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The Representations of HIV/AIDS in Contemporary Latin American Literature

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Abstract

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By 2008 there were over two million people living with HIV/AIDS in Latin America. Since the pandemic began in the 1980s, it has begun to find literary treatment in the Latin American context, becoming especially visible in the 1990s. Four works were selected from the 1990s that represent a panoramic view of the literary response to AIDS in Latin America: Salón de belleza by Mario Bellatin (Mexico, 1999), Un año sin amor by Pablo Pérez (Argentina, 1998), Pájaros de la playa by Severo Sarduy (Cuba, 1993), and Loco afán: crónicas de sidario by Pedro Lemebel (Chile, 1996). These selected works feature characters infected with HIV/AIDS, both implicitly and explicitly. The treatment of illness is unique to each work, varying in how the individual's life is impacted, and in how society reacts to (and perhaps perpetuates) such a chronic illness. These diverse treatments of HIV/AIDS may nevertheless be unified by the common interpretation of their representations of illness as a metaphor for marginalization and social exclusion.

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I. Introduction

By 2008 there were over two million people living with HIV in Latin America. Both men and women, heterosexual and homosexual, are affected. Since the pandemic began in the 1980s, it has begun to find literary treatment in the Latin American context, becoming especially visible in the 1990s. Four works that I have selected from the 1990s that represent a panoramic view of the AIDS response in Latin America are Salón de belleza by Mario Bellatin (Mexico, 1999), Un año sin amor by Pablo Pérez (Argentina, 1998), Pájaros de la playa by Severo Sarduy (Cuba, 1993), and Loco afán: crónicas de sidario by Pedro Lemebel (Chile, 1996). All of these novels feature characters either explicitly or implicitly infected with HIV, but the treatment of illness varies across works, both by the individuals, and by society. While HIV/AIDS may represent a physical illness, it begins to take on the shape of a metaphor that unifies the plights of those alienated by society.

In Salón de belleza [Beauty Salon], illness seems like an unstoppable transformation into death. The protagonist who was once a promiscuous cross dresser is now forced to abandon these pastimes and wait for death. He does enjoy company though, and turns his salon into a place where people can come to die. For the protagonist, illness seems to serve as a death sentence. The protagonist contemplates suicide because he realizes that there is no place left in society for him. Illness seems to be the tipping point for an already marginalized cross-dressing man who has a specific place in society, which he shares with his other cross-dressing friends. Now

infected with AIDS, he can no longer go into the city and enjoy sexual pleasures and the company of others.

In Un año sin amor [A Year Without Love] the narrator Pablo writes over the course of one year, from New Year to New Year, to tell his autobiographical story of living with AIDS, and how this condemnation will not grant him any hope. Pablo lives with his aunt, where his father finances his housing. Unlike the protagonist in Salón de belleza, Pablo refuses to allow himself to be forced out of society, and he chooses to hide his HIV status in hopes of finding love. However, his condition does not allow him to progress in a relationship, as his coughing fits will not allow him to sleep over with anyone. Pablo chooses to embrace his marginalization, in a way, by engaging in alternative sexual practices like sadomasochism. The pain he endures in sex, however, cannot compare to the pain of a year without love. While Pablo is forced to rely on society and the mainstream, he never finds his place. And unlike the protagonist of Salón de belleza, Pablo cannot find a refuge away from society, even if it is a refuge doomed to destruction. He ends the year, stuck in limbo, doomed to repeat it, without love, without independence, and without hope.

In Pájaros de la playa [Beach Birds], an unknown malady in Cuba has forced the infected into quarantine. Here in isolation, we meet a variety of characters, some infected, some uninfected, who cope with illness and death differently. Immortelle, an attractive woman who is uninfected, searches for the secret of youthfulness. The Cosmologist, a wheelchair-ridden man who is infected, searches for a way in which he can remove himself completely from society, withdrawing himself to his room to write in

his diary. The narrator reveals that there are two ways to deal with the illness: one is to accept it and withdraw yourself from the world, or the other is to fight it and do everything in your power but accept it. However, either way, you are condemned to a slow, lonely death. Interestingly, the story takes place partly in the present, and partly 40 years ago. This pre- and post-revolution narration reveals that illness may be tied to the Revolution. Forty years ago, everyone was healthy and felt they were on their way to achieving the ideal, and now in the present, they are infected and, having searched in vain for the ideal, now consider it to be unattainable. This is emphasized by the irony of Immortelle who seeks permanent youthfulness while the infected would give anything to age, revealing that both the infected and uninfected are condemned in society, as the infected suffer a slow death and Immortelle settles on suicide. The search for the ideal has collectively been abandoned, and hope seems to be fleeting.

In Loco afán: crónicas de sidario [Crazy Desire], Pedro Lemebel chronicles the lives of a group of transvestites in Chile during the last decades of the twentieth century. In his narratives, he reveals the personal inequalities and criticisms faced by what could be deemed society's more productive members. The novel uncovers the social costs of heroism and self-sacrifice in the transsexual community, and identifies numerous examples of individuals who have performed amazing feats yet sacrificed their own personal freedoms, like a man who stole a child solely to provide it a better life, in order to be closer to their true identities. The anthology also seeks to redefine the revolution, as there currently seems to be no space for the cause of those with nonconformist sexual identities. Outlining the unfortunate masculinist conservatism of the left,

Lemebel searches to promote solidarity among the transsexual community and inspire a newfound hope and a new leader among them.

In all four stories, society clearly has no current place for individuals infected with HIV. While the protagonist of Salón de belleza seems to find refuge, society still barges in and tries to destroy his safe space. In Un año sin amor, Pablo doesn't even have a refuge, and is forced to depend on society when he has no clear place in it. He proposes his potential refuge as getting his own apartment apart from family, finding love, or simply dying, yet he experiences none of these. In Pájaros de la playa those infected with HIV are literally cast out of society and sent to live in a quarantine facility. In Loco afán however, there seems to be a kernel of hope for transsexuals who, although still hiding in the shadows from the general public, find refuge in solidarity within the transsexual community.

While in Un año sin amor and Loco afán where illness is given a name, the other works never mention what the illness is, simply referring to it as *la enfermedad* (the sickness). Perhaps without a name, illness as metaphor becomes more potent. While HIV does affect all types of people (the narrator in Salón de belleza mentions turning away infected women and children, and Pájaros de la playa features victims from several backgrounds), it has often been associated with homosexual men. Salón de belleza, Un año sin amor, and Loco afán prominently feature homosexual characters. These are minority groups. Illness here serves as a metaphor for the process of marginalization. Being infected, their bodies are slowly wasting away, and this transformation forces them to remove themselves from society. While Pablo tries to

hide his status, ultimately he cannot find love and is forced to pursue alternative sexual practices including sadomasochism. As already marginalized groups, these characters are now marginalized to the extreme. The only thing that awaits them now is death. And in the sense that illness is treated as a metaphor for social marginalization, one could say that this death sentence is brought on by society.

Marginalization is constructed entirely by the majorities of society who choose to treat those as insignificant for being different. While Un año sin amor and Loco afán address a mainstream space and what is 'normal,' the other works treat an abstract intangible space, perhaps as a refuge, or simply because the mainstream is out of their grasp. In Salón de belleza the protagonist decorates his salon-turned-hospice as an absurd fish sanctuary. The image of victims slowly dying around him contrasts with the image of colorful brilliant fish. However, these fish can be seen as an extension of his past life, which was flamboyant. Fish serve as his last hope of revival. In Un año sin amor Pablo's last hope of revival is only experienced during superficial sex. In Pájaros de la playa the last hope for some is Immortelle, who is not infected with HIV, yet she lives with the others and refuses to age. For others, like the Cosmologist, a wheelchair-ridden man with AIDS, his last hope is his faith, which slowly disappears as he becomes disillusioned. In both of these works where illness is never properly named, one has to think what the metaphor really is. For the Cosmologist, it is the end of cosmos. For the protagonist of Salón de belleza, and even in Un año sin amor and Loco afán where illness is named, it is illness as representative of society's power to render someone a powerless outcast. Pablo, who refers to his illness as an "enfermedad

monstruosamente porno" [monstrously porno disease] (Pérez 29), cannot seem to separate illness from society, similar to the leftist comrades in Loco afán who cannot separate positive attributes like friendliness from homosexuality, a socially perceived negative attribute. Pablo, along with those subjected to scrutiny in Loco afán, wish to break these associations but find it impossible to do so. Illness is transformed into a subjective phenomenon in which its status is governed entirely by the mainstream culture. Only when illness is further deconstructed can we begin to find a cure for this social infection. When the "infected" are removed from society, they immediately appear to be the victims of something larger. Looking beyond the physical effects of disease, we gain a humanistic picture of those who wrongfully have no place in society.

II. Salón de belleza

Salón de belleza by Mario Belletin is a metaphor for illness and tells the story of how an infection leads to a lonely death in an indifferent society. Belletin writes about a mysterious illness, presumably AIDS, that seems to be spreading throughout the community. Through metaphors, Bellatin reveals a world of rejection, isolation, and ultimately regret as he traces the last days of the infected.

The narrator of the story, like the location, remains anonymous and is characterized by his past experiences which include prostitution, orgies, visiting porno theaters, frequenting bathhouses, and transvestitism, all which seem to contrast sharply with the seriousness of illness. The contrast between this pre-illness lifestyle and the illness serves to emphasize the sacrifices that come with the condition, whether they are made willingly or as a result of society. The narrator was once a fabulous drag queen traversing the city in search for some excitement, and has since then put the dress back in the closet to care for the sick. This literal closeting of pastimes also allows for the narrator's priorities to shift to caring for the ill. The narrator has converted his beauty salon into a facility for victims of the illness who have little time to live. Here in the Terminal, appropriately named, is the story unveiled, giving victims of the mysterious illness the opportunity to voice their struggles for the first (and last) time.

While the illness is never given a name, it is represented in the patients of the Terminal, and later in the narrator. The narrator reveals the symptoms of the disease as he recounts the stories of other victims and his own experiences. The candid

descriptions of the disease allow for one to begin placing a name to the culprit. He mentions his own weight loss, and low spirits. He compares this to the "ruined body" of another guest, marked by "his jutting ribs, his dry skin… and crazy eyes" (Bellatin 17). The narrator later reveals that this particular guest died from a co-infection of tuberculosis. Tuberculosis is a common co-infection of AIDS. The narrator describes his condition as if he were a young boy trapped in an old man's body. When the narrator catches a glimpse of himself in a mirror and notices, he realizes he too is infected.

The narrator also characterizes the disease by its targets, which appear to be a marginalized group of individuals. Without the Terminal, "their only option would be to perish in the street" (Bellatin 4). The marginalization of victims in the novel consists of a rejection by major social institutions including general public (discourse), hospitals, religion, and family. The Goat-Killer Gang, a violent group of individuals in the city center, often attacks the infected, sometimes resulting in death. This gang of haters represents general social prejudices, particularly against homosexuals. These hate crimes reveal that the fate of the infected was grim, due to rejection by virtually all major social institutions.

There was virtually no help outside of the salon, not even from public healthcare. The narrator recalls "the victims of the attacks were treated with contempt when they were brought into the hospitals. Often they weren't even allowed in for fear of infection" (Bellatin 5). Even the hospital workers couldn't objectively oversee the care of the infected. These descriptions reveal the public discourse regarding the heavily

stigmatized disease. Even when an angry mob riots outside of the Terminal, they do not enter, "perhaps because of the stench or the fear of infection" (Bellatin 26).

Not even family serves as a base of support for these marginalized individuals. The narrator is cut off from his mother early on when she discovers his sexual deviance, and he is forced to start life elsewhere. The pain of this rejection in particular seems to persist forever, because even as the mother writes to the narrator, as she is dying alone in a hospital, he refuses neither to acknowledge her letters nor to reply.

Not surprisingly, other institutions challenge the success of the Terminal. The Catholic Church is represented by the Sisters of Charity. Although their intentions are seemingly sincere, the narrator thinks otherwise and rejects their support. Speaking on his rules for admittance, the narrator states,

> I must be true to the original aims of the Terminal. Which is not at all like the Sisters of Charity, who as soon as they heard of our existence offered to assist us with pious work and prayer. No one here carries out any kind of religious work. The work done here obeys a more human, practical, real meaning. There is one more rule that I have not mentioned for fear of being criticized, and that is that no crucifixes, religious images, or prayers of any kind are allowed in the Terminal. (Bellatin 49-50)

While the church is willing to offer their services, the narrator simply denounces them, characterizing their work as inhumane and impractical. No religious symbolism or prayer is allowed in the Terminal. It is as if all hope is lost, and the narrator is saying that God

has already rejected the plight of the victims, and they are on their own, which gives the narrator a sense of worth and meaningfulness.

While the Catholic Church does not directly challenge the success of the Terminal, the narrator will simply not allow for any interference. Being marginalized in a heteronormative society and rejected by family damages trust in others. The Catholic Church has a reputation for intolerance to homosexuality, and putting two and two together reveals the controversial nature of the relationship between religion and the victims in the Terminal, presumably majority homosexual. His rejection of the Church however may be due to the narrator's desire to rid victims of false hopes. The narrator's pessimistic tone echoes throughout the novel, especially after he acquires the illness. The narrator states, "I make sure they have no false hopes. When they feel they are improving I make them understand that the disease is the same for everyone" (Bellatin 47). The illness is unforgiving, and the narrator makes sure to let everyone know this. This is yet another metaphor for the general discourse of the public.

Not a single person outside of the Terminal can see past the physical embodiment of the disease, and the narrator emphasizes this when he sadly states he can no longer go into the city. When the narrator realizes that he too is infected, he simply gives up on a personal life. "When I discovered the sores on my cheek, it all ended right then and there. I stuffed the dresses, the feathers and the sequins into the backyard toilet and I made a large fire with them" (Bellatin 42). For him, a social life was terminated. Not a single person at the bathhouse would give him the time of day

anymore. In this sense, the infection was not only a death sentence, but a sudden death in society, invisible to others.

While it seems pastimes are retired upon infection, there is one hobby of the narrator that persists while victims come and go. The narrator begins his story with his interest in colored fish. For him, the fish are more than just decoration, they are people. And they are the living, breathing metaphors for the victims of the terminal. Immediately, the narrator mentions his connection with fish. And the contempt of others for this relationship. The narrator reveals his affection for fish by lamenting their deaths, and through his coworkers' disapproval. He states, "My co-workers never approved of my love for fish. They believed fish brought bad luck" (Bellatin 3). Perhaps they were right, given their allure and the resulting influx of infected victims. But when the fish were young and animated, the Terminal was not yet established. The colorful fish accented the Beauty Salon. While revealing a sexual encounter at a bathhouse, the narrator reveals his own commonalities with the feisty fish,

> I always felt like I was inside one of my aquariums. I felt revitalized by the thick water, by the oxygen bubbling up from the pumps, by the jungle of underwater plants. I also experienced the same strange feeling as when the larger fish hunted the smaller ones. At that moment, the lack of any possible defense and the thickness of the clear walls of the aquarium became a very palpable, all-encompassing reality. (Bellatin 9-10)

The healthy fish reveal a man free of inhibitions but ultimately running from something. The flamboyant fish in a tacky underwater world could easily be the narrator dolled up

cruising around the city. But once the defenseless fish has let his guard down, he can no longer fend for himself. This is the fate of all things in the Terminal. After the Salon is converted into the Terminal, the patients begin to arrive. The fish grace the nightstands by the beds of the infected, perhaps reminding the patients of the fleeting youth they once retained. However, as the conditions worsen, the fish follow suit. At the same time as a patient dies, three fish pass away:

> While it is true that by that time the fish had lost some of their former splendor, there were still a good number of them left. Almost all of them were black tetras with white chests. I don't know why but during that period I avoided color. My spirit yearned for black and white. (Bellatin 18)

As victims are consumed by the infection, so are the fish, clinging to life. In general, the fish have lost their energy, like the victims. The once vibrant fish tanks are now dull and almost lifeless, just like the bodies of the guests. Even the narrator is beginning to worry that guests are imposing a threat on the life in the Terminal. As the tanks begin to fog up and the water clouds turning a greenish tinge, the narrator comes to the rescue of the fish:

> I've placed this fish tank somewhat away from guests. I don't want their rot to reach the water; I don't want the fish to be infected with any fungus, virus or bacteria. Sometimes when no one is looking I put my head into the fish tank… and I breathe in deeply and it feels as if life emanates from the water. (Bellatin 19)

In a place where death is fast and frequent, the narrator relies on his fish as an escape from the reality of the consumption of the illness, not only as a negative escape, but an affirmation. His fish represent vitality, even after discarding dresses, and retiring old habits. Perhaps the narrator separates the fish from the guests to preserve his own possibility of life. By isolating the fish, he can keep alive his life experiences that otherwise would have been contempted. Perhaps the most extreme negative affirmation is when the narrator contemplates suicide upon the realization of his own infection. All of these sacrifices forced upon the narrator reveal the negative "acceptance" associated with marginalization, which is self-sacrifice.

The narrator recalls from his past that one particular fish seemed to spark controversy among certain guests. When the narrator purchased axolotls, he recalls, "many of my clients thought they were disgusting but other clients took an interest in them on account of their strange appearance" (Bellatin 44). In addition to a unique appearance, the axolotls were segregated. When the narrator tried to introduce other fish, the axolotls simply devoured them, and then devoured themselves. Commenting on their presence, "It was the fact that the way the axolotls looked, added to their unpleasant style, made breeding them seem like a diabolical act" (Bellatin 46). It is simple to see how this unique fish, isolated, with an unpleasing look and style to some becomes just one example of someone facing criticism for lifestyle choices that may not fit the definition of normal. Hopeful however, the narrator tells us that for some, the axolotl is of tremendous interest. This is a clear intertextual reference to Julio Cortázar's short story "Axolotl".

Julio Cortazar's short story, Axolotl, tells the story of a man who admires and relates to the peculiar axolotl to a point where he is consumed by the fish, transformed into one. The axolotl are characterized in the story by their immobility, however unlike other banal fish. The narrator tells us that axolotls are Mexican fish, assuring us he can tell simply by looking at them. These strange fish have "little pink Aztec faces", eyes of gold, yet are completely without expression. As the narrator comes and goes, the axolotl watch him with a certain fruitless hope, that the narrator will live on to tell the story of the axolotl. It is clear to the narrator that these fish are prisoners of their own bodies, unable to do anything but think.

The narrator thinks to himself, "I imagined them aware, slaves of their bodies, condemned infinitely to the silence of the abyss, to a hopeless meditation. Their blind gaze, the diminutive gold disc without expression and nonetheless terribly shining, went through me like a message: 'Save us, save us'". Just as the fish serve as a metaphor for the guests in the terminal, the axolotl here represent any marginalized society condemned to a certain fate of powerlessness and immobility, and perhaps death in the face of social rejection. As the narrator says, their "stone faces… carry… proof of that eternal sentence". More obvious in Salón de belleza, the axolotl represent those infected with the disease, recalling that it is treated as a death sentence. In "Axolotl", the fish lead lives of meaninglessness, unable to speak or express themselves. Worse, the axolotl wield certain potency, that if you take interest in them, you too will be condemned.

These inherently Mexican Aztec-like fish serve as a metaphor for potentially any marginalized society of individuals. However, this could be a more direct reference to Mexico and nationalism. The Aztec civilization ruled in Mexico with its capital at Tenochtitlan until the conquistador Hernán Cortés reached the city in the early 1500s. Considered a backwards culture who practice ritualistic human sacrifices, the Aztecs were defeated by the Spanish, their footprint was destroyed, and a new city was built, what is present day Mexico City.

With all of this in mind, it is increasingly easy to see the resolution that is being considered by the major institutions of society. For Cortés, it was simplest to erase the existence of the society in question. Perhaps to Cortés, he thought it would be easier to go backwards in time, ridding the world of backwards civilizations. We see this same approach to a complicated problem in the doubt of the narrator at the end of Salón de belleza. The narrator contemplates what the future of the Terminal shall be and considers the easy alternative of flooding the Terminal, converting it into giant aquarium. This mirrors the approach of Cortés who destroyed the dams in Tenochtitlan which led to perpetual flooding and destruction of the Aztec city.

This metaphor of flooding as a solution to homogenize society reveals the destructive nature of marginalization. The contemplation of flooding the Terminal ironically affirms the very marginalization that pushes the narrator to the edge. Strangely, the more interiorized and private the narrator grows, the greater the reader sees the overwhelming presence of the social institutions that rejected him. His most intimate moments seem to ultimately define him as a social victim of marginalization.

Flooding the terminal evokes a sense of self-defeat and removal. This is not the first time we see this idea however. The narrator makes the transition towards becoming an axolotl earlier when he elects to remove mirrors from the Terminal. Removing mirrors is comparable to removing one's presence from society. At first, before the salon was transformed into the Terminal, it was a place home to positive transformations. These transformations were of people looking to be transformed into objects of beauty. For this reason, the narrator decorates the salon with dozens of mirrors. However, as the salon is transformed into the Terminal, the narrator vows to rid the salon of all its mirrors so that the guests will not witness their own transformations from beautiful people to ruined bodies.

The mirror not only serves as a representation of the individual and his or her state of health, but also represents a social dimension involved in recognition. Without somebody to recognize you, marginalization would not persist. With this in mind, marginalization is a social construct backed by power, or the ability of social institutions to marginalize a person based on an individual's external representation, for example.

The disease itself seems to be characterized by the visible external transformations experienced by the guests, however there is also an internal transformation that is rarely mentioned. While it is a tiny mirror that ultimately reaffirms the narrator that he is struck with the disease (he notices pustules), an internal transformation far more complicated conquers him. He contemplates suicide, referring to his condition as a death sentence. He proceeds to burn his dresses and anything else that reminds him of his now "past" life. This internal transformation is complicated

however because while feeling regret for his past actions (they may ultimately have led him to contract the illness), he gains a certain sense of responsibility.

Interestingly enough, without taking into account the symbol of the axolotl, Salón de belleza seems like an intensely personal story of one man's struggle with a fatal illness. Due to the idiosyncratic nature of the story, it becomes hard to connect to broader social issues and seems to only comment on the individual. However, once the axolotl is taken into account, the message of the author begins to take shape. The axolotl serves as a metaphor to bridge the social institutions that seem to systematically reject the narrator. Rejection from major social institutions such as healthcare, church, and family is one implication of the marginalization of the axolotl. Other implications of this marginalization include a seemingly willing removal from society and hopelessness. However one must realize that this marginalization begins with the rejection by others, then rejection by self. This is the most subtle and unfortunate part about marginalization. The process seems to be a slow and agonizing self-sacrifice. This can be further deconstructed.

Social rejection in the novel begins chronologically with family. The vehicle for marginalization here is homosexuality. Marginalization reaches its apex when the narrator learns of his infection with what appears to be AIDS. AIDS represents the vehicle by which marginalization reaches its most extreme form. At this point, rejection by all major social institutions is in effect. Even when trying to be a part of society, society pushes him out. Like in Cortázar's short story, inevitably you become the axolotl

and the rest is self-fulfilling. However, in this totalitarian view of marginalization, one can find a more universal meaning of what it is to be marginalized.

The simple fact of never placing a name on the unknown illness strengthens the message of marginalization in the novel. By leaving something up to the reader's interpretation, the author is able to comment on the general and universal process of marginalization as a whole. Marginalization shouldn't be characterized by a negative acceptance of pain and grief like in the novel. Instead, we should be able to overcome the cycle of rejections perpetuated by an unaccepting society. This can be achieved by either redefining societal norms or by transforming marginalization into a positive acceptance, which can be seen in the next chapter.

III. Un año sin amor

Un año sin amor: diario del SIDA tells the story of one man's struggle with AIDS. However, it claims to break the stereotype of the AIDS narrative genre. The prologue by Roberto Jacoby promises the reader that the novel does not comply with the rules of the traditional AIDS narrative in which Jacoby states AIDS equals death. Instead, the novel tells a story of hope as it begins in 1996, the year the AZT cocktail became available, reducing AIDS from a fatal to a chronic illness. But exploring further the novel, along with the film adaptation, it becomes increasingly difficult to believe that the story of Pablo Pérez, the author and protagonist of the novel, is one of hope and optimism.

The story, consisting of separate journal entries, spans the course of one year. This is symbolic because the narrator begins his story on New Years Day and ends it on New Years Eve, recounting his resolutions for the year, none of which have come true. Pablo is a teacher, a poet, and a writer who is financially supported by his father. He lives with his Aunt Nefertiti in an apartment. He is currently being treated for respiratory illness at the hospital, but refuses treatment for AIDS. He instead relies on natural remedies. While his journal entries do mention his treatment and family, Pablo mostly recollects memories of those he loved and lost. He claims his diary is about the search for love, and about the loss of love, desire, and the fear of death. While a "search for love" sounds like a pleasing task, it proves impossible, hence the title, Un año sin amor, or a year without love.

This quest for love may extend beyond the romantic, because in general, Pablo seems to alienate himself, rejecting sympathy from others, including his best friend Nicholas, and his father. Even Pablo's closest relationship with Hervé, a man living with AIDS, seemed questionable, as Pablo asks himself whether or not he truly experienced love. The only love that the author seems to experience was with his sister Paula. However, Paula committed suicide, and this left Pablo in a state of depression. Through his constant diary entries about Paula, it seems as though Pablo never got over her death, and cannot find confidence in anyone else. Pablo only has negative things to say about the rest of his family, including his mother who lies to him and steals from him. Pablo speaks of his family as if they were an infection he can't ward off. Pablo recalls how his parents lied to his brother about the death of his sister. His brother believed that Paula died in a car accident. When Pablo confronts his brother later to tell him the truth, he fears his mother will no longer call, as if he wronged her somehow. Instead, she calls Pablo and tells him she told his brother about his condition (and his sexuality) resulting in a rejection by the brother. This was a family secret. Now Pablo has neither a mother nor a brother to confide in. He refers to family as now extinct. Perhaps society is an extension of family, and all is dead to Pablo.

Pablo rejects family and society, being the agent of social rejection, which contrasts with the narrator in <u>Salón de belleza</u> in which the narrator seems to be the object of social rejection, not its agent. Social relationships are not the only aspect of daily life that Pablo seems to reject, however. Pablo rejects the help of the hospitals in Argentina. He is particularly stubborn about taking the new AZT cocktail, which he

believes is poison for HIV-positive patients, even as the doctor praises it for its positive results seen in other patients. Pablo relies on his own knowledge and self-diagnosis to treat his illness with natural remedies. It is interesting to note, however, that Pablo does not reject treatment for his respiratory illness, presumably a complication from the AIDS. Perhaps we see a fear of accepting the condition, or a fear of labeling oneself as living with AIDS, as opposed to living with a respiratory infection, which could infect anyone.

The only thing he seems to not reject is a sex life, however controversial this may seem. Unlike in Salón de belleza where the narrator removes himself from society in all senses, Pablo overcomes this hurdle, almost embracing his marginalized condition. Upon accepting his condition, Pablo enters the world of sadomasochism (SM). He mentions going to leather clubs in Paris with Hervé, and later explores clubs in Argentina with a circle of friends also involved in SM. While already marginalized as both a victim of AIDS and as a homosexual, Pablo further explores his marginality by exploring the world of alternative sexual practices. However, Pablo cannot be honest with his interests, as he never tells anyone of his health status. Additionally, while vowing to always practice safe sex, Pablo seemingly shows no remorse for engaging in unprotected sex, blaming others for persuading him into it, abandoning any moral code. Pursuing love or simply sex has its difficulties for Pablo. While he wants to sleep over with other men, he is unable due to his chronic coughing which to him is a dead giveaway of his HIV status. In order to avoid accusations or concerns, Pablo never spends the night with anyone. What does this say about the status of HIV in society? If Pablo can only “enjoy” life while hiding his illness, is this really a life at all? During

Pablo's quest for love, he is entirely unsuccessful. However, we do see a slight transformation in Pablo towards the end of his novel, where he posts a personals ad confessing his HIV-positive status. He only receives one response, and does not reply. In that moment of potential freedom, Pablo chooses to continue his fruitless quest for love elsewhere, further marginalizing a potential lover. It is interesting to mention that the man who responds to the ad is a stylist, like the narrator of <u>Salón de belleza</u>. Pablo, who once again is the agent of marginalization, continues his search for love in the world of SM. It is as if Pablo leads a double life. And Pablo realizes that this lifestyle is artificial, and at times, feels remorse.

Pablo's other activities, besides SM, include frequenting porno theaters, public bathhouses, and bars, where he engages in anonymous sex. Pablo discovers an artificial side to these activities, and like with treatment, wishes to seek out a natural alternative. He describes the porn theaters with "salvajismo" or savagery (Pérez 38), and willingly going to these places doesn't sit well with him. The only reward from these activities is mental excitement, and potentially an orgasm, which he states gives him a sense of life and vitality. However, before acting on these impulses, Pablo would recite the phrase "gastar pólvora en chimangos" (Pérez 70). This literally means to waste gunpowder on a falcon-like bird. Pablo is unsure what *chimangos* are but likens them to *pajarracos*, or ugly birds, that are easy to kill but serve no purpose. For Pablo, his *chimangos* are these activities and impulses upon which he continuously acts. But he sees that these actions serve little purpose to him, as he simply wastes strength on something below him that he can overcome. However, one must question Pablo's real

motives. Is this a healthy rejection, or is this simply a repression of what society looks down on? Also, what would be a natural remedy to this his artificial fix?

Perhaps the natural remedy is death. Pablo asks himself why he must resort to "artificial" means of treatment such as porn and AZT which seem to alleviate some of the pain. He questions whether he is doing it for himself or for others. Why prolong suffering and eventually death if it is inevitable? He too contemplates suicide, and sinks back into a depression. Even with his depression, he refuses treatment. Why then does Pablo not come to completely reject all artificial means of sustenance?

Perhaps the answer lies in his relationship with Hervé, his potential first and only true love. While living in Paris with Hervé, Pablo slowly witnesses the agony of AIDS, as it consumes Hervé. It is never mentioned whether Pablo contracted the disease from Hervé or not, but if he did, it certainly would explain some of his feelings towards him. Pablo eventually breaks up with Hervé and returns to Argentina, and Hervé dies. Pablo seems to have ambivalent feelings towards Hervé, questioning whether or not he ever really felt love for him. However, a certain phrase resonates in Pablo, one he read in a diary of Hervé's, "lion en cage." This metaphor of a lion in a cage reveals how Hervé felt as he was slowly being consumed by AIDS, always tossing and turning in bed, like a lion who can't stay still, yet can't go anywhere. Pablo vows to not carry out the death sentence to which Hervé was condemned. He chooses to lead an active lifestyle, not a passive one. The phrase "lion en cage" haunts Pablo as he often describes his own behavior as that of an imprisoned lion. Pablo explains this metaphor one day recalling a memory from the zoo; "Recuerdo la jaula del león del zoológico, aburrido como un rey

triste y solo en su castillo medieval," [I remember the encaged lion of the zoo, bored like a sad king, lonely in his medieval castle] (Pérez 48). He describes the encaged lion as bored like a sad king and alone in his medieval castle. This metaphor of a lion in a cage can better be explored by reading "The God's Script" by Jorge Luis Borges.

"The God's Script" tells of a powerful wizard named Tzinacán who is imprisoned next to a jaguar. He recounts, "I have lost count of the years I have lain in the darkness; I, who was young once and could move about the prison, am incapable of more than awaiting, in the posture of my death, the end destined to me by the gods." Tzinacán is immobile now, just like the axolotl from "Beauty Salon" and the encaged lion which Hervé mentions feeling like. The wizard has learned a formula that, uttering its simple words, will make him all powerful, however, he has no one to share it with, nor does he remember his own name, becoming no one.

It is clear that Pablo does not want to assume the fate of the lion or the jaguar, or the axolotl in Salón de belleza. Instead, he is forced into society. But perhaps he acts this way because there is nowhere else to go. In Salón de belleza, where the narrator seeks refuge from society in his own salon, he isolates himself from the mainstream of society. But in Un año sin amor, there is no refuge for Pablo. While he yearns for independence, perhaps in the form of love, he is unable to attain it. For practical reasons, he is forced to live with his aunt whom he dislikes. He is forced to live in the mainstream because he cannot support himself otherwise. He relies on his father to afford his apartment.

Perhaps because he is destined to stay in the mainstream and not find refuge, Pablo begins the initial rejection of the same major institutions that reject the narrator in Salón de belleza. Pablo rejects the hospitals, his family, and mainstream society in order to cope with the impending rejection of his own lifestyle and illness. But when one looks closer, perhaps these social institutions had already begun rejecting Pablo. When Pablo mentions the hospitals, he tells the reader that the hospitals were ill-equipped as if to say they didn't care about those infected with HIV. He also reveals that his family was full of secrets and that his identity was hidden from his brother. In this sense, his family was already repressing him before he decided to cut them off.

The book was adapted into a feature film, which is relatively faithful to the novel, however, the ending is very different. While the novel ends with the end of another year, the film ends with the publication of the novel, and the reaction of Pablo's family. When his family reads Pablo's novel, they reject him in the ultimate way by evicting him from his apartment, banishing him to a life neither in nor out of the mainstream, but in an unfamiliar place. While Pablo's family rejects him for shaming them, it is really his family who has shamed him.

At first glance, it seems the tones of the novel and the film are different, as the novel says it has a happy ending. But when we look more closely, it appears as though nobody is happy. As the title implies, it has been a year without love, and perhaps a lifetime. Pablo seems unable to love.

True love seems forbidden, reserved for death. Pablo mentions a list of people whom he had loved at one point, and all on the list are dead. True love only exists

among the dead. Only post-death can we acknowledge our love for others, and for Pablo, his memory of Hervé comes with his constant reminder of the “lion en cage.”

Because love does not exist in the living world, Pablo seeks out an artificial substitute, which is porn and SM. But even with this imitation of love, Pablo experiences pain inflicted by society. He faces constant rejection by “lovers” not to mention the physical pain he experiences through his sexual practices. Society has a sickening effect in the novel. As Pablo describes his own illness as an “enfermedad monstruosamente porno” [monstrously porno disease] (Pérez 29), the reader can see how the real disease is brought on by society. AIDS becomes a metaphor for society’s sickening, which marginalizes those like Pablo who are homosexuals.

Clearly Pablo doesn’t want to be permanently marginalized, and for this reason, he actively participates in society, unlike the narrator in <u>Salón de belleza</u>. However, the marginalization that Pablo fights is one of entrapment. He is pushed to the periphery, and cannot experience refuge, independence, love, or death. He is simply condemned to live in a social space subjected to pain.

But while the novel reveals the struggle of a man condemned to pain and suffering, it also reveals the failure of society. As he writes in his diary, the only private space for Pablo, he can condemn society for bearing the infection and repressing its minorities. The only escape for Pablo would be in finding love, which is the key to his liberation, but love is unattainable. Life is no longer viable, and with the publication of his novel, society will finally see.

IV. Pájaros de la playa

Severo Sarduy's Pájaros de la playa, known in English as Beach Birds, tells the story of people stricken by a mysterious malady, condemned to live in a sanitarium until a cure is discovered. However, the story is rather an allegory that describes a mass conformism in Cuba noted after the Revolution. The past and the present are in constant conflict, denoting a pre- and post-revolutionary Cuba. However, both views share one thing in common, a "panic of becoming disembodied in life" (Sarduy 54). In the sanitarium, the patients are confined to a pentagon of glass walls, perhaps Cuba, and are marginalized by an illness that threatens their status as ideal citizens. What was once a mansion with Moorish walls and fabulous gardens is now a whitewashed quarantine for the infected. The contrasting views of the two protagonists reveal the harsh reality of a nation under Revolution.

The two most notable characters of the novel, Immortelle and the Cosmologist, represent opposing views on life. Immortelle, while aware of its superficiality, runs on beauty and prides herself on possessions, while the Cosmologist vows to remove himself from being, sharing views with the mystics, as the only body's truth is the voice.

Immortelle is now past her prime and showing signs of aging, yet refuses to give up her youth by always applying makeup and cosmetics until no wrinkle or blemish is visible. Unlike other patients in the mansion, Immortelle is not infected with the malady. She chooses to stay there to keep the lonely men company. One day, she sinks into a depression upon the realization that her life is "devoid of real substance" (Sarduy 25).

She is ready to head to the sea, the beginning and end of life, to die when a man shows up, described as the Horse. The Horse, the new nurse, grows fond of Immortelle, and the two eventually engage in sex. Immortelle feels rejuvenated spiritually, however, she cannot forget the wrinkles that now cover her body. Later, a new nurse, referred to as the Cayman, joins the hospital team who brings with him powerful green medicine that can rejuvenate Immortelle's physical beauty. Immortelle engages in a sexual relationship with the Cayman too, in return for his medicine. To her surprise, Immortelle's wrinkles disappear, and she has regained the beauty from her youth, forty years ago. However, this transformation comes at the price of Immortelle's sanity.

Immortelle is not the only patient who undergoes a transformation. The balding blonde woman with the red jacket and the transfusion bag has also regained her youth, "formerly the transporter of her transfusion apparatus and now transformed into an adolescent with a graceful red beret perched on one side of her head over carefully set corkscrew-like locks gelled to perfect verticals" (Sarduy 75). She is wearing a sailor suit, "all the rage in children's wear in the fifties" (Sarduy 29). These character transformations reveal the desire to return to an idealized self, one that existed only in the past. The Cosmologist, the antithesis of Immortelle and as such possessed of a self-styled immunity to such nostalgia, notes that these other transformations have also come at the price of sanity, observing these patients' "coming and going as they talk to themselves and gesticulate, like madwomen" (Sarduy 116). The cosmologist speaks at least some truth as later we find out Immortelle begins talking to herself, before her dementia finally sets in. The cost of these transformations is best understood in the

case of Immortelle: “the more the body of that spirited girl was regenerated and rejuvenated, the more the poor thing’s mind deteriorated, as if the wonders worked by the beneficent brews were only skin deep, as if the stretching progressed in concert with senility and dementia” (Sarduy 131).

The Cosmologist, on the other hand, is infected with the malady and is in the terminal stages of the illness, bound to a wheelchair and slowly withering away. While others in the mansion try to regress and find youth despite their condemnation, the Cosmologist embraces his condition and dedicates his time to self-nullification, or removal from the natural world. The Cosmologist expresses great disdain for those who cannot live in the present, for those who cannot forget the past will suffer in the present, as “sick is the man who examines his past” (Sarduy 96). He keeps a diary to record his thoughts and trace his slow progression into an absence of being. The others note that the Cosmologist “had locked himself in his cell on bread and water in order to write a diary about the end of cosmos and its metaphor: illness” (Sarduy 88). Cosmos implies a harmony or order to the system. The Cosmologist writes in warning of the end of this harmony or idealized union, and explains the process through illness. Illness in the novel represents extreme marginalization as those stricken with the malady are quarantined and essentially removed from society. The Cosmologist states, “the body need only liberate itself from social protocol to manifest its true nature: a bag of farts and excrement. A trash heap” (Sarduy 119). Our own nature is reduced to trash because of current social protocol. Through his illness, the Cosmologist finds clarity. “Before, I enjoyed a persistent illusion: I was one. Now we are two, inseparable,

identical: the disease and me" (Sarduy 116). The disease becomes a part of the Cosmologist, and ultimately results in his disillusionment.

Throughout the novel, characters are constantly searching for an ideal self, synonymous with the past, with youth, in stark contrast with their present selves, debilitated by the malady. Although this ideal image is achievable, as in the case of Immortelle, it is simply "a fleeting, fictitious, precarious freedom" (Sarduy 20). To escape one's current condition, one cannot dream of an idealized self. As one nurse shouts to Immortelle regarding these fantasies, "If you keep this up, in the clouds this way, you'll never get out of here!" (Sarduy 46).

The omniscient narrator tells us:

> when someone, especially someone young, learns the nature of the malady from which he suffers, the texture of the poison that has invaded his flesh, he can react in one of two ways: Some of them rebel against everything, even against themselves, disregarding the prescribed dosages and divine will… others become withdrawn in thought, wall themselves up in an accessible muteness, inane aphasics mired in stupid somnolence as if they were mystics. (Sarduy 53-54)

Clearly, Immortelle and the others react in the first way, rebelling against their current identities, yearning for something from the past. The Cosmologist reacts in the opposite way, removing himself from society completely, seeking clarity and meaning in life. These outline the two contrasting views, particularly of pre- and post-revolutionary Cuba. The pre-revolutionary ideal follows modernism, the quest for an ideal, utopian

society. Forty years ago, Immortelle was a beautiful affluent young woman characterized by her mansion, luxurious possessions, alcohol, and her relationship with the modernist architect, also an idealist. As a group of pre-revolutionary souls shouts, “there’s no perfume like modernity!” (Sarduy 103). However, this philosophy soon changed in the aftermath of the triumph of the Revolution. Now those are fleeting memories of the past that seem too distant to be recovered. The Cosmologist, whose thoughts lie more with that of postmodernists, favors a dystopia (or the perceived failure of the regime) or opposing the ideal image of a man. Surely one can appreciate in the metaphor of a universal and unyielding malady the accusation of a repressive society that bears illness instead of well-being.

The whole host of characters struggles with what is characterized as a “void”, which might best be interpreted as a vacuity that results from the loss of something, whether it be a person or a lifestyle. While Immortelle is constantly searching to fill the void in her life, Cayman philosophizes that “the void is an essential condition of movement and life” (Sarduy 89). The void, and how each character chooses to deal with it, reveals the coping mechanisms of each to deal with the malady. While both the Cayman and the Horse vow to cure the malady, their strategies are significantly different. The Horse chooses to fill the void with innovative new medicines and technology which he believes will cure the patients. The Cayman on the other hand wants to cleanse the body, freeing up the void, which when full, results in inactivity and fear. The Cayman explains, “Plants, whose growth follows the seasons and the natural equilibrium, utilize, above all, the void… Man, however, from birth to death, does

nothing but fill himself with impure foods, poisoned air, and things that accumulate, thus distancing himself from the void, which fills him with terror" (Sarduy 89). Cayman believes that real cure is to essentially do nothing, or to simply rely on nature, which he refers to as his green medicine. These different strategies are put to the test when the Horse and the Cayman vie for the love of Immortelle. Both succeed in some ways and fail in others. However, their dueling love for Immortelle causes them to fight, which results in both Cayman and the Horse fleeing. Immortelle is saddened by their departure and she, too, flees the hospital in order to find them, who, together, can cure her. The narrator tells us, "She decided to look for them, certain that the three of them together would be clever enough to break out of the sinister hospital" (Sarduy 139). Regardless of which strategy was best, it is clear that the void is the key to enlightenment, in that one can truly appreciate their being after recognizing emptiness and what used to fill this void, perhaps the pre-Revolution lifestyle.

While restoring the void may be the key to curing oneself of the malady, this seems difficult, given the constant images of hoards, particularly of the natural world. This counter-intuitive presence of beings further complicates the restoration process, perhaps serving as a reminder that the void does need to be restored, as birds and bees in the novel are closely associated with death. As the title implies, birds seem to be an extension of those suffering from the malady, as the patients are beach birds, now "afflicted with the malady, incapable of soaring into the sky, they spend the days remembering the feats of the past" (Sarduy 17). The Cosmologist claims that the birds "suffer, too, from the malady" (Sarduy 18). While these birds have the ability to leave,

they always seem close by to the inescapable sanitarium, reminding the patients of their condition. Interestingly, the world *pájaro* means homosexual man, according to the Real Academia Española (RAE). Perhaps the birds represent society which bears infection, like the society in which Pablo lived in Un año sin amor. Not only are birds everywhere in the novel, but also bees. A hoard of bees attacks Immortelle on two occasions, the second resulting in her car accident, which killed the modernist architect whom she loved. Immortelle remembers the bees "attacked the convoy so viciously that it seemed to be obeying an order, its robotic, blood-thirsty warriors defending a sacrosanct and secret territory" (Sarduy 105). Moments later, "birds passed, perhaps disoriented" (Sarduy 107). It is as if the illness results from a vacuity and the imposing presence of birds and bees. One could argue that the bees were responsible for the death of modernist thought, which the architect and Immortelle embodied.

The architects of whom Immortelle was fond shared visions of modern homes, seamlessly integrated, unimposing in the natural world. One architect built his house under the reefs, "listening during the day to the sound of the tide and, at night, submerged in those strata, the almost imperceptible sound of the Earth turning, or the hum of the origin, the echo of the initial explosion" (Sarduy 67). Immortelle's architect built a house inside an old volcano, with no door, but only a window. Here was his refuge from everything but the natural world, similar to the Terminal in Salón de belleza. Then one day a hurricane came and flooded the home, forcing the architect to abandon his refuge, and his ideals. The narrator notes, "Perhaps resigned, without energies for a new undertaking, the architect abandoned everything. He contemplated for the last time

the flooded crater and walked toward the car, without looking back" (Sarduy 68). There was no longer hope for the architect, whose home and refuge was a last attempt to hold on to his modernist values. However, his refuge is no longer viable, like that of Pablo in Un año sin amor.

It seems that hope was lost for both the architect and the Cosmologist. The Cosmologist reveals his already diminishing faith in God early on as he proclaims:

> Despite my frail frame I have one freedom left: to rise up against divine disorder, against the simulacrum of universal harmony. God watches indifferently as men and birds fall, struck down by lightning. The victims are chosen at random, as in a galaxy, the star that will be consumed. We're the aborted dream of a minor demiurge. (Sarduy 18-19)

The Cosmologist reveals his little faith in God, which he refers to as a "minor demiurge" whose dream was aborted. This harsh criticism of a Creator reveals that there is no ideal in the world, or that ideal is far from perfect. This is an indirect criticism of those in the sanitarium who do strive for an ideal past self. The Cosmologist clings to his mystic views, which the narrator characterizes by "stupid somnolence." However, he too denounces his beliefs, when he realizes "I lost. I bet on the human being. I thought that in him there was a part of God. Today I find myself sick and alone. At least one thing certain remains from all this: disillusionment" (Sarduy 117). Perhaps the Cosmologist does find some clarity in this disillusionment, but worse, he is still sick and now alone. Like the architect, the Cosmologist no longer has refuge, or a space for persistent beliefs, but only finds disillusionment. This may represent the Cuban sentiment of a

persistent belief in the failed Revolution, holding out hope and refusing to accept the failure, resulting in progressive disillusionment.

By rejecting any and all past selves, living entirely in the present as the Cosmologist believes, it seems one could find peace and clarity. But as society has been stricken with illness in the present, it can no longer function. Now we can see illness, as told by the Cosmologist, as a metaphor for the end of cosmos. Just as illness removes the patients of the sanitarium from society, so does the Revolution, which no longer permits refuge for those now disillusioned by it. While the message of marginalization may not be as concrete as in Salón de belleza and Un año sin amor, the working metaphor of HIV is the agent of infection of the Revolution. Both infected and uninfected bystanders of the Revolution have now abandoned hope, forced into disillusionment and self-annihilation, condemned to death, as no social space is habitable. The utopia promised by the Revolution that strove for national unity is now complete dystopia.

V. Loco afán

Pedro Lemebel's Loco afán: crónicas de sidario chronicles the lives of a group of transvestites in Chile during the changing political climate of the second half of the twentieth century, from leftist utopia to military dictatorship back to leftist democracy. The novel gives a candid voice to repressed identities in Chile. Lemebel seeks to bring the struggle of transsexuals to light, in a time when the group's cause is first dwarfed by the up and coming revolution of the left, and then repressed by the conservative military dictatorship.

Structurally, this novel differs greatly from the other works studied thus far. The novel is separated into five sections, each distinct in characters and story. The first section chronicles the lives of a group of transvestite friends who slowly die off one by one from AIDS. It also establishes the tone of the generation, waiting in vain for emancipation, as the protagonist takes a retrospective glance at "la foto de la fiesta donde las locas entrevieron aleteos de su futura emancipación" [the photo of the fiesta where the transvestites began to see the fluttering of their future emancipation] (Lemebel 21). The audience gets the general feel that the transvestites are waiting for an escape from this logic that is continuously perpetuated by the political-economic model, as the narrator recalls, "los destinos minoritarios siguen escaldados por las políticas de un mercado siempre al acecho de cualquier escape" [the fate of the minorities remains scalded by the politics of a market always lying in wait of any escape] (Lemebel 23). The minorities are waiting for a voice and a new identity in the

changing political climate of Chile, first with the hopes that a leftist government under Salvador Allende (1970-1973) will provide them with novel cultural freedoms, then with disappointment with dictatorship under General Augusto Pinochet (1973-1989), and then later with even more futility under the neoliberal capitalist democracy (1990-present). This minority group searching for a voice and identity must first overcome the social pressures, both internal and external, facing transsexuals in a heteronormative society.

The novel establishes a dichotomy between a perceived imperative toward masculine identity in the United States and a more *mariposa* or butterfly-like identity in Chile, positing that gay culture in Chile does not self-impose the pressures to masculinize identity that its U.S. counterpart does. There is a perceived internal pressure in the United States that is not present in Chile, where there is a greater permissiveness, for example, with the *mariposa* style of life. This doesn't mean, however, that there are not external pressures that transvestites face in Chilean society, as only in private is this identity not compromised.

In public spaces, indeed, Chilean transvestites still fight the vulnerability associated with being doubly stigmatized, for identifying with the feminine identity and for living with HIV/AIDS. The second section of the novel addresses this, recalling "ese tono masculino que adoptan los enfermos frente a las cámaras, para no ser segregados doblemente" [that masculine tone that the infected adopted in front of the cameras, to not be doubly segregated] (Lemebel 70). While these individuals assume a falsely masculine identity on camera, they will, however, open up under the guise of their more

feminine identity to those who are genuinely concerned: “es fácil encontrar una loca positiva que acceda a contestar algunas preguntas sobre el tema” [it’s easy to find an HIV-positive transvestite that agrees to answer questions on the subject] (Lemebel 69). However, this willingness to answer questions candidly off the record does not seem to weaken the greater circumstance of repressive marginalization that demands a conformist masculine identity. While the social atmosphere may seem similar to that in the United States, Lemebel tries to open up a new vein of participation, achieving it by finding heroism and hope in the most marginal of marginalized figures.

In a chapter in the second section, a victim openly discusses his AIDS, sardonically glorifying aspects of his condition “más bien jugando un poco con el aura star de la epidemia” [rather playing a little with the star aura of the epidemic] (Lemebel 70) proclaiming AIDS is a reason to live, that AIDS is a reason to love life. When asked if having AIDS is a privilege, he responds “completamente, me hace especial” [completely, it makes me special] (Lemebel 71) and that as a result of his illness he has a range of social benefits, such as a doctor, a psychologist, and dentist, as well as tuition for school, all for free. But even with all of these benefits, perhaps the most important necessity, love, is not guaranteed. Another guarantee that is unwanted, he mentions, is that you will never age, because one does not live to age due to the severity of AIDS. When asked about treatment including AZT, he responds that AZT is like silicone, it simply adds a little more time, in the case of AIDS, to one’s suffering. It seems as though the victims in this novel are at a crossroads between Pablo Pérez and the protagonist of Salón de belleza, because while recognizing that the illness does not

have to render one antisocial, it still entails endless suffering and an impossible quest for love.

When the victim is describing his condition in the interview, he manages to find hope, strength, and courage within those whom society has condemned. Although this hope is expressed as cynicism, through his incredibly sardonic tone, it nevertheless seems that there is some small kernel of truth in this albeit cynical affirmation of hope, strength, and courage, in that the realization of AIDS does change one's priorities to perhaps live more in the moment, and this is the vein I would like to emphasize as the most significant conceptual thread unifying the text. This heroic attitude of finding hope even while living with AIDS is explored further in the following three anecdotes.

In the story "La transfiguración de Miguel Angel," for example, the eponymous protagonist, who is a social nobody, sparks a national media controversy courtesy of a mystical transformation. Miguel Angel was a poor orphan from an otherwise unremarkable village of Villa Alemana who, one day, saw the Virgin Mary. The town was bewildered as to why the Virgin would appear to a poor orphan who "ni siquiera había hecho la primera comunión" [hadn't even taken his First Communion] (Lemebel 157) and one woman replies that the Virgin does not want to appear before the rest of the townsfolk, that "ella sólo se deja ver por niños puros, y en este pueblo la gente es tan mala y peladora" [the Virgin only allows innocent children to see her, and in this town the people are so bad and gossipy] (Lemebel 156). The town, representing the heteronormative Chilean society, is so unprincipled that the Virgin will not show herself before the general populace. Not only does the Virgin appear to Miguel Angel, but she

gives him the power to perform miracles, resulting in his increasingly desired presence among the townspeople. The narrator recalls the commotion as "comenzaron las peregrinaciones, las multitudes de enfermos que buscaban la sanación, y los sanos aburridos que deseaban contraer la epidemia de la fe" [the pilgrimages began, the multitude of sickly people searched for the cure, and the healthy bores wished to catch the epidemic of faith] (Lemebel 156). Interestingly, Lemebel uses the word "pilgrimage" which connotes a certain respect in the language of religious devotion that the sick individuals have for Miguel Angel. However, this does not last. Lemebel also mentions the epidemic of faith, which the bored and otherwise healthy individuals want to catch. This evokes the contrasting images of health (healing faith epidemic) and sickness (AIDS epidemic). This contrast between life and death is recurrent amongst all works previously analyzed. The metaphor explores the conflict of living with AIDS, and whether or not one will treat it like an impending death sentence, or, like the interviewee or several other characters in the novel, who, in spite of their cynicism or sardonic tone, find a reason to live. These individuals manage to salvage a kernel of hope out of their condition, and this kernel of hope is embodied in the epidemic of faith, which Miguel Angel leaves to spread in other villages. Years quickly pass as the townsfolk slowly forget their memories of Miguel Angel and replace them with "esperados cambios políticos" [hoped for political changes] (Lemebel 159).

Eventually, Miguel Angel decides to return and the town publicizes his return. However, after everyone steps off the plane, nobody can spot Miguel Angel, but a girl with long hair and glasses remains. She bewilderedly asks, "¿No me reconocen? Soy

Miguel Angel. La virgen me hizo mujer" [You don't recognize me? I'm Miguel Angel. The Virgin made me a woman] (Lemebel 159). The Church responds by saying that the Virgin does not perform these kinds of miracles, and that "la biblia es muy clara en estas cosas, no admite trucos sodomitas ni operaciones sexuales con bisturíes místico" [the bible is very clear on these things, it doesn't allow sodomite tricks nor sex changes with mystic scalpels] (Lemebel 160). This attitude of the Church resonates with that the religious institution of Salón de belleza. The Church is totally unsympathetic, and now regrets any previous endorsement of Miguel Angel's miracle making.

The narrator rescues Miguel Angel from this popular and institutional rejection seen in the novels previously analyzed by emphasizing her beauty and compassion, which redeems her from a marginalized perspective. Her physical description contrasts harshly with the rejection by the people, as the narrator describes Miguel Angel's appearance: "tan linda ella, tan joven, tan bella su mirada misericordiosa" [her compassionate look so cute, so young, so beautiful] (Lemebel 161), emphasizing the unexpectedness of this reaction. Now, Miguel Angel represents a leader for the marginalized, as an "ángel de los inválidos" [angel of the disabled] (Lemebel 160). The narrator describes a transvestite pilgrimage that is being made by other visitors: gay males who wish to be women, pre-op transsexuals who cannot afford operations, hermaphrodites, etc. However, the narrator mentions that this visitors arrive "en medio de la noche, camuflados por las sombras" [in the middle of the night, hidden in the shadows] (Lemebel 161) underscoring society's intolerance of alternative sexualities.

In this story, initially Miguel Angel represents a leader, one who heals. When Miguel Angel is a man, society is a willing follower that wants to know the power of Miguel Angel, who wishes to catch the faith epidemic. Since society is bound to follow its own rules, then once Miguel Angel becomes a woman, she, along with her leadership is relegated to a marginalized position, as society does not allow these alternative sexual identities. Miguel Angel, on the other hand, becomes the leader of the people, initially of society as a whole, later of the marginalized. The story suggests there is a socially salutary effect when Miguel Angel is a man, as his masculine leadership, even in his absence, gives the town faith to create positive political changes. But the fact that the town cannot accept his own changes as positive in the realm of gender and sexuality truly shows the limits of progressive politics, which are still heteronormative. Even the most progressive of politics such as during the neoliberal capitalist period post 1988 feel like a dictatorship sans military in a sense, limited by a rigid heteronormativity that will not permit a nonconformist identity.

Another analogous transformation in the novel is that of Ernst Böttner who becomes Lorenza, a beautiful artist. Ernst Böttner was the gentle blonde son of an immigrant family. One day, Enrst was playing and trying to catch a bird perched on a wire fence, and he did not realize that the fence was electrical. When he went to grab the bird, he got electrocuted and burnt his arms. His mother, a German, decided to take Ernst to Germany to seek treatment, as the rural medicine was insufficient in helping him. Ernst had his arms amputated all the way up to his shoulders, leaving him like a Greek statue. He was then forced to learn to use his feet to complete routine tasks, and

eventually taught himself art. Eventually, Ernst began cross-dressing and applying makeup, and completed his transformation into Lorenza. Through all of this, his mother never stopped supporting him, becoming his “mamanager” (Lemebel 152). Lorenza became a well-known artist, known both for her drawings as well as her corporal art displays, like when she painted herself white simulating the Venus de Milo. To complete her transformation, she builds herself a pair of wings to wear like the Winged Victory of Samothrace, a Greek statue representing the goddess Nike. The story ends with Lorenza flapping her wings in a gay disco, and being chosen symbol of the Special Olympics in Barcelona. A footnote at the end of the story tells the reader that Lorenza died of AIDS in 1993. This story is very interesting because again, an already marginalized individual is transformed into a leader of other marginalized individuals. This becomes another theme in the text, an almost unionizing of marginalized “others.” Even with a marginalized status, these people do not succumb to the debilitating effects of marginalization like those from the other novels including the protagonist of Salón de belleza, but rather gain power and respect among the marginalized community.

Yet another transformation occurs in “Berenice la Resucitada” [Berenice the Revived], the story of a man given a second chance at life. As a child, Berenice was known by a masculine name, and he lived with this aunt and grandfather, his only family. When he turned eighteen, he ran off with a group of women to work on a vineyard where he could earn wages to finance a trip to the city. One day, a fellow worker passes out in the sweltering heat, and he is assigned the duty to keep the ants away from the body. While he watches the body, he begins to admire her beauty and

youth and assumes the identity of the now deceased upon finding her identification card, becoming Berenice.

Berenice moves to the city to work for a wealthy family where she becomes infamous for the kidnapping of the child for whom she cared. When one day the child called Berenice "mamá," Berenice snatches the child in an "arrebato sentimental" [sentimental impulse] (Lemebel 166). Berenice spoils the child, buying sweets, Batman capes, and other amusements. The narrator sides with Berenice, explaining that Berenice exhibited "una maternidad eunuca de Virgen María o Madre del Año" [a eunuch maternity characteristic of the Virgin Mary or Mother of the Year] (Lemebel 166). In sharp contrast, the public only worries that Berenice, being a homosexual man, might sexually abuse the child, which the narrator recalls as "todo Chile pensando lo peor, las aberraciones sexuales más atroces en manos de ese degenerado" [all of Chile thinking the worst, the most atrocious sexual deviations in the hands of that degenerate man] (Lemebel 167). When Berenice is finally apprehended, she stoically gives back the child without struggle, as the narrator recollects: "no derramó ni una lágrima, le dijo adiós levemente, sin drama" [she didn't shed a tear, and said goodbye mildly, without drama] (Lemebel 168). Berenice remains quiet and reserved, just remembering "el olor de su sueño en la piel mojada del peluche" [the scent of her dream in the moist skin of the plush toy] (Lemebel 168).

Berenice is cast by the public as an outlaw and a criminal, having stolen both an identity and a child. However, the narrator's empathic view of her attenuates the reader's perspective of her as a criminal. Unfortunately, due to society's present

rejection of alternative sexual identities, the only way for Berenice to become a mother is to break the law. She is the most exemplary and loving mother as possible, but society cannot accept this kind of loving and gentle maternity, and they cannot only accept it, but are outright fearful, which breeds the negatively stereotypical views of sexual abuse among homosexuals. Even the news story regarding the kidnapping characterizes Berenice as a man, not a woman, negating the idea that this woman could be a loving mother or a female at all. It negates the realization of personal ideals as well as social well being that can come from them, by keeping society's members within the confines of prescribed gender roles. If transvestites cannot be parents, then they cannot be architects of the social future, so by refusing to recognize her status as a mother, society denies her a place to shape the future of the society. If children are the future, why not foster the belief that raising children is productive, even if you are a transvestite?

While these chapters feature individuals elegized as heroes, in subsequent chapters, the characters decide to stand up for and defend their freedoms in spite of criticism. Berenice, just like Miguel Angel and Lorenza, willingly makes a decision to follow through with the transformation to be one step closer to happiness. However, these transformations are met with disapproval and intolerance by the rest of society. As the adage goes, "When life gives you lemons, make lemonade." If life gives you an opportunity to be happier with yourself, why not take it? And that is exactly what these individuals do, even at the cost of facing social stigmatism and criticism. All three characters are granted a heroic status precisely for their courage in being openly true to

their alternative sexualities, and in their willingness to endure the negative repercussions. This section of the novel establishes Berenice, Lorenza, and Miguel Angel's unique identities and perhaps heroic representations; subsequent sections give a justification of the merits of their struggles.

The most potent such justification of the merits of these three transsexuals' struggles comes in the third section in a poem entitled "Manifiesto: hablo por mi diferencia" [Manifesto: I speak on behalf of my difference], wherein an unknown narrator elaborates his political views which elucidate the shortcomings of progressive—erstwhile revolutionary—politics. The narrator slowly reveals his struggle to cope with his marginal status, and emphasizes what must be done to better society for future generations.

The narrator addresses an unknown listener evidently from the heteronormative majority, confronting him: "Usted no sabe/ Cómo cuesta encontrar el amor/ En estas condiciones/ Usted no sabe/ Qué es cargar con esta lepra/ La gente guarda las distancias/ La gente comprende y dice:/ Es marica pero escribe bien/ Es marica pero es buen amigo" [You don't know/ How difficult it is to find love/ In these conditions/ You don't know/ What it is to carry the burden of this leprosy/ The people keep their distance/ They understand and say/ He's gay but he writes well/ He's gay but he's a good friend] (Lemebel 87). The narrator comments directly on his marginal status, telling us that people keep their distance, and qualify his successes and attributes through the lens of his homosexuality, saying although he is gay, he writes well, or although he is gay, he is still a great friend, treating homosexuality like a social disability. The narrator

further describes how he is marginalized and mocked, recalling, "Tengo cicatrices de risas en la espalda" [I have scars of laughter on my back] (Lemebel 87). He remembers the emotional pain from taunting laughter. Again, like Pablo in Un año sin amor, a marginalized individual expresses grief over the struggle for love. Love is obviously an important driving force for anyone, and it becomes particularly hard to attain in the narrator's marginal condition.

The narrator reluctantly defends himself to an imagined interlocutor: "Tiene miedo de que se homosexualice la vida?/ Y no hablo de meterlo y sacarlo/ Y sacarlo y meterlo solamente/ Hablo de ternura compañero" [Are you afraid of a homosexualized life?/ And I don't speak of sexual promiscuity/ Of sexual promiscuity solely/ I speak of tenderness, *compañero*] (Lemebel 86). Again, the characters in the novel defend themselves, saying they are more than simple stereotypes of promiscuity. This reveals the sad irony of the leftist politics, as the narrator addresses a leftist "compañero" whose limits will not tolerate a homosexualized life, or even a tender caring one, revealing the heteronormative politics of the left. The narrator exposes the weakness of the political left which manages to rabidly marginalize those with alternative sexual identities, rendering any quest for love hopeless. Although status quo evades the fight for sexual equality, the narrator vows to fight back.

As the poem opens, the narrator states his proposal, "Hablo por mi diferencia/ Defiendo lo que soy" [I speak on behalf of my difference/ I defend what I am] (Lemebel 83). He speaks for his status as "other," and he defends who he is. The narrator is plagued by injustice and refuses to discuss the political leftist cause, "porque ser pobre

y maricón es peor" [because being poor and homosexual is worse] (Lemebel 83). The narrator represents the cause of those who are not only homosexual but also socio-economically disadvantaged. He leaves the audience with one simple message: that his cause to be included in the revolution, proclaiming, "Hay tantos niños que van a nacer/ Con una alita rota/ Y yo quiero que vuelen compañero/ Que su revolución/ Les dé un pedazo de cielo rojo/ Para que puedan volar" [There are so many boys that will be born/ With a little broken wing/ And I want them to fly, *compañero*/ And that your revolution/ Give them a piece of that red sky/ So they can fly] (Lemebel 90). With this powerful close, the narrator asks that the future generations of marginalized homosexuals, born as children with "broken little wings," be given a piece of the leftist ideal. Lemebel's narrator observes that the exclusion of homosexuals from the revolutionary cause is evidenced as a marked absence within leftist discourse; revolutionary Latin American music, for example, "nunca nos dedicó ninguna estrofa, ningún estribillo, como si los maricones no existiéramos, nos exilió del universo poético de su canto" [they never dedicated a single verse to us, nor a refrain, as if the homosexuals didn't exist; they exiled us from the poetic universe of their song] (Lemebel 119). Speaking of the revolution in general, the narrator recalls that "nunca tuvimos un Ché Guevara propio… porque los héroes del marxismo macho nunca nos tuvieron paciencia" [we never had our own Ché Guevara because the macho Marxist heroes never had any patience for us] (Lemebel 137).

Additionally, there seems to be no room for transvestitism in the visual arts. For instance, in the first section, a young transvestite aspires to be like Madonna, assuming

her name. Madonna worked in the commercial sex industry, where she was the most photographed, "no por bella, sino más bien por la picardía tramposa de sus gestos" [no for her beauty, but rather for her naughty gestures] (Lemebel 36). She is discovered by an art director, Nemesio Antúnez, who decides to exhibit a clip from a film starring Madonna, made to promote the sex industry. While the clip is rolling, spectators comment on how beautiful Madonna is, describing her "perfil nativo, sus hombros helénicos, apretados en el gesto tímido de la ninfa, sus pequeños pezones abultados al juntar los brazos" [her native profile, her Helenic shoulders, tensed in a timid expression of the nymph, her small nipples bulging between her gathered arms] (Lemebel 37). As the camera pans down, it reveals a seemingly normal female region, when suddenly Madonna's penis becomes untucked. The director immediately calls for the film to be cut, referring to the film as "esa obscenidad, ese escándalo sin nombre… esa suciedad, que eso no era arte, eso era pornografía, pura mugre libertina que desprestigiaba a la democracia" [that obscenity, that scandal beyond meaning, that filthiness, that was not art, but rather pornography, pure libertine filth that discredited democracy] (Lemebel 38). In an instant, what was beautiful is now anti-democratic pornography. With the arrival of democracy from dictatorship, censorship had been lifted on creative expression of the female body. However, when Madonna's body is revealed as male, the limits of this democracy and its freedoms have suddenly been breeched. Where then is there a safe space for these individuals who push the limits of socially accepted sexual identity to express themselves artistically?

The only “safe space” addressed in the novel for these marginalized identities is in the music industry, as the third section reveals that the music of artists such as Queen and David Bowie “intenta configurar un espacio gay en el pesado y agreste mundo rockero” [tries to configure a gay space in the heavy and wild world of rock] (Lemebel 97), “como si la música fuera la excusa para escenificar una erótica bisexual para todo consumidor” [as if the music were an excuse to stage a bisexual eroticism for consumerism] (Lemebel 99). Yet even this safe space is ultimately disappointing, functioning more as an aesthetic experiment than a real space of social transformation, particularly since these trends seem to retain a marked degree of masculinity, thanks to bands such as Kiss whose most notable trademark is full makeup, purely aesthetic. The novel does cite a few examples in Latin America like Cecilia, a cross-dressing Elvis performer with a small lesbian following; however, the following remains small and the performance uncontroversial.

The lack of safe spaces for marginalized individuals is very evident in the novel, and the only solution presented seems to be for these individuals to stand together and make their stories known. Lemebel’s style of testimonial-like vignettes allows the audience to understand the obstacles overcome and day-to-day struggles encountered by these transvestites, in such a way that humanizes them. Lemebel gives his characters rich back stories, and makes the reader sympathize with at least some of them on certain levels. What it boils down to is a group of transvestites who make life decisions to release any inhibitions and insecurities, which everyone does at some point in his or her lifetime. However, the fates met by each character do not seem happy or

optimistic, but this is the sad truth of the greater plague, AIDS. The illness that was responsible for taking the lives of almost everyone from the photograph in the first section is well defined, like in Un año sin amor. This brings to light the unfortunate reality of the disease. While the novel does not fully explore how individuals cope with AIDS as do the other novels, it does nevertheless attempt to destigmatize those who are otherwise considered a risk-group in the novel: transvestites. With tales of a miracle-working orphan, a talented armless artist, and a transvestite "mother of the year", Lemebel's novel achieves a new status for marginalized individuals. In some ways, Lemebel is even more radical, as he fights to establish solidarity among not only transvestites, but those with economically disadvantaged statuses.

Whereas Pablo in Un año sin amor reached out to others yet ultimately foreclosed the possibility of a lasting love because he could not see his way through to bridging the class divide, Lemebel does instill a kernel of hope in the lives of sexually marginalized individuals, namely transvestites from the most economically challenged backgrounds. Pablo cannot see through class and break out of the metaphorical cage in which he is trapped. In Salón de belleza, the protagonist never even establishes a connection with society, lonely, totally alienated and drowning slowly. And in Sarduy's Pájaros de la playa of perfect segregation, the individuals are physically trapped in another world, in the sanitarium, where even those uninfected with AIDS wish to die.

Lemebel's strength is not only his political denunciation of the heteronormative class-divided status quo that keeps transvestites marginalized, but also his empathy and taking up their political cause, calling for their integration within progressive leftist

politics. Not only should these transvestites be included, Lemebel seems to argue, but, moreover, they are the greatest advocates of leftist progressive ideals, of tolerance, of working against the division of classes, and of establishing social harmony. It is as though Lemebel refuses to surrender the kernel of hope that transvestites will witness the emergence of their own Ché—or, to put it another way, that the prospect of any future such heroism for Latin America is to be found in its gay community.

VI. Conclusion

While nearly two million individuals are living with HIV/AIDS in Latin America, the theme of illness remains distant to literature. However, a small but significant literary niche does concern itself with the question of HIV/AIDS. Four works were selected: Salón de belleza (Mexico, 1999), Un año sin amor (Argentina, 1998), Pájaros de la playa (Cuba, 1993), and Loco afán (Chile, 1996). These works were carefully selected for being contemporaries of one another and sharing a common generational perspective on HIV/AIDS during the mid to late 1990s. These works also give a panoramic view of the reaction to AIDS across Latin America as each work represents a different national attitude, and the works each provide a unique social commentary as the authors' lives have spanned multiple generations (Bellatin 1960-, Pérez 1966-, Sarduy 1937-1993, Lemebel 1952-). While the narratives differ in method and structure, they all work against traditional stereotypes of marginalization that cast the gay community in the negative light of promiscuity and social unproductivity. The novels appear to be working against the language of marginalization, and we are able to appreciate that two of the most recurrent ideas in the novels are that members of the gay community are not promiscuous but want to be loved and in committed relationships, and that members are not unproductive, but want to be dedicated contributors to society, in some ways the hardest working members. It is this very language of marginalization that prevents the protagonists from realizing their full identities as both committed and loving, and as productive, integrated and contributing

members of society. Through these novels, we catch a glimpse into this process of marginalization, and how it affects the lives of not only the victims, but also of society.

As of the end of 2000, sex between men accounted for one third of all HIV/AIDS cases, with the silence and marginalization of this social group contributing to disease susceptibility (Garcia-Abreu et al 29). Garcia-Abreu notes that there is little sense of community among men who have sex with men and few activist groups are present, making it difficult to spread messages of prevention (29). This results in an underground society of marginalized individuals who place themselves more at risk due to living outside of mainstream society where information is more easily disseminated. The key to addressing these concerns is by not targeting individuals but rather respectfully and safely approaching them to further education of HIV/AIDS. As men who have sex with men (MSM) account for a large majority of infected individuals, their rights and protection have been fought for under a larger LGBT movement.

While the LGBT movement in the United States has rapidly progressed since the 1970s, the movement has been comparatively slower to catch on in Latin America, although most nations are governed by some form of democracy and are considered Western (Corrales par. 1), which would seem to poise them for the adoption of progressive politics in regard to sexual orientation. Yet it was not until the late 1990s that legislation granting rights to the LGBT community developed in the region. In 1998, Ecuador passed legislation protecting against discrimination based on sexual orientation; in 1999, Chile decriminalized same-sex intercourse; in 2006, Mexico City granted same-sex couples the right to civil unions (Corrales par. 2-3); in 2010, Argentina

became the first Latin American country to legalize nationally recognized gay marriage (Hertz and Daskow 24); and today in Cuba, sex change operations are free to those who qualify (Corrales par. 3). Albeit at an uneven pace across the continent, Latin America today has protected and guaranteed some of the most progressive and inclusive LGBT rights. However, in the immediate aftermath of the AIDS epidemic outbreak in the 1980s, attitudes were not nearly as tolerant as today.

Tim Frasca provides evidence about how this group of individuals (homosexuals living with HIV/AIDS) became marginalized not as much by empirical social circumstance as by social stigmatization on the basis of negative stereotypes (80). These stigmatized risk groups included Haitians, heroin users, hemophiliacs, and homosexuals. Frasca acknowledges that these groups are in fact at a higher-than-average risk for contracting HIV, but underscores the point that the method of disseminating this information to the public was disrespectful in that it reified negative stereotypes. This resulted in society associating danger and risky behavior—and not simply an elevated possibility of contagion—with risk groups, to the point that Frasca characterizes Mexican public opinion in the 1980s as believing that people in risk groups “ought to be segregated, if not boarded onto ships and sunk far at sea” (80). And this perspective pervaded not only the public, but also the government, which Frasca accuses of a paradigmatic cultural machismo that stalled the response to AIDS in Latin America and hindered efforts to help those at risk (79). In this respect, Frasca argues that Latin American machismo finds its counterpart in the United States, echoing Lemebel’s literary observation of the same phenomenon. As evidence of this common

maschismo, Frasca cites Randy Shilts's comparative study of the U.S. governmental and mainstream response to Legionnaire's disease and its sharp contrast with the response to AIDS. Whereas Legionnaire's disease was perceived as afflicting virile soldiers and affluent members of society, and as such was not stigmatized, those affected by AIDS were "not war heroes like with Legionnaire's but marginalized groups such as heroin users and homosexuals" (Frasca 79). The fact that these latter groups most at risk for AIDS were already severely marginalized only increased their risk because their stigmatization by a hypermasculinist culture—in the United States and Latin America alike—jeopardized efforts at treatment and prevention.

The novels studied give literary representation to the exacerbating effects of labeling the gay community—an already marginalized group—as being at risk for HIV/AIDS. For example, Pablo from Un año sin amor had a hard enough time finding love without disclosing his HIV status, so these individuals who are now pooled into a risk group face even more stigma, enough to push people completely out of the margins into a solitary space, like the protagonist of Salón de belleza. While it may seem impossible for some to represent their cause due to severe stigma, others have banded together to form unions. In Un año sin amor, Pablo reaches out to a group of fetishists, which allows him to experience some pleasure, whereas in Loco afán the characters form close bonds with other transvestites, and clearly contemplate strategies for aligning their causes with those of other successful groups such as leftists. This strategy is best described as "piggybacking" (Aggleton et al 44) where numerous examples have been cited including homosexuals who joined together with the Sandinistas in Nicaragua

(Babb 276), homosexuals who fought alongside feminists especially in the United States (Corrales par. 7), examples that resonate with the express desire to include homosexuals within the leftist cause in Loco afán. This could even be extended to HIV-positive individuals fighting under larger LGBT movements. While solidarity among the gay community has proved successful in organizing human rights organizations in the United States, "piggybacking" has been less successful in Latin America. This lesser success resonates with the argument articulated in Loco afán where the narrator in "Manifiesto" claims that even the leftist party retains its conservative values regarding sexuality. Javier Corrales recognizes that while most governments in present-day Latin America are left-leaning, the LGBT movement has failed to gain the support of many leftist political parties, attributing this failure to three possible reasons: the disdain of globalization of the left which many LGBT advocates embrace, the lingering machismo resulting from macho leftist leaders including Ché and Fidel, or simply the "innate conservatism of leftist-populists" (par. 10) which we see in Loco afán.

Despite many unsuccessful attempts to garner the respect of and integration within the political left, some homosexual groups have made breakthroughs. In Nicaragua in 1989, homosexual activists of the Sandinista party marched in celebration of the tenth anniversary of Sandinista victory, and this gathering received much media attention (Babb 276). While these movements were silenced at first, it forced a more open dialogue on homosexuality which led to a more tolerant community in Nicaragua, which held its first gay pride event in 1991. However, there are still shortcomings, particularly regarding gender inequality. While homosexual men have stood up in

Nicaragua, lesbians observe far fewer social spaces, and cite their own perceived social responsibilities that must be upheld like family (Babb 277). This exclusion of women from the male homosexual cause is best described in Cruising Utopia by José Esteban Muñoz. Muñoz discusses Evan Wolfson's idea that homonormative interests guide the LGBT movement, referring to gay pragmatic thought (21). This idea, Muñoz believes, damages the cause of the LGBT community, saying "gay pragmatic organizing is in direct opposition to the idealist thought that I associate as endemic to a forward-dawning queerness" (21). His concept is, instead of trying to force yourself into the present social order which he sees as flawed, you must always look towards the future, and address the inequalities inherent to society, including discrimination based on gender, race, and sexual orientation among others. In order for queerness to evolve in a progressive direction, one must not be passive like those in Salón de belleza or Pájaros de la playa, nor pragmatic like Pablo in Un año sin amor who resigns himself to strategic but limited social insertion where he can find it, but rather active like those in Loco afán who seek to mold society into an all-inclusive one, including men, women and transgender individuals, homosexuals, heterosexuals and transsexuals, and the rich, the poor and everyone in between.

Javier Corrales identifies the transition from dictatorship to democracy as the key social catalyst that gave rise to tolerance and the ability to work to overcome these social inequalities on the basis of sexual identity in parts of Latin America. Corrales notes that "it helps that the region is no longer authoritarian, because gay rights rarely expand under such conditions. It also helps that the region is solidly urbanized and that

Latin American cities are becoming more globalized and richer; gay life thrives in wealthy, cosmopolitan cities" (par. 5). Corrales's claim rests on the idea that marginalized individuals living in the city face fewer stigmas as information is more readily disseminated as compared to in rural areas, where macho ideals still prevail. While his views may seem hopeful, they do not seem to afford significant hope for individuals who do not easily fit into wealthy cosmopolitan life. What about those living in less urban areas, or those who are financially burdened? When all hope seems to be lost for these non-conformist members of society facing the added challenges of rural machismo and class prejudice, Pedro Lemebel revives that hope by advocating for a new revolution that includes members from all social strata, particularly those facing this triple marginalization of being homosexuals who are poor and of rural background. Lemebel's portrait of radical social stigmatization allows his readers to fully understand the extent and mechanisms of social exclusion.

Peter Aggleton explains how social inequalities breed stigma, particularly related to HIV/AIDS, through the mechanisms of social hierarchy: the dominant group codes the subordinate group with a negative characteristic that works to further perpetuate the subordinate group's lack of power and control by marking that group as less socially valuable (291). For example, stigma may arise out of class divisions, making AIDS a disease of the poor, or it may arise out of gender or sexual relations divisions, making AIDS a disease caused by men, or a gay disease, respectively. If social inequalities like these are addressed before an epidemic like AIDS arises, then stigma can be neutralized. However, because the AIDS epidemic emerged in the context of social

inequalities, its outbreak has served as a breeding ground for stigma. Aggleton believes that HIV stigma "comes from the powerful combination of shame and fear," and that the negative responses "force the epidemic underground, creating the ideal conditions for HIV to spread" (288). This is clearly evident in Un año sin amor where Pablo does not disclose his status out of shame, and presumably transmits HIV to another male after unprotected sex. But the bigger concern is the overwhelming number of individuals who are not fortunate enough to know their status, further spreading the disease. The idea of HIV being underground is clearly expressed in both Salón de belleza and Un año sin amor where the protagonists seek to occupy "safe spaces," yet these spaces prove to be anything but safe and the protagonists cannot seem to breach the social strata in which they are inevitably trapped.

The unifying theme of all the works analyzed is finding one's true and fully realized social identity amidst a socially exclusive world in the time of the AIDS outbreak. This search for identity and solidarity can be applied to the greater struggle that seeks to define Latin American identity. In Queer Latinidad: Identity Practices, Discursive Spaces, Juana María Rodríguez identifies the struggle for "latinidad" which she describes as *mestizaje* or ethnic mixture (13). Latin America harbors a very diverse group of individuals from many different races, religions, and backgrounds; therefore, the very process of trying to define Latin American identity gives rise to new margins. Rodríguez says that in order to resolve its problems with identity, "the state has created ideologies that propose solutions to the problem of identity, but those solutions always occlude the existence of marginalized groups who are not part of the 'national project'"

(13). This resonates with homosexuality in Cuba that was deemed unproductive by the government, as represented in Pájaros de la playa.

Society, which has been recurrently embodied in these works as the metaphorical agent of disease, is unfit to handle yet another plea for equality and integration. In the end, AIDS is not only a physiological disease, but also a social syndrome. The reactions to AIDS are purely cultural, and this social phenomenon can be overcome if we address the shortcomings of the full range of social inequalities. Aggleton says it best, that "the only way of making progress against the epidemic is to replace shame with solidarity and fear with hope" (288). As we have seen, AIDS, especially during the early years, was seen as a death sentence, and was worn with shame, so much so that it forced perfectly productive members of society off the map. In Pájaros de la playa, it literally and physically forced individuals into quarantine, placing them in sanatoria until the epidemic could be contained.

Replacing individual shame with communication and solidarity among those victimized, as well as replacing fear with hope that AIDS is not a death sentence, will become the driving force that does not integrate the marginalized into the present society, but that molds a new all-inclusive one. In this new all-inclusive society, partnered romantic love and full social citizenship—the two goals recurrently manifested in these narratives—become fully realized markers of the gay community's social identity.

In this quest toward realizing a collective social identity, there seem to be two paramount ideals: love and integration. Through the texts, HIV/AIDS not only becomes

a metaphor for social marginalization and its worst effects, but also presents the very possibility of a social unity that can overcome the stigma resulting from society's own infection. These novels reveal the frustrations of a minority pushed to the edge of social existence, and they encourage solidarity and communication among and between groups. By recognizing community even simply among one marginal group can we begin to mold public attitudes into an all-inclusive society, free of infection, medically and metaphorically speaking.

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