life”
(Halperin 28). With the appearance of AIDS quarantines in Cuba, and elsewhere,
and the emergence of contestation novels on quarantines, as seen in Sarduy’s
Pajaros de la playa, and Goytisolo’s Las virtudes del pájaro solitario, the
analytical tools Foucault offered in History of Sexuality prove useful in studying
how the life of AIDS patients is administered and regulated.

In addition to ascribing hagiographic status based on scholarship, Halperin
makes a convincing case that Foucault’s saintly status is realized in how to
redefine the homosexual engagement with the world at large. According to
Halperin, “homosexuality for Foucault is a spiritual exercise insofar as it consists
in an art or style of life through which individuals transform their modes of
existence and, ultimately, themselves” (78). For Halperin, therefore, spiritual
journeys and processes of becoming homosexual share the same transformative
journey of “becoming” a mystic or a saint. Halperin adds that “homosexuality is
not a psychological condition that we discover but a way of being that we practice
in order to redefine the meaning of who we are and what we do, and in order to
make ourselves and our world more gay; as such, it constitutes a modern form of
asceticism” (78). In both accounts of Foucault’s life and scholarship, Miller and
Halperin return to a common notion of ascesis: the queer body is rendered as an
agent and subject of self-discipline. For both Miller and Halperin, the queer body
comes to inhabit spaces marked by Foucauldian self-discipline. For Miller, self-
discipline was figured in Foucault’s engagement in sadomasochism and in theories
of power. For Halperin, though, self-discipline was transfigured as a spiritual
journey aided by scholarship and by intersections with sexuality. Like Saint
Sebastian’s agony, the queer body is always punished, transfigured, and
transcendent.

Latin American authors also came to inhabit this space of transfiguration
and transcendence, though for a variety of different reasons. Arenas and Sarduy
receive a sanctified tribute of their life and work in Goytisolo’s recent collection
of essays in El bosque de las letras (“The forest of letters”).20 Goytisolo, like
Halperin’s canonization of Foucault, is perhaps the first to consider Arenas and
Sarduy as saints in their own rights. In “Caído en el campo del honor” (“Fallen in
the battlefield of honor”), Goytisolo concludes that writing and homosexuality are
conditions for the martyrdom of Arenas, “Ningún escritor contemporáneo ha
atravesado situaciones más duras, en condiciones de acoso y miseria, que Reinaldo
Arenas. Su martirio, como homosexual y escritor, no puede dejar indiferente a
nadie” (111-12; “No other contemporary author has lived through such harsh
experiences, in conditions of harassment and misery, as Reinaldo Arenas. His
martyrdom, as homosexual and writer, cannot leave anyone indifferent”). If
Sarduy’s escrito-viral writing is affected by the presence of the virus, in
Goytisolo’s reading of Arenas’ writing it is sexuality which informs Arenas’
resistance to heteronormativity and guarantees his constant persecution, “Sexo y
escritura serán en adelante sus pilares, su castigo y su gracia; la causa de sus
persecuciones, pero también de su resistencia ejemplar” (113; “Sex and writing
will be from now on his foundation, his punishment, and his grace; the cause of
his persecutions but also of his exemplary resistance”). Through writing, Arenas
is able to achieve divine grace, and canonization due to political and homophobic
persecutions.

In assessing Sarduy’s canonization, Goytisolo employs Islamic
iconography to speak of Sarduy’s vices and virtues, “Como muchos santos del
islam popular, cultivaba públicamente sus vicios y mantenía sus virtudes secretas.
Sólo los amigos podremos en adelante dar testimonio de ello” (130; “Like many
saints of popular Islam, he publicly cultivated his vices and maintained his virtues
secret. Only his friends could give testimony of this henceforth”). For instance,
Sarduy, like Foucault, hardly disclosed his HIV status to any of his close friends.
In Goytisolo’s beatification of Sarduy, though, the sanctity ascribed to AIDS needs to be challenged, especially since Goytisolo does not seem to acknowledge the degree in which AIDS patients are conditioned by medical and by political regimens:

Lo diré así con humor, mas con seriedad extrema: Severo murió como un santo [. . .] y merece una inmediata beatificación. Estoy seguro de que súfíes como Ibn Arabi e Ibn Al Farid, San Juan de la Cruz y su homónimo Barbès-Rochechouart, además de las hermanas de la Perpetua Indulgencia o travestidos londinenses con hábito de monjas que canonizaron a Derek Yarman—reencarnación alegre de Auxilio y Socorro, las fieles compañeras de Sarduy a lo largo de su obra—, saludarán también la emergencia de esta nueva, festiva y ligera forma de santidad, sin burocracia, papeleo, jerga eclesiástica ni arrimos curiales. . . . (138-39, my emphasis).

[I will say it in this way with humor, though with extreme seriousness: Severo died like a saint ( . . . ) and deserves an immediate beatification. I am sure that Sufi mystics such as Ibn Arabi and Ibn Al Farid, San Juan de la Cruz and his homonymous Barbès-Rochechouart, along with the sisters of Perpetual Indulgence or the London transvestites with nun habits that canonized Derek Yarman—happy reincarnation of Auxilio and Socorro, the faithful companions of Sarduy throughout his work—will salute as well the emergence of this new, festive and light form of sanctity, without bureaucracy, red tape, ecclesiastic intrigue or priestly bribes. . . .”]

Though Goytisolo is saluting the canonization of artists by lay followers who do not need church institutions to dictate processes of beatification, the “emergence of this new, festive and light form of sanctity, without bureaucracy, red tape, ecclesiastic intrigue or priestly bribes” occludes how other forms of medical and of church bureaucracy operate in AIDS patients before the “festive and light” apotheosis is reached.

A work of fiction resisting this “bureaucracy, red tape, [and] ecclesiastic intrigue” comes from the contemporary Peruvian/Mexican author Mario Bellatín.
In Bellatin’s *Salón de belleza* (beauty parlor), a novel narrated by a drag queen that tells of the transformation of a beauty parlor to an AIDS ward, the nameless drag queen narrator virulently resists both the presence of clerics and of medics for the same reason Goytisolo salutes this new form of beatification: “Como creo haber dicho en algún momento, los médicos y las medicinas están prohibidos en el salón de belleza. También las yerbas medicinales, los curanderos y el apoyo moral de los amigos o familiares. En ese aspecto, las reglas del Moridero son inflexibles”21 (“As I think I had told you, doctors and their medicines are prohibited in the beauty parlor. Also, medicinal herbs, witch doctors, and the moral support of friends and family. In that aspect, the rules of the *Moridero* are inflexible”). Figures of saints, doctors, and clerics bring their own regimes of bureaucracy and of ecclesiastic intrigue. For Bellatin’s narrator, these forms of control do not bring freedom to the dying, and instead, qualify their lives only as medical and moral subjects of the state and of church systems.

**Textual Saint Sebastian**

The re-appearance of the figure of Saint Sebastian in contemporary fiction coincides, in part, with the AIDS pandemic. Though many may not believe in the actual saint or in the existence of miracles, authors return to the Sebastian figure because he is a figure at the crossroads of sex, politics, power, and erotics. The colonial Peruvian representation of Saint Sebastian had especially redefined him as a representative of the Spanish empire. In paintings, the solitary nakedness in most Sebastian paintings marks him as a communal pariah, and exalts the bared
qualities of his life (his \(\text{zoe}\), to use Agamben’s formulation). The figure evokes a transformation in which Saint Sebastian consoles and helps mourn those lost to disease. With the burgeoning AIDS pandemic, Saint Sebastian also becomes “a politically charted figure signifying not so much sado-masochism as government neglect and societal hostility” (Kaye 98). He represented both Roman order and stately power, but rejected dominant religious practices, e.g., paganism, to worship monotheism.

In art, from Medieval and Renaissance to the contemporary work by French artists Pierre & Gilles (as in their technicolor-rendition of tanned and bee-stung lipped “Saint Sebastian,” 1987), the figure of Sebastian continues to fascinate the senses, and the spirits, and equally important, to serve as a reminder of our mortality. This Pierre & Gilles 1987 image of Sebastian, in addition to evoking golden Hollywood motion pictures, is reminiscent of popular religious art from Latin America (Kaye 96), and was recently used as part of a cover for \textit{La noche es virgen} (1997; “virgin night”) by another Peruvian author, Jaime Bayly.\(^{22}\) He is a deity associated with sadomasochism, with healing, with resurrection, and with homoerotic readings. Among the diverse range of modern artists who return to Saint Sebastian images, including Oscar Wilde, Thomas Mann, Franz Kafka, Marcel Proust, Gabriel García Lorca, and W.H. Auden, to name only a few, all seem to dramatize a sexuality beyond “acceptable bounds,” and therefore aberrant and dangerous (Kaye 88).
Even *macho* Hemingway was interested in the figure and representation of Saint Sebastian. Upon looking at the portrait of Saint Sebastian by El Greco (1541-1614), Hemingway remarked not only on the saint’s queerness of pose and androgynous appearance, but also on the painter’s. Hemingway connected the androgynous images he saw in El Greco with the painter’s own deemed queer sexuality. Hemingway goes so far as to call him the “Rey de los Maricónes” [sic; “King of the Faggots”]. While in Spain, for example, in *Death in the Afternoon* (1960), his dissertation on Spanish bullfighting, and while conversing with an Old Lady about a writer who is finishing a book on El Greco, Hemingway asks, “Do you make him a *maricón*? […] Did you ever look at the pictures? […] Do you think that was all accident or do you think all those citizens were queer? The only saint I know who is universally represented as built that way is San Sebastian. Greco made them all that way. Look at the pictures” (Comley and Scholes 119, my emphasis). It is interesting that Hemingway connects Saint Sebastian with a queer citizenship in sixteenth-century Toledo: Hemingway suggests that El Greco’s effeminate Saint Sebastian must resonate with El Greco’s queer audience.

In modern iconography, Saint Sebastian’s metaphoric impulse towards the eschatological may be another possible explanation for the saint’s popularity. Especially in narrating final moments due to deaths from AIDS, authors use the figure of the saint to create alternative systems that may help explain and mourn the loss of life and of bodily functions due to this disease. In this sense, when authors deploy religious iconography to write about imminent death due to AIDS,
they return to nineteenth-century practices of writing manuals on how to face
death. In his monumental study, *The Hour of our Death* (1977), Philippe Ariès, the
French philosopher, remarks that in the nineteenth century some fathers would
write their wills in order to pass on to their children their wisdom on how to
confront death.\(^{24}\) In “A Guide to Influential Literary Texts of HIV/AIDS
Literature,” Volet et al. further argue that with the rise of consumerism and
materialism, families no longer wrote wills together. This process of writing
inheritances would help mediate fears surround death. For Volet, the appearance
of AIDS has forced subjects to confront their own mortality and the “scandal” of
dying too young due to illness: “The AIDS crisis has reinstated mortality as a
subject to be openly talked about and explored in new ways.”\(^{25}\)

One of the problems in considering AIDS literature as a type of manual, or
even living will about death, is that it may elide the social, racialized, and
gendered realities of those who suffer from AIDS. For example, Volet considers
that AIDS writers tend to “conclude their tales with positive visions of an
imaginary future, ‘an after-death’, with recurrent metaphors of sun and water as an
affirmation of the continuing cycle of life” (“Guide to Influential […], no pp.).
Writers such as Sarduy and Arenas, for example, do not share such life
affirmations when they narrate their characters’ experience with AIDS. Instead of
writing positivistic affirmations of life in their novels, Sarduy and Arenas,
especially, confirm how trenchant homophobia and fear of disease in the Americas
support stately penal reactions against heretical bodies. Towards the end of *El
color del verano (Verano), Arenas provides a history ("una relación") of persecution, exile, and death to all dissident and queer bodies. Colonial "New World sodomy," as discussed in earlier chapters, continues to be resonant in Arenas’ fiction, but unlike Clavijero’s resistance to the prevalence of sodomites in the Americas as supported by de Pauw, Arenas is proud of this alternative colonial history populated by sodomites:

Se hizo una relación de los sufrimientos por los que habían pasado casi todas las locas. Se sacaron a colación millones de indios exterminados, según declaraciones del propio cronista y soldado López de Gómora, por haber practicado la sodomía... "Y sin embargo, a pesar de la persecución (se elevó la voz de la Reina de Holanda) aquellos nativos seguían reuniéndose en grupos de más de tres mil para practicar el amor prohibido". Se citaron las locas de la colonia también perseguidas, las locas de la república también discriminadas, las locas masacradas bajo el comunismo y el fascismo. Se iluminó la pantalla y aparecieron locas rusas congeladas en gulags remotos, locas carbonizadas en campos de concentraciones nazis. Se mostraron fotografías de la locas cubanas confinadas en los campos de concentración de Fifo. [...] Se mostró un campo de confinamiento para las locas víctimas del SIDA. Se mostraron prisiones, cayos, torres y túneles atestados de prisioneros sexuales. (389).

[There was a history of the sufferings to which almost every queen and faggot in the world had always been subjected. There was mention of the thousands of Indians exterminated, according to statements by the chronicler and soldier López de Gómora, for practicing sodomy. "And yet, despite persecution," the queen of Holland’s voice rose in righteousness, "those natives continued to gather together in groups of more than three thousand men to practice that ‘forbidden’ love.” There was also a list of the names of Spanish-colonial queens and independent-republican queens who had been persecuted in Cuba and throughout Latin America, the names of queens massacred elsewhere under Communism and Fascism. The screen lit up to show the spellbound audience Russian queens frozen in remote gulags, queens burned to cinders in Nazi concentration camps. Photographs were shown of the Cuban queens confined in Fifo’s own concentration camps. (...) There were pictures of confinement camps for victims of AIDS. The audience was shown prisons,
keys, towers—and tunnels filled with sexual prisoners [356-57, first ellipsis in original.]

Arenas connects colonial histories of extermination based on sexuality, a reminder of Balboa's own reaction to queerness in the Isthmus of Panama, with more current accounts of queer dissidents being incarcerated in gulags, in concentration camps, and more recently, in AIDS confinement camps. Arenas' use of political heresy, though described in religious metaphors, actually reflects Arenas' confrontation with the Cuban regime, with its artistic dogmas, and with homophobia. Towards the end of Verano, in a scene reminiscent of Saint Sebastian's martyrdom, Arenas describes a young homosexual martyr in bondage. In the chapter entitled “La elevación del Santo Clavo” (in the Hurley translation, “The Elevation of the Holy Hammer”), Arenas not only pokes fun at the level of fetishism in Christianity (even the crucifying nails of the young martyr are sanctified, Arenas tell us), but also uncovers slippage in political and in sexual practices of power:

Este rito sólo podía realizarse en un momento como aquel, momento sacro, en que Fifo celebraba la apoteosis del triunfo de sus cincuenta años en el poder.

El joven (o el eterno adolescente) completamente desnudo fue amarrado a una cruz de madera mientras su falo iba creciendo a causa de las constantes caricias de que era objeto por quienes lo crucificaban. De este modo tuvo lugar una doble erección, la erección del joven y la erección de la cruz gigantesca que fue izada en el centro del carnaval (426).

[This ceremony could be held only at a moment such as this—this *sacred* moment at which Fifo was celebrating the triumphant apotheosis of his fifty years in power.]
The naked youth (or eternal adolescent) was tied to a wooden cross, and since those who were crucifying him could not restrain themselves from caressing his extraordinary member, that rosy phallus grew and GREW and GREW, until it reached truly unparalleled dimensions. Thus, a double erection took place—the young man's erection, and the erection of the gigantic cross that was raised in the center of the Carnival (393-94, italics only in translation).26 ]

The cross functions here, as it did when Cuneo planted one of the first conquest crosses in the Caribbean, as an emblem of power for the state and for the power of the phallus. According to Arenas' account, all high functionaries took part in the “constant caresses,” implicating the state with its desire to display queer bodies for stately purposes, namely, the celebration of Fifo’s fifty-year reign. The visibility of queer bodies depends on the agenda of the state. Queer bodies can be rendered invisible, as in the case of the sanatoriums, and for purposes of deemed public health. The queer body, as well, can actually be exalted in a patriarchal society in order to promote heteronormative processes and white hegemony. On a related topic on the relationship between queer subjects and white hegemony in a global economy, Josefa Gabilondo’s article, “Like Blood for Chocolate, Like Queers for Vampires,” highlights the extent that queer and homoerotic representations of male sexuality are part of “a historical by-product or noise generated by a hegemonic global hetero-masculinity [...] mobilized worldwide for the purpose of articulating such a global hegemony.”27 Arenas' young martyr comes to embody the impulse of the state to show off its manhood, but at the same time this display of such phallic and stately power can only be mediated vis-à-vis a queer body. If not for this mediation, the state would be suspected of its own
homosexuality, a danger that Arenas continuously scoffs at in the framing of Verano. While the audience’s desire for the young martyr represents the extent to which queer bodies become mirrors of the state’s hyper-masculinity, the queer body also is required to desire the bondage: “Era realmente fascinante contemplar a aquel joven desnudo y erotizado amarrado a la cruz. [...] Súbitamente, no fue un pájaro, ni un hombre, ni una mujer, sino todo el pueblo el que quería saborear el santo clavo” (427; “That naked, aroused young man tied up there on that cross was so amazing. [...] Suddenly it was not a solitary faggot or macho man or even woman who wanted to worship the Holy Hammer, but the entire nation, my dear” [394, italics in translation only]). In short, the queer is subjected to the state’s desire, but unlike Gabilondo’s dictum that the state forces the queer to “desire the imperialist white subject and become the latter’s perfect, yet excessive, mirror” (Gabilondo 252), Verano’s account argues for a concomitant desires between the state and the queer agent.

In addition to the allusion to Saint Sebastian in the bondage scene described above, Arenas also continues to reflect upon classical renditions of pleasure and of death. The title to El color del verano o Nuevo jardín de las delicias (The Color of summer, or, the New Garden of Earthly Delights) is borrowed, after all, from the Garden of Earthly Delights by Dutch artist Hieronymus Bosch (c. 1450-1516). Both in the Arenas text and in Bosch’s canvas, what is stressed is the grotesque, the sexual excess, and the carnavalesque. In a chapter entitled “Pintando” (“Painting”), Arenas acknowledges his text’s surroundings as emanating from the
sixteenth-century painting. Like Bosch’s depiction of the garden of earthly delights where the center canvas is full of oversized fruit bearing a multiplicity of beings in different sexual positions, in *Verano* Arenas depicts a world of dissident sexualities: “Pintaré las descascaradas paredes de mi cuerpo. Pájaros insólitos, nubes donde viaja una rata tocando varios instrumentos musicales. Yo pintaré una danza gigantesca alrededor de una inmensa cosa roja con apariencia de fruta y encima un negro desnudo conminando a todo el mundo a que gire a su alrededor” (74; “I will paint the cracked and peeling walls of my body. Strange birds and clouds, and rats playing musical instruments riding atop them. I will paint a huge crowd of people dancing around a gigantic red object that resembles some sort of fruit, and on top, a naked black man commanding them all to skip in a circle around it, threatening them if they don’t” [67]).

Illustrated sexual excess, now in Arenas’ textual rendition of Bosch’s painting, underscores how the excessive manifestations of all body functions liberate the dissident and queer body. Only in excess can the queer body escape from the confines that states try to ascribe to their viral or political state. Instead of a tied Saint Sebastian figure who is confined to the state’s erotic scrutiny, the excess just highlighted cannot be contained, regulated, and poses a threat to all those who face it, like “un negro desnudo conminando a todo el mundo a que gire a su alrededor” (“a naked black man commanding them all to skip in a circle around it, threatening them if they don’t”).
The frame for *Verano*, then, is one whose salient feature is excessive sexual abandonment. Of course, this excess has not been without criticism, especially since the sexual excess is centered in Arenas’ work around the figure of the feminized and hypersexualized homosexual. Critics, such as Miguel Riera, for example, find that Arenas “nos restriega la cara con su homosexualidad” (59; “throws his homosexuality in our faces”), and affirms that if Arenas “hubiera tratado su sexualidad de forma más ‘discreta’, hubiera escrito una obra de mayor calidad artística” (Clark 94; “had treated his sexuality in a more ‘discrete’ form, he would have written a work of higher artistic quality”). Riera’s response highlights how aesthetic principles are governed by heteronormative impulses. Years earlier, when Cabrera Infante published *La Habana para un Infante Difunto* (1978), the strong heterosexual content was praised and was considered to be part of a compendium of erotic experiences. Arenas challenges this heteronormative categorization of heteroerotics-as-Art by creating an entire island in which even its dictator, Fifo, is perhaps the most prominent queer.

**Queer States of Emergency**

The representation of the homosexual in Arenas’ *Verano* and Santiago’s *Stella Manhattan*, like the aberrant iconography surrounding Saint Sebastian, is constructed at the crossroads. Both authors narrate how *locas* and *bichas* become part of nationalistic projects, and indeed become incorporated into the machinations of the state. The incorporation into the state, though, tends to result in death to homosexuals. In both Arenas and Santiago, the homosexual has an
uneasy relationship with the state especially, since there is a fear that homosexuals, in addition to their orientation towards the same sex, also are prone to terrorism and to espionage. One of the locas in Arenas’ _Verano_, Tedevora, for example, recalls how he may be incarcerated if he attends the carnival, the same carnival in which the specter of Saint Sebastian would later appear in bondage:

“Estaba casi seguro de que al entrar allí podía ser arrestada, torturada, condenada a muerte por intenciones terroristas, o tal vez por sospecha de ser un espía, pues era muy probable que aquella casa fuese el sitio de recepción u orientación de toda la policía secreta que vigilaría el rumbo ideológico del carnaval” (71-72; “He was almost certain that if he went inside he could be arrested, tortured, sentenced to death as a terrorist, or maybe under suspicion of espionage—because the odds were that this house was the reception or training center for all the secret police who were keeping an eye on the ideological direction the Carnival took” [64]).

Moreover, Arenas also wants to acknowledge the complex relationship that homosexual revolutionaries have with state indoctrination and with political education. The adventure of the _loca_ nicknamed “la Stalinista” (Arenas retains the English spelling for “the Stalinist”) dramatizes the extent to which homosexuals have been part of Cuba’s nationalistic project. He is called “la Stalinista” because he was sent on scholarship to Russia, and during his political indoctrination there, he was discovered giving oral sex to a Russian officer from Stalin’s home province. Moreover, the oral sex took place during a Bolshoi ballet performance, an important emblem of Russia’s nationalism and aesthetics:
Como si eso fuera poco, el hecho de haber sido descubierta mamándosela tras una tela a un alto militar soviético eran pruebas de que el pájaro, la terrible araña, tejía unas redes capaces de enredar en ellas hasta un mismo héroe de la gran exmadre patria, Dios mío, y nada menos que de la provincia de Stalin. Stalinista era el pájaro, ya lo veremos más adelante . . . Por otra parte, y eso es entre tú y yo, mi amiga, la loca era también chivata, además de chismosa, enredadora, bretera, maligna y tejedora de chanchullos. Sus hilos no se sabían a donde podían llegar. Cúidense de ese pájaro, comadre. Si lo ves haz la señal de la cruz y huye (116).

[And as though that weren’t enough, the fact of having been discovered sucking the cock of a high-ranking Soviet cadet behind a curtain was proof that this fairy, the terrible Spider Queen, wove a web that was capable of entangling even a Hero of the Former StepMotherland. My god, and from Stalin’s own province . . . Oh, the fag was a Stalinist, all right, as we shall see further on . . . And also (this is strictly between you and me, darling) a snitch—not to mention a gossip, a troublemaker, a nasty piece of work, and a spinner of confidence schemes. No one knew where the sticky threads of her web might reach.—You better beware of that one, honey. If you see her, make the sign of the cross and run (106, first ellipsis in original).]

Gossip, in addition to contesting notions of a strictly heteronormative construction of Marxist education abroad, allows queer bodies to challenge the rigidity of the state and its official discourses. In Arenas and Santiago, the role of gossip strives to create alternative histories for minorities who are not written in official descriptions. Gossip, then, challenges the state, much as testimonial accounts create alternative discourses within historical projects.

In this regard, Santiago’s character of Stella Manhattan, the Brazilian drag queen working for the Brazilian embassy, also tries to create a metaliterature for minority voices which critiques those services that represent the waning world of the Brazilian dictatorship in the late 1960s. Moreover, the minority discourses embedded in gossip also need to be seen as sharing the same impulse as student
riots across the U.S. and Europe, the Beat generation, and peace demonstrations in the 1960s. In “Metafiction and the Question of Authority in the Postmodern Novel from Brazil,” Nelson Vieira concludes that the role of Brazil’s metaliterature and “cultura alternativa” (“alternative culture”) sought to monitor and resist military oppression: “Manifested in Brazil as the ‘cultura, arte, cinema, e imprensa alternativas’ of the 60s and 70s, the alternative optic served as both the vanguard and watchdog for cultural and political resistance in opposition to established, official and rigid authority as expressed in Brazilian society, and politics, as well as in art. Fiction as an alternative world finds in Brazilian metafiction an alternative pathway toward new and freer vistas away from authority’s inflexible parameters” (591-92).

In the case of Stella Manhattan, though, “authority’s inflexible parameters” are maintained not only by Brazil’s military. The U.S., for example, is considered even more intolerant about homosexuals holding state offices. As the narrator describes below, homosexuals are ultimately considered communists and worse off than other social misfits:

São intolerantes paca, parece que são escolhidos como os opostos dos ingleses. Não sabem como os ingleses admiram tanta bicha no serviço secreto. Deu no que deu, todos comunistas. E como não sabem, tomas todas as precauções. Os ianques perdoam tudo, bebida, mulher, taras, até droga, perdoam tudo, menos bicha. Toda bicha é comunista. Sua carreira, seus contatos nos States, tudo por água abaixo. É melhor apressar a reforma (226-27).

[No one is more intolerant than the Americans, the exact opposite of the British. It’s beyond them why the English allow so many faggots into the secret service. Five’ll get you ten they’re all commies. And since the
Americans can never be sure they take all kinds of precautions. Gringos will overlook anything—alcohol, women, handicaps, even drugs—but faggots, never. All faggots are commies. If you’re found out, there goes your career; forget about your contacts in the States. You lose everything. Better get the ball rolling (171).

Moreover, the charge of being considered homosexual raises a state of emergency even in international relations. At the end of the novel, after the beaten body of Stella Manhattan has been discovered, one U.S. official tells another that all Brazilians are queer, and the common motif is that queer is synonymous with communism and with terrorism:

“Como se pudesse, o senhor não conhece os terroristas brasileiros, se vê logo que o senhor não os conhece. São todos uns veados, com perdão da palavra, mas numa hora destas é bom pôr os pingos nos ii. O rapaz é, os terroristas são, logo inimigos é que não são. Se entendem entre eles. São todos da mesma laia. E como tal, estão metidos no mesmo saco” (254).

["That’s unlikely; if you knew what these Brazilian terrorists are like . . .? They’re all queer, excuse the expression, but it’s about time we crossed our t’s and dotted our i’s. The young man and the terrorists are not enemies; on the contrary, they understand each other. They’re all cut from the same cloth and they’re all into the same dirty business” (195).]

_Stella Manhattan_ is not only a novel about homophobia and gay-bashing, but points out how Brazil, then recuperating from a military dictatorship at the beginnings of the 1970s, was built upon the exclusion, expulsion, and even extermination of queer bodies. One of Eduardo’s co-workers, Maria da Graça, for example, after reading news of his death, is concerned that the whole nation of Brazil will be considered queer: “Maria da Graça: Vocês duas com a cabeça no Brasil, só eu com a minha aqui, fico pensando é naqui, o que que não estão dizendo da gente depois que o _Daily News_ deu ontem o escândalo na primeira
Maria da Graça: You two have got your heads in Brazil; I’ve got mine here. What worries me, especially after yesterday’s front page story in the *Daily News* is what people must be saying here. They’re going to think all us Brazilians are like that” [201]). The question of Eduardo’s sexual orientation is fundamentally linked with the state.

Homosexuality, let alone having a state employee be a drag queen, would not only challenge the reification of the state, but would also challenge heteronormative patrimonies, in the duty to the father (*pater*), to the *patrão* (in Spanish “patrón,” boss in English), but also loyalty to the nation (*patria*).

Hence, when Eduardo’s lover, a military attaché to Brazil, writes his letter of condolence to Eduardo’s parents, he is careful to underscore their son’s commitment to his paternal upbringing and to civic engagement: “Não acredite, Sérgio, não acreditem, não passem por mais este dissabor, não pensem que o seu filho tenha traído a Pátria que tanto amamos—e pior!—que tenha traído os ensinamentos cívicos que vocês lhes transmitiram equanto pais” (266; “Don’t believe a word of it, Sérgio. You should not be made to suffer the agony of thinking your son betrayed his country, this country that we love so dearly, or worse, that he betrayed the civic responsibilities you both instilled in him” [205]).

In the process of writing histories about the formation of the nation, Sedgwick points out that the emergence of the nation also coincided with a changing landscape of sexual definitions. In the case of *Stella Manhattan*, Eduardo had the opportunity to work for the state (Eduardo issued passports) and to perform his
sexuality: "[...] I do want to suggest that the mutual interrepresentations of emerging national and sexual definitions must be looked for at no less a level of complexity for other important figures, as well" (Sedgwick 243). The confrontation of the homosexual body with state dogma will continue to haunt the construction and maintenance of the state, especially if sexual dissidence is read as a threat against the vital stability of the state's hegemony.

Whereas Chapter 3, "Bared Life of AIDS," discussed the quarantine of PLWAs, and at times, the exclusion of sexual and of political dissidents, Chapter 4 examined how homosexuality itself is considered diseased, dangerous, and subject to similar penal measures. To challenge the oppressive regimes, Arenas and Santiago overly emphasize homosexual bodies (homosexual excesses in Verano, and fear of drag queens in Stella Manhattan), and show how the queer is used as a vehicle to support patriarchal and governmental operations. Though the first chapters of the dissertation established how discourses of disease helped construct the Americas as a site of enervation, chapter 3 discussed what happened when such narratives of disease are used to legitimate the recent incarceration of PLWAs. Whereas Chapter 3 reflected on the invisibility of PLWAS, chapter 4 showed how queer bodies are rendered visible, especially with the intercession of the plagued and queer figure of Saint Sebastian, to promote state operations. As Stella Manhattan cautions her readers, "Queers are like prostitutes; they have to seek out a saint to intercede on their behalf" (159). In Verano, the martyrdom and erection of a Saint Sebastian-like loca showcased the fifty-year celebration of
Fifo’s rule. In *Stella Manhattan*, the eponymous drag queen works as an issuer of passports for the Brazilian state. The following chapter, “Pájaros and Tombs: AIDS takes Flight,” examines how in the pandemic AIDS itself is rendered invisible in processes of mystification in works by Sarduy and Goytisolo, though ultimately this canonization of AIDS by Iberoamerican writers will prove equally objectifying to PLWAs.
NOTES


2 Translations borrowed from *Stella Manhattan*, trans. George Yúdice (Durham: Duke UP, 1994) 159. The translator throughout the novel translated the Portuguese “bicha” either as “faggot” or “maricón” (a Spanish version of faggot). For consistency, I retain an English equivalent term of “queer.”


is not clear who currently maintains this virtual copy of the St. Sebastian’s Angels.

Access to the entire site now requires a code.


20 Juan Goytisolo, El bosque de las letras (Madrid: Alfaguara, 1995).


22 Jaime Bayly, La noche es virgen (Barcelona: Anagrama, 1997).


Hurley takes some liberties in translating Arenas. For instance, the “grew” or “GREW” emphasis is not in the original.


Chapter 5

Pájaros and Tombs: AIDS Takes Flight

En las paredes de las rocas, los nudistas gregarios habían dejado inscripción de sus juergas y otros jolgorios: signo tallado con sílex—doble salamandra, posible pájaro—, que se repetía sin variaciones. La congregación, años ha, era multitudinaria y móvil.

—Severo Sarduy, Pájaros de la playa

[On the rock walls, the gregarious nudists had left behind an inscription of their mirth and games: a sign carved with silica—a double salamander, possibly a bird—that was repeated without variations. For many years, the congregation was multitudinous and mobile.]

The construction of disease in the Americas has been marked by natural histories, and by on-going sexual, medical, and epidemiological encounters. Along with colonial narratives of sexual enslavement and fear of aberrant bodies inhabiting New World’s enervating climate, the construction of the Panama Canal reified colonial discourses of disease associated with the isthmus’ history of miasmas and disease. More recently, the incarceration of AIDS bodies, both in Cuba and in Severo Sarduy’s Pájaros de la playa, continues to confront how disease is employed in order to support viral and political isolation of dissidents. The encounters highlighted thus far, both in eighteenth-century natural histories and in AIDS novels, have been grounded on the material reality of disease and of its impact on human geographies and on bodies. The present chapter examines how Sarduy and Juan Goytisolo use metaphysical discourses to interpret the emergence of AIDS in literature and in their own critical body of work. In evoking metaphysical ruminations in their novels, these Iberoamerican authors, who by no
means represent the only configuration of authors, show how life is read, interpreted, and policed in spite of death. This chapter analyzes how Sarduy’s *Pájaros* and Goytisolo’s *Las virtudes del pájaro solitario* construct biomedical policing, approach medical protocols, and lastly, re-write invocations of the hereafter. Though in chapter 1, “Potency and Enervation: Sexualized America,” European travel narratives had constructed the Americas as a site of disease, the present chapter examines how European mystical narratives of disease (the apotheosis that AIDS brings in the early fiction of Goytisolo, for example) are resisted in the Americas, especially when authors, such as Sarduy and Mario Bellatín, object to such flights of mysticism. Sarduy resists the European mythic model for reading AIDS in which there is an apotheosis when dying from the disease. As was the case with Peruvian reconstructions of Saint Sebastian, and discussed in chapter 4, “Queer Iconography,” the New World had been quite accustomed to adopt, and to resist, since colonial times, European religious projections.

In *AIDS and its Metaphors*, now a foundational and critical work on constructions of AIDS along medical, cultural and political points of contact, Susan Sontag briefly inserts a curious comment on AIDS, the hereafter, and the process of artistic creativity. Though for Sontag diseases associated with sexual contacts, such as syphilis, came to engender artistic furo and a keen sense of the hereafter, AIDS did not create a similar mythology. Also, because of the dementia it brought to brain functions, syphilis came to be read as providing avenues for
imagination and creativity: “This romanticizing of the dementia characteristic of neurosyphilis was the forerunner of the much more persistent fantasy in this century about mental illness as a source of artistic creativity or spiritual originality. But with AIDS—though dementia is also a common, late symptom—*no compensatory mythology has arisen, or seems likely to arise*” (my emphasis).  

This chapter argues that novels by Sarduy and by Goytisolo, in contrast, do point out that AIDS mythologies and mysticisms necessarily arose as a reaction to the pandemic, partly as a way for authors confronting the disease (Sarduy died from complications due to AIDS) to prolong life through writing.

**Policing Biology**

As discussed in Chapter 3, “Bared life of AIDS,” Sarduy’s *Pájaros* provides an account of a mysterious disease affecting an island. The bathers, and patients of this island, are quarantined in a clinic guarded with prison-like care. In discussing the extreme medical treatments of its insular patients, *Pájaros* contests the homogenizing impulse of medical discourses when diseased bodies are constructed. The beginning of the novel describes some of the daily routines of the bathers, and what is especially resonant in the following citation is the appropriation of writing, described as “inscription,” to mark both the presence of the illness and of the passing of time, “En las paredes de las rocas, los nudistas gregarios habían dejado inscripción de sus juergas y otros jolgorios” (13; “On the rock walls, the gregarious nudists had left behind an inscription of their mirth and games”).
Diseased bodies, Sarduy suggests, are marked by repeated inculcations of their viral state. The bathers, all of whom have the un-named disease, are described as having heterogeneous and itinerant lives even though their disease marks them as having one identical and repeatable trait, namely disease. The emblazoned sign that the bathers carve to reflect their past pleasures, their “juergas y otros jolgorios” (“mirth and games”), is described as a hybrid creature, one that inhabitants liminal positions between water and air, “un signo tallado con sílex—doble salamandra, posible pájaro” (“a sign carved with silica—a double salamander, possibly a bird”). This sign “se repetía sin variaciones” (“was repeated without variations”) even though the congregation had already moved or passed away, and as the next paragraph informs us, had been replaced by a new generation of bathers: “Hoy no era nada. Envejecida y anémica. [...] Los naturalistas supervivientes se hundían entre las rocas, como si descendieran por peldaños cavados en la piedra” (13; “Today it [the congregation] was nothing. Old and anemic. [...] The surviving naturalists would hide within the rocks, as if they were descending through crevices already carved on the rock”). Because of their disease, the bathers, like the salamander/bird hybrid image, are in a state of arrested evolution: they are neither young nor old, and they are neither dead nor have hopes for a long life. Because of their disease, the bathers came to be haunted by the repeated inculcation of how they came in contact with the un-named disease. Past and future bathers alike have their fates sealed by the same hybrid stamp, the “signo tallado con sílex—doble salamandra, posible pájaro—,
que se repetía sin variaciones” (“a double salamander, possibly a bird—that was repeated without variations”).

The bathers, as well, are read as contaminated bodies, since the old bathers, as in Hawthorne’s *The Scarlet Letter* (1850), wear their moral and viral guilt in the form of an embroidered textile: “El paso efímero de jovenzuelos no era más que una reverencia a la retórica ecologista de sus padres, una marca de la abominación que sentían por las trusas—despreciaban a los bañistas cubiertos con la injuriosa denominación de ‘textiles’—, o una indolencia” (13; “The fleeting passing of young men was no more than a reverence to the ecological rhetoric of their parents, a sign of abomination that they felt for swimsuits—they hated bathers that were covered with the injurious denomination of ‘textiles’ or indolence,” my emphasis). The un-named disease literally becomes the canvas by which bathers are understood and read.

The beginning of *Pájaros*, unlike its finale, positions the body as receptive to the cultural and artistic reformations of its disease. Sarduy’s use of hybrid creatures reflects the liminal positions that diseased bodies encounter in their medical treatment. These are bodies that strive to resist the foreign gaze as the only possible construction for their being. The old bathers, for example, try to escape not only from a mass of “birds” that may consume them, but also try to evade a “mirada ajena” (“foreign gaze”) that promises to be equally cannibalizing: “Como los vermes dejados por las olas reptan para escapar a la voracidad de los pájaros de presa, ellos gateaban entre los peñascos para disimularse, para huir de
lo que más aborrecían: la mirada ajena” (13; “Like the vermin left behind by waves that fight to escape the voracity of birds of prey, they crawled between boulders in order to disappear and to flee from what they most despised: the foreign gaze,” my emphasis). Instead of identifying a homogenous experience for all who succumbed to the un-named disease, Pájaros’ construction of sexual and of disease experiences is rendered unstable and changing, even though the viral insignias remain constant. Characters, like Siempreviva, never narrate how they came to be infected. Both young and old have the disease. The text suggests that regardless of a person’s own history with disease, science and its gaze will attempt to generate one viral history for its patients.

Sarduy’s reaction against the medical and statist gaze—Sarduy constructs the island’s clinic as a military and medical site, as discussed in chapter 3, “Bared Life of AIDS”—is in accordance with Juan Goytisolo’s warning about the risks of engendering totalizing metaphors. In a 1998 interview, “Una nacionalidad cervantina: Entrevista con Juan Goytisolo,” for example, Goytisolo remarks how totalizing metaphors prevalent in the arts and in the sciences herald an emergent manifestation of totalitarian regimes: “Desconfío totalmente de las identidades fijas, de los nacionalismos de calidad y de las sociedades homogéneas, porque toda esta homogeneidad o identidad icónica es siempre el producto de la violencia hacia los individuos. Esto sólo puede existir dentro de sociedades totalitarias”3 (“I totally mistrust fixed identities, from qualified nationalisms and homogeneous societies, because all that homogeneity or iconoclastic identity is always the
product of violence against individuals. This can only exist within totalitarian societies”). The incarceration of AIDS bodies in Cuba, for example, put into practice the programmatic application of totalizing definitions for quarantining all diseases. The treatment of AIDS in Cuba occluded the fact that AIDS is only contagious through sexual contacts (or exchanges that involve the incorporation of blood or foreign substances to the body, as with hemophiliacs or drug users, for example), and that the history of more contagious diseases (such as airborne viruses, such as the cold or the flu) came to dictate all future protocols for treating and containing sexually-transmitted diseases. AIDS quarantines in Cuba responded to the state’s objectification of a virus associated with the dissident, the queer, and even with the act of writing AIDS fiction. Since the queer probably cannot be excised, the AIDS quarantines in Cuba tried to manage, as exemplified by the “talleres literarios” (“literary workshops”) established at the AIDS sanatorium of Los Cocos, the artistic output of these authors by inscribing AIDS writing workshops as part of the biomedical treatments for all PLWAs.

In the twentieth century, and with the emergence of AIDS, the Americas continued to be constructed as a place of contagion and of queerness. For instance, Foucault’s own contagion with AIDS was read as “American,” and as arising from queer habitats in U.S. metropoles. His AIDS, according to Didier Eribon, could only emanate from the Americas, as already discussed toward the end of chapter 4, “Queer Iconography.” In biographies on Foucault, there was indeed an incitement to discourses in associating Foucault’s “AIDS” as arising
from his contact with homosexual bodies in the Americas, and in cities such as San Francisco and New York. As David Halperin notes, Eribon’s biography suggested that AIDS “could not possibly have originated in a civilized place like Paris or been transmitted to Foucault there.”

If Foucault had initially maintained the notion that “sex” brings about an “incitement to discourse,” the emergence of AIDS fuses medical and penal discourses in order to eradicate disease and to police aberrant pleasures associated with AIDS (prostitution, drug use, and the queer). Like discourses of “sex,” the emergence of AIDS, and the states of emergency that it affords, establishes an “incitement” to disease narratives. To borrow and transpose from Foucault’s “The Repressive Hypothesis,” disease, like sex, becomes closely connected to mechanisms of power and results in the “wide dispersion of devices that were invented for speaking about [disease], for having it be spoken about, for inducing it to speak of itself, for listening, recording, transcribing, and redistributing what is said about it” (History of Sexuality, vol. 1, 34).

In vol. 2 of History of Sexuality, Foucault also concludes that the history of persecution and of regimens of power have not been delegated specifically to the insane asylum, the prison, or to the concentration camp. Disease continues to operate under similar regimens of power, and as Foucault points out at the end of the citation, these “games of “truth” invariably consider the aberrant diseased body a criminal agent:

Not a history that would be concerned with what might be true in the fields of learning, but an analysis of the “games of truth,” the games of truth and error through which being is historically situated as experience: that is, as
something that can and must be thought. What are the games of truth by which man proposes to think his own nature when he perceives himself to be mad; when he considers himself to be ill; when he conceives of himself as living, speaking, laboring being; when he judges and punishes himself as criminal? (vol. 2, 6-7).

In Sarduy’s fictional account of the prognosis, treatment, and the technology facilitating the study of diseased bodies in Pájaros, the Cosmologist reaches a similar conclusion regarding the “games of truth” generated by science in understanding, treating, and in objectifying diseased bodies. Sickness, according to the Cosmologist, means being tied to instrumentalities coded for the study of disease, and while technology gives an air of objectivity, science is constructed in various degrees of interpretations: “Estar enfermo significa estar conectado a distintos aparatos, frascos de un líquido blanco y espeso como el semen, medidas de mercurio, gráficos fluorescentes en una pantalla” (109; “Being sick means being connected to distinct apparatuses, vials of a white and thick liquid like semen, measurements of mercury, and fluorescent graphics on a screen”). In short, both science and technology construct the body. The body itself is only free and autonomous, at least for Sarduy, as it leaves the bed sheets of a hospital bed: “La cura es una ruptura de amarres, de nexus; el cuerpo es libre y autónomo, arrancadas las sábanas” (109; “The cure is the rupture of knots, of connections; the body is free and autonomous, the sheets pulled away”). For the Cosmologist, cure from disease comes from creating a wedge between technology, prognosis, and knowledge of disease. In this case, prognosis, meaning “foreknowledge,” highlights the constructedness of knowledge: there is no prior,
stable "gnosis." Instead, there is only a process of finding, as the etymology for "prognosis" suggests, a "probable course and termination of a case of disease.\(^6\)

In addition, prognosis is also associated with the course of treatment, a process that is intrinsically connected to the instruments that help decipher disease for Sarduy's Cosmologist.

In *Pájaros*, the Cosmologist's approach to prognosticating disease is mediated and constructed by astronomical instruments. For the Cosmologist, the expansive cosmos and the epidemiological universe of "los enfermos" ("the sick") share the same finality:

Los astrónomos veían cuerpos celestes, esferas incandescentes o porosas, recorridas por cataclismos de nubes carbónicas, rodeadas de anillos, esplendentes o vidriosas; para los cosmólogos fue como para los enfermos: nos conectaron con aparatos en que los astros son cifras que caen, invariables y parcas noticias del universo (109, my emphasis).

[The astronomers would see celestial bodies, incandescent and porous spheres, etched by cataclysm of carbonic clouds, surrounded by rings, splendid and glassy; for the Cosmologists it was the same as for the ill: they connected us to instruments in which the stars are statistics that fall, invariable and with fateful news of the universe.]

The Cosmologist would like to resist the inevitability of identification which surrounds the disease. In describing the "news of the universe" as "parcas noticias" ("fateful news"), Sarduy remarks on the inevitability that fate brings to being named "diseased": all news of the universe, like those engendered by the Roman parcas or the Greek Fates, have already been scripted, interpreted, and finalized. All subjectivities surrounding the sick, therefore, only describe experience as an ontology based on viral conditions.
In understanding the biomedical policing that is inherent in medicine, it is important to return to Sontag’s discussion of metaphors of war enacted by the state in *AIDS and its Metaphors*. In addition to highlighting how science is constructed subjectively, the connection between ontology and disease is mediated by how governments construct disease according to politics of “othering.” For instance, in chapter 2, “Disease in *Luna verde* by Joaquín Beleño and in *Paisaje con tumbas pintadas en rosa* by José Ricardo Chaves,” disease became a tool for “othering” black workers in the Panama Canal, and for preventing miscegenation. In chapter 3, “Bared Life of AIDS,” HIV-positive Cubans were considered to be the only carriers of AIDS. Ian Lumsden points out how the majority of Cubans still thought that only those confined in AIDS confinement camps were the only carriers, and that the quarantine system “may foster a false belief that sexual partners outside the sanatoriums are free from the disease. Cubans as a group still have little knowledge about AIDS.” The prologue to the fiction in *Toda esa gente solitaria*, for example, also revealed how AIDS was read as a threat to the nation. Lourdes Jomolca and José Atanes remind their prologue readers that only sports and politics are safe contacts in Cuba, “salvando quizá los polítics y los deportivos” (“except perhaps political and athletic ones”). Likewise, in *AIDS and its Metaphors* Sontag argues that diseased bodies are constructed as dangerous “others,” as alien, and as enemies of the state:

War-making is one of the few activities that people are not supposed to view “realistically”; that is, with an eye to expense and practical outcome. In all-out war, expenditure is all-out, imprudent—war being defined as an
emergency in which no sacrifice is excessive. But the wars against diseases are not just calls for more zeal, and more money to be spent on research. The metaphor implements the way particularly dreaded diseases are envisaged as an alien “other,” as enemies in modern war; and the move from the demonization of the illness to the attribution of fault to the patient is an inevitable one, no matter if patients are thought of as victims (11).

Along with prognostication, victimization based on an individual’s health status continues to be resisted especially since victimization, as Sontag underscores, is founded on the murderous excesses of war and of irrational patriotic zeal. For instance, the drag queens suffering from an unnamed disease (“el mal”) that Peruvian Mario Bellatín introduces in Salón de belleza, as already noted in chapter 4, “Queer Iconographies,” are not part of the state’s history on account of their viral health and their queer drag (they are homosexual drag queens). The drag queen element in Bellatín’s text resists the state by satirizing the worship of national heroes: “Antes de esperar en alguna concurrida avenida, ya travestidos nuevamente, ocultábamos los maletines en unos agujeros que había en la base de la estatua de uno de los héroes de la patria” (25; “Before waiting in some busy street, now in drag once again, we would hide our luggage in crevices that were at the base of the statue of one of the national heroes”). The drag queens resist Sontag’s assessment of the state’s construction of diseased bodies as “other,” “victims,” or as “enemies.” Moreover, the drag-queen narrator of Salón vehemently resists institutional ways of curing the un-named disease, including medicine, alternative medicine, the occult, or even the support from empathic communities: “Como creo haber dicho en algún momento, los médicos y las
medicinas están prohibidos en el salón de belleza. También las yerbas medicinales, los curanderos y el apoyo moral de los amigos o familiares” (33; “As I think I had told you, doctors and their medicines are prohibited in the beauty parlor. Also, medicinal herbs, witch doctors, and the moral support of friends and family. In that aspect, the rules of the Moridero are inflexible”). Ultimately, the AIDS bodies in Salón never become objects of pity because they are not constructed as victims of disease: they are simply dying in what the narrator calls “a Moridero,” a dying zone.

Protocols for AIDS

“Protocol” becomes an important operative word in understanding the policing and legitimating discourses surrounding AIDS quarantines, treatments, and subjectivities. Though Sarduy uses the term “protocol” to designate social and scatological functions, the word itself prefigures the collapse of subjectivity that an individual with AIDS faces. In its Latin and Romance language use (English does not retain any of the following meanings), protocol was the first flyleaf glued to the case containing a manuscript. Protocol means, in short, the “first glue,” and functions as the glue which keeps together a collection of documents. Moreover, in Romance languages, a protocol became one of the first forms of legalities and of official insignias. In the original Greek, “protocol” also signified the mark itself: the protocol “was the first sheet of a roll of papyrus, bearing the manufacturer's official mark” (OED). Diseased bodies, like protocols, become marked texts, bearing the stamp of affliction, and because of their viral
status they are marked by medical, social, cultural, and political definitions of disease. Sarduy’s bathers, for example, had already described their connection to insignias that repeatedly marked them as liminal bodies, “signo tallado con sflex” (“signs carved with silico”), intersecting life and death, and described in Pájaros as oscillating between figures of birds or salamanders. Protocols are both the letter before the law (they are the first sheets of a roll of papyrus) and the manifestation of that regimen of power. While sealing them with an official mark, protocols mediate initial reactions to narratives of disease.

In Pájaros, Sarduy is hesitant to give merit to any form of protocol, of official mark or insignia, to the experience of being diseased. All protocols, by definition, cannot escape from being a social construction and from having the risk of totalizing the treatment and the individuality of PLWAs. Sarduy’s “protocol” is one which unveils the real nature of infection and of its effects on the body:

“Basta con que el cuerpo se libere del protocolo social para que se manifieste su verdadera naturaleza: un saco de pedos y excrementos. Un pudridero” (166; “It is enough that the body liberates itself from the social protocol so that its real nature becomes manifested: a sack of farts and excrement. A rotting cesspool”). Without a “social protocol,” the body is reduced to its bared qualities. Like Sarduy, Bellatín also refuses to exalt compassionate feelings in those who frequent his beauty salon turned to a “Moridero” (a dying zone). Because drag queens were beaten by mobs, were refused healthcare, and were considered infected, “no querían recibirlos por temor de que estuviesen infectados” (Salón 14; “they did not
want to receive them for fear of infection”), the narrator decides to reclaim a neutral space for convalescence and death: “Tal vez de esa manera se fue formando este triste Moridero que tengo la desgracia de regentar” (14-15; “Maybe in this manner the sad Moridero was formed and now I have the misfortune of reigning over it”). For both Sarduy and Bellatín, “pudrideros” and “morideros” resist the medical and punitive treatment of disease. Moreover, the bared qualities ascribed to a life of AIDS contests the process of mystifying disease. Sarduy’s last novel resists the flight of AIDS into paths of mysticism, and serves as a counterpoint to the deep-rooted Old World mysticism in the other queer text, the other “pájaro” text (and pájaro had signified queer for both authors), Las virtudes del pájaro solitario by Goytisolo. Pájaros becomes Sarduy’s reaction to Goytisolo’s mythic impetus throughout Las virtudes. The next section discusses how Sarduy reads AIDS against a European tradition of viewing disease as apotheosis. Pájaros resist this narrative of disease emanating from one of the first novels to glorify AIDS in Iberoamerica, Goytisolo’s Las virtudes. Sarduy resists modern discourses on disease that emanate from Europe and that are eventually echoed, and refuted, in the Americas.

After Life

If Sontag provided a dissenting voice regarding the growing use of military and militant metaphors surrounding the treatment of AIDS, Sarduy’s Pájaros and Goytisolo’s Las virtudes provide a transatlantic counterpoint to processes of mystifying metaphors surrounding AIDS. Sarduy resists the European mythic
model for reading AIDS as an apotheosis when dying from the disease. As was the case with Peruvian colonial constructions of Saint Sebastian, and discussed in chapter 4, “Queer Iconography,” the New World had been quite used to altering European religious, and mythic, icons to reflect New World realities. The colonial Saint Sebastian in Peru was connected more with Spanish power over the Incas than with the European traditions that associated him with healing and with Christian proselytizing. Because Peruvians considered Saint Sebastian a “Spanish soldier,” his death showcased Peruvian resistance to Spanish invasion and to Catholicism in the New World. In *AIDS and its Metaphors*, Sontag wants to resist the categorization of AIDS as an “invasion” or as a “‘total’ anything” since “we are not being invaded. The body is not a battlefield. The ill are neither unavoidable casualties nor the enemy” (94-95). Refusing to glorify AIDS in the afterlife, Sarduy resists the process of mystification surrounding the narration of AIDS. Like Sontag, Sarduy resists totalizing metaphors, but especially those emanating from a mysticism ascribed to narratives on and about AIDS. Moreover, in *Pájaros*, the omniscient narrator is uncertain about finding solace or a cure during the pandemic:

¿Encarnizarse en la cura o en la busca de otras soluciones ofrecidas por medicinas más o menos míticas? No. La única respuesta del hombre, la única que puede medirse, por su desenfado, con la voluntad de Dios, es el desprecio: considerar ese don precioso como algo intrascendente, risorioso, como lo que llega y se va. Sin otra forma de evaluación (155).

[To wrap oneself up in the cure or in the search for other solutions offered by medicines, more or less mystical? No. The only answer for humanity, the only one that can be measured, due to its ease, with the will of God, is
disdain: consider that precious boon as something insignificant, laughable, as something that comes and goes. Without any form of evaluation.]

Cure is neither located in faith nor in scientific dogmas. For Sarduy, then, disease should not be considered a divine boon, “ese don precioso” (“that precious boon”). Instead, it should be narrated as having no transcendental meaning except, of course, as a tragic joke, “algo intrascendente, irrisorio” (“something insignificant, laughable”).

In contrast to Pájaros’ emergent existential reflections and disavowal of mystical readings of disease, Goytisolo’s Las virtudes participates in a rich tradition representing metaphysics of disease generated by citing aberrant mystic narratives that exalt the death and dying of queer bodies, either from AIDS or from political and religious repression. In “Juan Goytisolo: De Apóstata a Iluminado,” Javier Escudero designates the more recent cycle of works by Goytisolo, including Paisajes después de la batalla (1982), Las virtudes del pájaro solitario (1988), Aproximaciones a Gaudí en Capadocia (1990), and La cuarentena (1991), as exploring “una serie de creencias espirituales antidogmáticas, provenientes de tradiciones heterodoxas islámicas, que le sirven para alcanzar una nueva visión del cosmos y la divinidad, para enfrentarse de lleno con cuestiones relacionadas con la trascendencia, la salvación o la condenación” (“a series of anti-dogmatic spiritual beliefs, arising from Islamic traditional heterodoxy, that he employs to reach a vision of the cosmos and divinity, in order to confront head on questions relating to transcendence, salvation, or
condemnation”). In *Las virtudes*, for example, the diseased body, while undergoing a mystic transformation, is asexualized, and no longer possesses any trace of the ravages of the disease. If there was AIDS, its effects on the human body have been subsumed by the mystic experience as described in *Las virtudes*:

> tu enfermedad amenazaba con extenderse, los calmantes te mantenían exteriormente amodorrado, en una fase de secreta y fecunda receptividad y entre delirios, caos onírico y acronías sonámbulas, repetías frases a primera vista inconexas, increpadas amorosamente al poeta, le reprochabas el enigma insoluble del Cántico, asumías giros de su lenguaje quebrado y tenso, recorrías la geografía alucinada de sus versos, sus espacios insulares y extáticos, presa de temores y arrebatos mesiánicos, oscilando entre la anchura y lóbreguez de su noche espiritual (71-72).

[your sickness threatened to spread, the tranquilizers kept you outwardly drowsy, in a phase of secret and fertile receptivity amid fits of delirium, oneiric chaos and a somnambulistic lack of a sense of time, you kept repeating phrases that seemed disconnected at first, you lovingly chided the poet, reproached him for the insoluble enigma of the Canticle, adopted his tense, fragmented turns of phrase, traversed the hallucinatory geography of his verses, his insular and ecstatic spaces, overcome with fears and messianic raptures, fluctuating between the freedom and the gloom of his spiritual night (64-65)]

In narrating the moment of death from AIDS, *Las virtudes* exalts the moment of apotheosis. Throughout the text, for example, little attention is paid to the medical realities of the disease. Instead, “mystical suffering” replaces bodily suffering. The physical suffering that we see in the above citation is particularly notable because the body is completely absent and is cast aside. The reader is even told that the disease is spreading, “tu enfermedad amenazaba con extenderse” (“your sickness threatened to spread”), and yet no body is described that can map the spread of the illness. The *corpus* that is infected is the classical works of
mystics such as San Juan de la Cruz, especially in the direct allusion to his “Noche oscura del alma.”\(^{13}\) The *topos* of “una noche oscura” (“a dark night”), for example, is a common motif in San Juan de la Cruz’s description of the communion with God. Even in narrating the manner of infection, *Las virtudes* describes it as first starting spiritually. The physical infection is almost an afterthought: “qué significaban aquellas precauciones, el cordón sanitario impuesto a su celda por los del Pano? su contagiosidad era asimismo física o, como había creído hasta entonces, *solamente espiritual*?” (82, my emphasis; “what was the meaning of those precautions, the cordon sanitaire placed about his cell by the Unreformed Carmelites? was his contagion also physical or, as he had believed up until then, *merely spiritual*?” [76]).

If the concern is to create humane policies surrounding the emergence of AIDS, Goytisolo’s process of reducing disease to mystical flights introduced some fundamental problems in the intersection of fiction and disease, though recently Goytisolo has entertained certain misgivings regarding the application of totalizing religious metaphors, especially when religion is inculcated to justify war and imperialism. In a Feb. 18, 2003 interview in Madrid, Goytisolo declared that “Deberíamos volver al imperio de la razón, pero los países están dirigidos por teólogos y va a resultar prácticamente imposible”\(^{14}\} (“We should return to the empire of reason, but countries are being ruled by theologians and it will be practically impossible”). Coinciding with the publication of his latest book, *Telón de boca* (2003), Goytisolo also announced that his literary career would be ending
with Telón, a novel recounting the philosophical and spiritual journey a husband embarks upon after losing his wife. In it, the husband, and his double, resist the apotheosis from disease that informs Goytisolo’s Las virtudes. Telón promises to provide Goytisolo’s own contestation to the mystic drive characterizing his earlier fiction.¹⁵

When exploring the spiritual ramifications that the emergence of AIDS brings to his last novel, Sarduy presents mysticism as a three-part fabrication, beginning with conceptualizing the illusion of union with one entity, then describing the mystic experience in classical terms (and reminiscent of Goytisolo’s own approach to mysticism), and finally ending with disillusion. First, the emergence of the un-named disease makes the illusion of joining one entity an impossible enterprise in Pájaros. For Sarduy, disease creates a split between disease and its carrier: “Antes disfrutaba de una ilusión persistente: ser uno. Ahora somos dos, inseparables, idénticos: la enfermedad y yo. Parece que el embarazo procura esa misma sensación” (160; “Before I used to relish a persistent illusion: being one. Now we are two, inseparable, identical: sickness and me. Seems that pregnancy procures that same sensation”).

It is interesting that Sarduy describes the relationship between disease and its host body as akin to pregnancy. As in pregnancy, the offspring, like disease, is separate from the host body, but disease is only knowable as it relates to the host’s body. Second, Sarduy indirectly cites classical sources about Christian mysticism, namely by inserting a passage on San Juan de la Cruz from an account in Saint
Jean de la Croix et le problème de l'expérience mystique, by Jean Baruzi. The mystical unity with god can only be understood as negation of the bodily. In Pájaros, the citation regarding the mystic experience of San Juan de la Cruz is indirectly quoted from Baruzi and is twice removed from the germinating text. In other words, Sarduy does not believe in the "original" source (text) for the mystical experience. Instead, other readers and critics constantly mediate Sarduy's reaction to mysticism. Unity with god is mediated and is corruptible. Sarduy's use of palimpsest highlights how the "original" text is not an important source for mysticism: "San Juan de la Cruz resume en la palabra noche el carácter de esa experiencia. A través de la negación de los diversos objetos, que éstos sean naturales o sobrenaturales, se insinúa en nosotros eso que ni nuestros sentidos ni nuestra capacidad mental podrían comprender" (Baruzi, as quoted in Sarduy 162; "San Juan de la Cruz resumes in the word 'night' the character of that experience. By way of the negation of diverse objects, that these may be natural or supernatural, it is insinuated within us that neither our senses nor our mental capacity can comprehend"). Instead of reading directly from the saint's writing, Sarduy believes in a critic's assessment of San Juan's mysticism. Sarduy, therefore, questions even a readerly union with the mystic text: Sarduy resorts to criticism on the narration of the mystic experience.

Sarduy concludes the triad of experiences surrounding mysticism in Pájaros with cynicism about a possible unity with the divine. Soon after the citation from Saint Jean de la Croix, the Cosmologist immediately responds
against the negation of feeling and of intellect that are necessary for a mystical 
experience, as suggested by Baruzi in the above citation, “ni nuestros sentidos ni 
nuestra capacidad mental podrían comprender” (“neither our senses nor our mental 
capacity can comprehend”). In Pájaros, then, disease does not bring unity with 
me encuentro enfermo y solo. Al menos, algo cierto habrá quedado de todo esto: 
la desilusión” (162; “I lost my bet on humanity. I believed that in it [humanity] I 
would find a part of God. Today I find myself sick and alone. At least, something 
certain remains from all this: disillusionment”). For Sarduy, humanity lost the bet 
and its connection to divinity. The only certain aftermath of the un-named disease 
is loneliness and disillusionment.

Notions of loneliness and personal contagion arising from reading disease 
narratives pose an interesting dilemma for readers and critics, especially those who 
work on Goytisolo and who presumably have become part of his operating critical 
corpus. For readers, the transient figure that connects them with AIDS and with 
the pleasure of reading and writing in Las virtudes is the aberrant Sufi scholar Ben 
Sida (“Ben Aïds” in the Helen Lane trans.), a comparatist in mysticism, and a 
good copyist of manuscripts:

mas el jugo de la granada con el que el especialista en mística comparada 
ha pergeñado el poema resulta en esta ocasión demasiado perceptible y el 
prior del monasterio describe escandalizado las conexiones ocultas del 
preso con los nefandos alumbrados islámicos, qué acepción atribuir a los 
versos copiados por Ben Sida, toma puro este vino o mézclalo si no con la 
saliva del Amado, cualquier otra mixtura sería profanarlo?, las estaciones 
de la noche oscura no llevan acaso a los goces y derretimientos por los que
los adeptos del suave cauterio alimentan las llamas del quemadero entre los rugidos y vítores del estadio? (122).

[but the pomegranate juice in which the specialist in comparative mysticism has traced the poem turns out on this occasion to be too perceptible and the prior of the monastery discovers, scandalized, the hidden connections between the prisoner and the abominable Islamic illuminati, what meaning to attribute to the verses copied out by Ben Aïds, drink this wine down straight or else mix it with the saliva of the Beloved, any other mixture would be a profanation? do the stations of the dark night not lead to the pleasures and passionate love for which the adepts of gentle cautery feed the flames of the stake amid the roars and huzzahs of the stadium? (114).]

The Spanish original captures more clearly the aberrant sexuality of Ben Sida. He is connected with “nefandos alumbrados islámicos” (translated as “abominable Islamic illuminati”), and with sodomy, “amores nefandos” (“abominable loves”) being the operative term for aberrant sexual practices. Ben Sida is also less cautious about bodily discharges, especially if they may emanate from a same-sex figure called “el Amado” (male lover). The female lover (“la Amada”) does not prefigure in the exchange of fluids. Ben Sida only honors the discharges from “el Amado” since anything else would be profane: “toma puro este vino o mézclalo si no con la saliva del Amado, cualquier otra mixtura sería profanarlo?” (“drink this wine down straight or else mix it with the saliva of the Beloved, any other mixture would be a profanation?”). Hence, the role Ben Sida plays is one marked by liminality. He is a mystic and a queer. He is the name of AIDS and also the source for unsafe sex. Since AIDS is never mentioned as such in Las virtudes, he is the name for AIDS, but also its occlusion, as Bradley Epps notes in chapter 5, “Las virtudes del pájaro solitario (1988)”:
That the divine is mouthed in SIDA, in AIDS, is perhaps what Ben Sida, the relayer of wisdom, proves best. [...] His pharmacological function is critical, but here I only want to signal its reversibility. A similar reversibility seems to hold for the discourse of AIDS as well. For if saying yes to the name, to the Thing, is lethal, saying no is, it seems not exactly inspired with life. In other words, AIDS affirms its presence in and through and despite negation. It does not need to be spelled out for its meaning to be felt (400).

The unnaming of AIDS that informs the work of Latin America literature, as discussed earlier in chapter 2, “Disease in Luna verde by Joaquín Beleño and in Paisaje con tumbas pintadas en rosa by José Ricardo Chaves,” reveals the power of negation in inculcating the presence of the disease, and not its absence.

For critics, Linda Levine dramatized the dangers of engendering homogeneous and homosexual teleologies in the act of reading. In a paper she gave for the Second International Seminar on the Work of Juan Goytisolo (1989), she describes her own contagion with Goytisolo’s Las virtudes:

(Personally I have felt not only profoundly moved and affected, but also infected and contaminated by the mystic flight of Juan Goytisolo of the Cross and his companion Ben Aids. And I am happy for it, because the figure of the virus-plague-punishment metaphor of the twentieth century ceases to be “homo-AIDS” in the pages of Juan Goytisolo in order to occupy another space in our bodies and imagination.)

Though there is an on-going danger in ascribing homosexuality to disease, Levine is correct in assessing that Las virtudes allows readers to interpret AIDS
not solely as a homosexual disease. Instead, *Las virtudes* allows readers to see disease as inhabiting other spaces, other sexualized bodies, and other sites for imagination. In responding to Levine’s reading of safe readerly contacts with *Las virtudes*, though, Epps is categorically suspicious of Levine’s well-intentioned reading, especially as she posits contact with the text as a safer negotiation than with virile bodies: “union cannot take place in the body of the beloved (*amado*), but it can take place in the body of the text. The embrace of the virile rough men (*jayanes*) might be impossible, but not the soft caress of Sufi mysticism” (Levine 234-35, also quoted in Epps 440). Levine seems to create a world of adversarial dualisms as she constructs the epidemiology of AIDS: textual bodies versus human bodies, rough versus soft sex, for example. Levine’s use of “rough” may be denoting unprotected sex and validating the guilt ascribed to AIDS carriers, especially when conservative factions only read AIDS as a problem of homosexual sex, and of unsafe sex. Levine, inadvertently, participates in the guilt surrounding sexual practices considered non-normative. Epps also senses that safe-sex campaign in criticism may indirectly give credence to institutions which have marshaled the imprisonment, castigation, and quarantine of AIDS patients:

To be sure, it is always possible to avoid thinking about death drives and live values by understanding this body, even this spiritual body, as only in or of the text, and hence as impossible outside it. Which is exactly the problem with Levine’s declaration: for in so far as she subtly offers here reading as exemplary [...], she *extracts* a cautionary tale from the text, moving “outside” it only to say “inside” it all the better. And what this tale cautions us against is sex in the time of AIDS, when risks supposedly outweigh pleasures. It is a tale of sublimation masked as transcendence, of physical renunciation *on behalf* of the ego and not mystical renunciation *of*
the ego, a tale told over and over by the media, government, the legal 
pundits and moral guardians of modernity (440-41, emphasis in original).

As the prophylactic preface to *Toda esa gente solitaria* had tried to caution,
writing is not always a necessarily safe space as readers encounter ideologies of
disease. Reading, therefore, can be a source of contagion. Cuban short stories
must be first introduced with a cautionary preface detailing how artists can be
quarantined depending on their viral state. Epps, for example, notes that “safety is
relative and partial, but never absolute: no amount of prophylaxis can secure the
subject, once and for all, from death, and certainly no amount of literature” (441).
In *Pájaros*, Sarduy himself had described the act of writing as a form of virus and
as affected by the un-named virus:

Nuestra escritura, por ejemplo, antes equilibrada y uniforme, en la que el
pensamiento se encadenaba sin esfuerzo, legible como la partitura en el
fraseo de un gran pianista, hoy se desvía de la línea, tiembla, exagera
puntos, acentos, banderines y tildes. Todo es borrón, tachonazo
incongruente, sanguinaria ballesta. Las letras ameboides surgen solas, sin
mano que pueda moderar su aceitosa expansión. Un pájaro de presa, ávido
de nuestro propio desperdicio, se esconde en cada trazo (134-35, my
emphasis).

[Our writing, for example, was balanced and uniform before, one in which
thinking created links without effort, legible like the phrasing in the sheet
music of a great pianist, today deviates from the straight line, trembles,
exaggerates periods, stresses, diacritics and accents. All is a smudge,
incongruent markings, bloodthirsty crossbow. The amoeboid letters surge
alone, without a hand to moderate its oily expansion. *A bird of prey, avid
for our own waste, hides in each stroke.*]

AIDS, represented here as a “pájaro de presa” (“bird of prey”), continues to
haunt spaces of fiction. In narratives about disease emanating from Europe and
the Americas, there has been a growing resistance to the process of mystification
and of allegorization surrounding illness and sexuality. Because the Americas had
been configured in colonial and naturalist mythologies as a site for enervation,
writers, such as Sarduy, resist totalizing medical and mystic metaphors. Pájaros
attempts to resist the latest incantation of European metaphors, in this case
mysticism, to help explain the “reality” of disease in the Americas. Towards the
end of Pájaros, for example, the first-person narrator wants to distance himself
from mystical fantasies constructed by the other, what Sarduy calls “una presencia
otra”: “Burdo emblema del vacío, / permanecer en ese frágil cero / —ni siquiera
el sentimiento / de una presencia otra” (223; “Banal emlem of the vacuum, / to
remain in the fragile zero / —not even with the sentiment / of another’s
presence”).

In contemporary times, resistance against European constructions of
disease is exemplified in Pájaros’ negation of the mystical reading of AIDS as
apotheosis. Whereas New World intellectuals, such as Thomas Jefferson or
Francisco Clavijero, resisted European narratives of disease and of enervation with
taxidermy and with competing natural histories, the emergence of AIDS prompted
a resistance against European supernatural narratives by highlighting the
corruptibility of the body and the medical protocols that erase the specific histories
of those dying from the disease. This supernatural narrative renders PLWAs
equally vulnerable to being forgotten in the pursuit of a divine unity. In Pájaros,
mysticism is akin to forgetting the individual history of PLWAs facing their own
reality with the disease. Pájaros de la playa dramatizes how even in questions of
life after death PLWAs must have their own voice, and must be allowed write their own place in the history of disease.
NOTES

1 Severo Sarduy, Pájaros de la playa (Barcelona: Tusquets, 1993) 13. All translations mine.


9 Mario Bellatín, Tres novelas (Lima, Perú: Ediciones El Santo Oficio, 1995)


15 Juan Goytisolo, Telón de boca (Barcelona: Modernos y Clásicos, 2003).

16 Jean Baruzi, San Juan de la Cruz y el problema de la experiencia mística [1924] (Valladolid: Junta de Castilla y León, Consejería de Cultura y Turismo, 1991).

17 According to Epps, Linda Levine is parodied in Goytisolo’s La saga de los Marx (1993), see p. 439, endnote 68, in Bradley Epps’ Significant Violence:

Conclusion

Sacred

Cuando regrese a casa le pediré a la Muerte que no venga por ellos. Bello sería que los dejara libres para siempre y que salieran a la calle enlazados, como profetas de un rito vegetal y poderoso.

Nosotros les cantaríamos canciones de alegría y les pondríamos collares de hojas frescas. Grandes collares que les sirvieran como almohadas cuando se hallaren sin almohadas en algún sitio amargo de la tierra.

—Jorge Debravo, “Los amantes” (“The lovers”)

[When I return home I will ask Death not to come for them. It would be beautiful to let them be free forever and let them go out holding hands, like prophets of a ritual primal and powerful.

We would sing them songs of joy and we would adorn them with garlands of fresh leaves. Large garlands that would do for pillows when they found themselves without rest in some painful place on the earth.]

The variety of texts present here, describing disease in a context of transatlantic exchanges between the Americas and Europe, is not a comprehensive taxonomy of disease, or even a partial record of epidemiology in the Americas. Instead of taxonomy, Proliferation of Disease resorted to collecting a variety of natural histories, social archives, web sites, iconographies and hagiographies, and AIDS narratives. Not taxonomy, but a form of the cabinet of curiosities better represented the aim in this study to destabilize notions of linear histories of disease, especially when disease intersects with manifestations of culture,
sexualities, politics, and of bodies. Against the totalizing operations of the museum, and in collecting curiosities on disease, the present study sought to contest how “disease” in the Americas became an emergent metaphor describing, policing, and regimenting sexual, racial, and viral difference. A recurring concern in this study was the exploration of how dissident, sometimes queer, bodies in the Americas were regarded as a threat to the state due to their viral and political unorthodoxy. Narratives from the Americas—and their intersections with Spain—resisted such regiments of biopower, though at times, the resistance meant medical isolation or political exile.

*Proliferation of Disease* aimed to be an intervention and a contestation of state projects that have continued to use disease as another form of regimenting the sacred qualities of life. The first chapters intended to establish a working foundation for describing the future reincarnations of disease discourses in the Americas. To this effect, the colonial record revealed how European mediators conceptualized the Americas as a land of contradicting discourses on enervation, and as the locus where disease was closely linked to sexual excesses. While Vasco de Nuñez de Balboa’s encounter with Panamanian chiefs demonstrated a deemed hyperhomosexual urge for sodomy, Michele de Cuneo’s native women, for example, represented hyperheterosexual male fantasies. Evoking not only European patriarchal sexualities, Cuneo also helped commence a discourse on the “whitening” of natives, and on the privileging of “white” skin that continues to dominate contemporary racial relations in the Americas. Along with skin
functioning as a marker of difference, the presence or absence of hair also made current a hirsute discourse which reflected Europe’s estimation that Native Americans lacked sexual vigor, strength, and even intellect. In the case of flora and fauna, the deployment of endemic creatures, Jefferson’s moose being one such example, helped contest a European museum archive that conflated taxidermy with taxonomy.

The initial colonial and Enlightenment construction of the Americas, especially with the aid of natural histories by Cornelius de Pauw and by George-Louis Leclerc, the Comte de Buffon, came to be analyzed in *Proliferation of Disease* as a form ventriloquial reduction (f. L., to speak from the belly). French *philosophes* such as Abbé Guillaume-Thomas Raynal, de Pauw, and de Buffon never visited the New World, and though their constructions were spoken from the belly of Enlightenment Europe, they carried a measure of intelligibility that filtered into the development of scientific discourses on race, and into the attempts to understand the variety of monsters encountered in Europe’s colonial enterprises. Against such *philosophes*, the work of Francisco Clavijero, an eighteenth-century Mexican Jesuit, contested European natural histories. In emulating the “research methods” that French *philosophes* used in constructing their natural histories, namely the use of fantastic travel narratives, Clavijero shows how New World natural history reflected European ideology.

Initial chapters, but especially chapter 2, “Disease in *Luna verde* by Joaquín Beleño and in *Paisaje con tumbas pintadas en rosa* by José Ricardo Chaves,”
established a foundation for stressing how America, with the Isthmus of Panama as one possible example, was founded on the promise of gold and of capital, but also on the premise that America’s contagious enervation must be regimented. This study explored why more current disease narratives in the Americas indirectly named AIDS or sought to allegorize the ravages of the AIDS pandemic. In other words, chapter 2 especially examined the resistance by Latin American authors to name “AIDS” as such in their fiction. Severo Sarduy’s Pájaros de la playa, for example, only resorts to calling the island’s disease “el mal” (the illness).

As a counter example, in Las virtudes del pájaro solitario Spaniard Juan Goytisolo even names one of its narrators Ben Sida (“Ben Aïds, in the Helen Lane trans.).³ Proliferation of Disease argued that authors, such as Reinaldo Arenas, resist the easy collapse of Latino(a) gender and sexual taxonomies conceptualized by Anglo heteronormativity. In chapter 5, “Pájaros and Tombs: AIDS Takes Flight,” Mario Bellatín’s Salón de belleza, the connection between drag and disease has been helpful in providing possible ways of understanding how dissident bodies resist state-funded clinical services in order to uphold their itinerant gender performances, and to challenge state and church regiments of healthcare. José Ricardo Chaves’ Paisaje con tumbas pintadas en rosa also revealed that the emergence of AIDS forced some to become itinerant bodies. Characters in Chaves’ novel are in exile in Italy as a result of the scourge of the AIDS pandemic in Costa Rica. Such literature joins in the history of plagued
narratives that emerged with Giovanni Boccaccio’s *Decameron* and continued with Thomas Mann’s *Death in Venice*.

In examining contemporary narratives of plagues, writing became a form of contesting European constructions about disease. Whereas colonial Peruvians resisted European colonization by re-writing Saint Sebastian’s biography in the New World, contemporary authors, such as Bellatín and Sarduy, resist the Old World’s reading of disease as a conduit for a mystical experience. Both in Bellatín’s *Salón* and Sarduy’s *Pájaros*, mystical experiences are written-off and in their place, the medical protocols that manage the life of the dying are accentuated. In *Pájaros*, for instance, Sarduy reflected on the impact that AIDS had on his own writing. *Proliferation of Disease* decoded AIDS scripts in Sarduy as a form of *esrito-viral* writing knowable in its absence and its presence. Moreover, this study argued that Sarduy’s return to earlier themes and stylistic practices were filtered by the AIDS pandemic and by Sarduy’s own personal experience with the disease. Curiously enough, if the remembrance of saints, such as Saint Sebastian, prompted a return to Medieval and Renaissance traditions, Sarduy’s *Pájaros* also marked a return to his own conceptualizations on the “Baroque.” Balancing the deadly effects of the virus is the figure of *esrito-viral* writing, a scripted *pharmakon* which can sustain, even in hiding, AIDS narratives, lives, and testimonies.

The recursive set of questions in the later chapters focused on exploring a three-fold conceptualization of disease in the Americas and its social impact along
the vectors of a triad: the *unnatural*, the *supernatural*, and the *denaturalized*. In negotiating these vectors, the present study also argued that the emergence of AIDS in the Americas amalgamated three perceivably distinct institutions (the clinic, the prison, and the concentration camp) into one overarching material and metaphoric site, the AIDS medical ward. This ward functioned as both a figurative and physical holding cell for incarcerating the “incurable” and for *maintaining* non-normative sexualities linked with disease. In underscoring Giorgio Agamben’s contribution to viewing life as always sacred, despite of political or medical establishments, *Proliferation of Disease* contested the inhumane deployment of AIDS quarantines and the resulting reduction of life as conditioned only by the state, and therefore subjected to incarceration and to criminalization.

Whereas Chapter 3, “Bared Life of AIDS,” examined the quarantining of PLWAs, and the attempt to make queer bodies invisible through incarceration, as in Cuba’s use of AIDS sanatoriums, chapter 4, “Queer Iconography,” assessed how homosexuality and hypersexualized queer bodies are made visible in a patriarchal society to promote heteronormative operations. When represented as hypersexualized, the queer body in the fiction of Reinaldo Arenas and of Silviano Santiago becomes “diseased.” In short, whereas earlier chapters have examined how the Americas has been constructed as a site of disease and of sexual enervation, chapter 4 argued how such sexualized discourses are overturned by Arenas and by Santiago to challenge oppression and homophobia. In Chapter 4,
homosexuality itself became the “disease” that posed a threat to the state. Arenas and Santiago provided narratives of subversion in which the homosexual body became an inflammatory text deemed dangerous to the state and to nation building. Excess in homoerotic imaginings helped interrogate how citizenship was created, maintained, and policed.

Resisting permutations of statist and religious readings of disease marked the end of this study. Chapter 5, “Pájaros and Tombs: AIDS Takes Flight,” especially argued that though AIDS mythologies and mysticisms necessarily arose as a reaction to the pandemic, the mystical adumbrations continued to limit the viability for aberrant bodies to have their own voice, and to write their own account of disease. That narratives of disease continue to be challenged by artists, social activists, and scientists is clear. With globalization, stable notions of epidemics, such as AIDS, and of sexual boundaries continue to become more intensely blurred throughout the Americas and the world. Indeed, the study of disease narratives is constantly changing as new treatments and socio-political programs emerge to counteract disease. Indeed, though Proliferation of Disease explored moments of epidemiological crisis when the state enacts states of emergency to counteract disease, its goal was to disrupt the initial triad of vectors (the unnatural, the supernatural, and the denaturalized) that configured the Americas as a site of enervation. In “A Dying Epidemiology,” Cindy Patton calls for such disruptions as critics continue to assess the on-going impact of AIDS around the world: “We needed new concepts that would vivify the bodies that
were not only geographically mobile but also sexually labile. We needed a way to feel our bodies as the disrupters of vectors” (emphasis in original).\textsuperscript{4} The foundation of disease narratives that the present study established in the Americas is a working model that can be emulated in other geographies and in other histories. As Patton suggests, we need to find new ways of configuring “our bodies” as “disrupters of vectors.” Equally important, we need to bridge narratives of disease around the world to better contextualize how the threat of disease, be it AIDS or “germ warfare,” continues to form and inform inhumane policies around the world, and to legitimate the end of life because of its deadly “threat.”

The rendition of sacred life offered by Costa Rican Jorge Debravo in “Los amantes” (“The lovers”) is one that gives dignity and that celebrates life when death approaches. This is one form of the “sacred” that \textit{Proliferation of Disease} searched for in curative narratives about AIDS. It is a sacred bereft of dogmatic impulses. It is a sacred which entitles all permutations of life to survive and to be remembered. It is a return to the sacred condition of all life. A return that celebrates the sacred lives of those who passed away from AIDS and that mourns the future of those who will “rest in some painful place on the earth.”
NOTES


2 In alluding to cabinets of curiosities, and not to taxonomies, especially illuminating is *Mr. Wilson's Cabinet of Wonder* by Lawrence Weschler (New York: Pantheon, 1995).


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Oscar Fernández

Foreign Languages & Literatures
Portland State University
PO BOX 751, 724 SW Harrison St.
Portland, Oregon 97201
Office: (503) 725-3522
Fax: (503) 725-5276

Education

2003 The Pennsylvania State University University Park, PA
Ph.D in Comparative Literature

1998 The Pennsylvania State University
M.A. in Comparative Literature

1994 Ohio Wesleyan University Delaware, OH
B.A. in English literature, music minor

Publication


Selected Conferences and Lectures

2003 Organizer, panelist, "Deviant Globalizations: Stray(ing) America," First World Congress of IASA, the International American Studies Association (May 22-24, Leiden, Netherlands).


Recent Teaching and Professional Experience

2003-Present Portland State University
2002-03 Comparative Literature Department, Penn State
2001-02 English Department, Penn State
2000-01 Editorial Assistant, Comparative Literature Studies
1999-00 Spanish, Italian, and Portuguese Department, Penn State

Selected Grants and Awards

1999-0 Woodrow Wilson Foundation, Practicum Grant
2002 University Graduate Assistant Outstanding Teaching Award, Penn State
2000 Graduate Student Research Award, Penn State

Recent Departmental/University Services

2001-02 Founding President, PSU Americanists, Penn State

Languages

Bilingual in English (U.S. citizenship) and Spanish, good knowledge of Portuguese, reading level in French

Association Membership

Modern Language Association / American Comparative Literature Association / International American Studies Association

Recent References

Djelal Kadir, Edwin Erle Sparks Professor of Comparative Literature, The Pennsylvania State University. Office: (814) 863-9629; e-mail: kadir@psu.edu
Ánibal González Pérez, Edwin Erle Sparks Professor of Spanish, The Pennsylvania State University. Office: (814) 865-4252; e-mail: axg20@psu.edu