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Beauty and The Beast: Homosexuality in Federico García Lorca's "Oda a Walt Whitman"

Can we condemn on the same grounds of bigotry by which we would a white, the black whose vocabulary includes the word "nigger"? Or the Jew who jokes of his overbearing mother or penny-pinching father? Certainly, the argument has been made that though the "crime"—i.e., the perpetuation of denigrating stereotypes within a society—may be the same, the "criminals" are not. Just as, on the one hand, the culprit is acting upon a culturally instilled sense of superiority, motive, on the other, stems from socially derived feelings of inferiority, and may be characterized by a complex, even contradictory, combination of the desire for social acceptance and an attempt at self-defense. In other words, self-degradation, as mimicry of bigots, becomes a means by which one ingratiates oneself to them, or tries to undermine the effects of their prejudices. Keeping such considerations in mind, what conclusions might we draw, from the analysis of the speaker's portrayal of the homosexual, about the author of "Oda a Walt Whitman"?

To be sure, the poem abounds with such insinuations of perversity, from pederasty to sadomasochism, and taunting references to "maricas," as could justifiably offend any gay man. At the same time, its very *raison d'être* is to pay tribute to a homosexual poet. The best explanation for the speaker's such-seeming schizophrenia, with regards to sexuality, may be extracted from the biography of the author himself, Federico García Lorca. According to the traditional Spanish-Catholic society in which Lorca was raised, wherein the cultural emphasis upon *machismo* was as pervasive as the religious one upon procreation, homosexuality was not simply deviation—it was sin. Therefore, it seems certain that any conscious acknowledgment of such tendencies in himself would have been accompanied by an excruciating inner conflict, as would manifest itself in the speaker's violent ambivalence towards gays. But once behind the mask of the persona, Lorca would have felt relatively free to explore the issue from all sides—as the poem's constant comparisons and con-

trasts of the homosexual and heterosexual, in relation to other concerns which presented themselves in Lorca's life and in his poetry, seem to attest. These other concerns include his views on the city as compared to the country, the spirit of the poet, the significance of dreams versus reality, and religious issues such as morality and immorality, mortality and immortality (often represented by the dichotomies of body and soul, heaven and earth). Through the parallels he draws between such concepts, we are able to see Lorca's determination to somehow reconcile the set of values and beliefs that had been instilled in him in his youth with that which he was forming independently, so as to be able to justify his sexuality to himself and to others. If, in that light, we find the poem's treatment of the homosexual undeservedly extreme, ranging from bitter condemnation to veritable idolatry, we must conclude that he was, after all, a mirror image for Lorca, embodying all Lorca expected from and doubted about himself.

Even as the poem begins, with a provocative look at the world of the traditional Western male, we get an indication of the speaker's repressed homosexuality. On the one hand, the opening portrayal of the virile male in action is clearly sexually appreciative, from the voyeuristic "los muchachos cantaban enseñaban sus cinturas" (l.2), to the highly suggestive list of objects typically associated with masculinity, both the tools of his patriarchal, industrialized world, and the fruits of his labor, the phallic hammer, and the olfactory and tactile sensuality of oil and leather, as well as the mention of what is considered man's greatest invention, the wheel, convey the potency with which the heterosexual is credited by the speaker (l.3). On the other hand, the latter's lack of identification with the former is illustrated by his inclination to regard such men as wanting in sensitivity, sexually and otherwise. For instance, his assertion that "ninguno se dormía [...ni] amaba la lengua azul de la playa" (ll.6-9) denies them the capabilities of such responsive souls as the dreamer and the poet, respectively. Rather, they display a highly logical, mechanical approach to the act of creation, such as the whole of Western civilization was founded upon, as with "los niños [que] dibujaban escaleras y perspectivas" (l.5). Indeed, given the fact that "ninguno quería ser río" (l.7), we may infer that their imaginative powers have been confined by the city, to the city—they can, for instance, employ their wheels for industrial purposes, as with the "poleas [que] rodarán para turbar el cielo" (l.21), but "ninguno buscaba helechos/ni la rueda amarilla del tamboril" (ll.18-19); they have not the romantic vision to transform it into an instrument (literally) of pleasure. We may in fact say that, as the creator of this unnatural world—i.e. the urban setting—the traditional male is its natural heir, to be identified with it in proportion to his estrangement from the natural world ("ninguno amaba las hojas grandes," "ninguno

buscaba los helechos," etc. [ll.8, 18]). Thus, as the narrator exposes the city as the seat of corruption, commercialization, materialism, and decay, so we begin to see the heterosexual as a product, so to speak, of his environment; it seems that the more he constructs, the more he self-destructs (take, for instance, the reference to "los muchachos [que] luchaban con la industria" [l.11]). Even his sexuality has been reduced to a commodity, as the image of the river faun (a mythological symbol for sexual potency) buying "la rosa de la circuncisión" (l.13) reveals: whether the fauns are actually being circumcised, or are simply purchasing the foreskins of others (presumably as "spare parts," either for themselves or to be sold on the market), the impression we are left with is one of selling oneself to the point of emasculation, even dehumanization. This is furthered by the image of the "manadas de bisontes empujadas por el viento," as the beasts, symbolizing the power of the male in the throes of lust (for which the wind is a standard metaphor), were well-known to be an endangered species (l.15).

In sum, that the speaker sees the entire civilization in apocalyptic decline is undeniable, as he reduces all of New York, with its "límite de agujas" and innumerable "ataúdes" (ll.22-23) to "Nueva York de cieno,/Nueva York de alambre y de muerte" (ll.24-25).

In the face of such doom, the news that help is on the way is sure to be well received. Thus, by timing his introduction of Walt Whitman to coincide with the image of New York slipping into its self-made quicksand ("cieno") he is clearly attempting to show him in the best light possible, conveying the extent to which the speaker idolizes the homosexual poet. Not only does its wording—that of three questions—essentially place Whitman in the role of superhero or even savior, by recalling either the suspense-building cue of the former ("It's a bird, It's a plane!") or the catechism; so do the reverent images it contains. For example, between the "ángel . . . oculto en la mejilla" of New York (l.26)—in the position, therefore, of a tongue—and the "voz perfecta," offering salvation as it sings "las verdades del trigo" (l.27), a picture of the poet as prophet, if not that of the Redeemer himself, begins to emerge. And that he could be a "sueño" to New York's "anémonas manchadas" suggests his exaltedness; as the flowers, whose shape suggests the sex organs of the female, and thus—in conjunction with "manchadas"—are metonymous for the non-virginal woman herself, we see him as the object of sexual fantasies which will never be fulfilled (suggesting his freedom from impurity even as it provides our first clue to his as yet undisclosed homosexuality [l.28]).

In answer to these questions, we receive a portrayal of Whitman which, in direct contrast to that of the city-dwellers, evokes a sense of all the beauty and timelessness we associate with the natural world—to

which the poet ideally belongs, poetic truths being bred of such qualities. Just as the very virility of the "man's man" was proving to be his weakness (a personal asset transformed into a financial one), so Whitman's apparent fragility appears to be a great strength, and his age an indication not of decrepitude, but of longevity, even immortality (as even the simple juxtaposition of the adjectives in the phrase "viejo hermoso" suggests [l.29]). With his "barba llena de mariposas" (l.30), he is "hermoso como la niebla" (l.34); such imagery conveys his oneness with nature, and therefore his vitality, its delicacy notwithstanding—just as, in his "muslos de Apolo virginal" (l.32), he embodies the classical agelessness of beauty.

As the latter image hints at reincarnation, it raises the notion that decay and death have no real place in this world. For instance, the speaker's reference to Whitman's "voz como una columna de ceniza" (l.33) implies a resurrection, a poetic structure composed of the very materials of death—whereas the fact that "gemías igual que un pájaro / con el sexo atravesado por una aguja" (ll.35-36) illustrates the transcendence of pain towards poetry. (Indeed, between the "bird" and the "ash," poetry itself may be viewed as the legendary phoenix.) Finally, any sense we get of Whitman's deterioration in the image of "tus hombros de pana gastados por la luna" (l.31) is, in light of the stanza's later description of its subject as "amante de los cuerpos bajo la burda tela" (l.39), actually an affirmation of his own potency.

The stanza is, in fact, replete with allusions to sexuality and the role it will play in separating Whitman from the other men depicted—for example, that he is an "enemigo del sátiro" (l.37) places him at odds with the heterosexual, who has already been connected to the "fauno." That his sex has been "atravesado por una aguja" also provides us with some clue as to the fact that he is markedly different sexually (indeed, the stigmatism is a clear indication of homosexuality). And the next stanza develops the issue of Whitman's sexuality even further, as it points to a desire in him to do away with the traditional heterosexual roles of patriarchal society, characterized by domination and submission, and to redefine them in the name of a unity that would extend beyond the physical into the spiritual. Amidst a landscape that has been dominated by man (even the mountains are man-made structures, built of "carbón, anuncios y ferrocarriles" [l.41]), we find Whitman dreaming of "dormir como un río" with his lover (l.42); considering that water is, as the life-giving force, often a symbol for the female sex, it seems that Whitman is expressing a willingness to adopt feminine qualities, so as to prevent such an imbalance of sexual power. That we are not to equate this, however, with acceptance of a submissive role, is made clear by the use of the asexual term "camarada"; the emphasis, instead, is on equality, on the per-

fect harmony which one expects to find within the natural world. In addition, as the line reminds us that “ninguno [de los heterosexuales] quería ser río”(1.7), we may now see Whitman as the transcendental figure to whom they were apparently being compared, which places him even more firmly in opposition to all that they stand for. We thus begin to see the different worlds for which these men are made as being contingent upon their sexuality.

Proof is not, however, established until the next stanza. That the speaker would refer to him in such intimate terms as “hermosura viril” (1.40) and the aforementioned “viejo hermoso” supports our as yet unproven theory that the speaker himself is homosexual. Finally, by calling Whitman “macho,” he means to separate once and for all the “men” from the “boys”—as he has consistently used the term “muchachos” when referring to the heterosexual. In other words, the speaker imagines that Whitman’s very lack of *machismo*, and his willingness to “become the other,” to attempt to infuse his own spirit with aspects of the feminine (as with the “river”) in order to embody the unity and harmony which the natural world, epitomized by the Garden of Eden, symbolizes—that these in themselves make him an “Adán de sangre” (1.45), more manly than the heterosexuals will ever be, since their associations with the physical world mean their manhood is doomed to extinction, while Whitman’s with the spiritual guarantees his everlasting life.

Having presented Whitman’s world as so appealing, and the other as so appalling, that few readers could help but begrudge the American poet his implied sexual preference, the speaker finally dares to approach the topic of homosexuality explicitly, by introducing to us the “maricas” (1.52), and defiantly declaring, “¡También ése!” (1.53). That Whitman and the “marica” in fact have very little in common is immediately apparent in the imagery, containing as it does many of the negative stereotypes upheld by the general population. “Maricas,” as the speaker defines them, are those homosexuals who assert themselves as such even within the domain of the heterosexual, the urban setting. The significance of this for the entire poem lies in our ability to recognize the associations the speaker has set up in his own mind—some of which we have already seen—between sexuality and its various roles, both ideal and actual, and society as it affects and is affected by those roles, in order to determine the meaning of sexuality within a given context. According to our speaker, within the urban—by definition, unnatural—setting, as the dominion of the traditional—by definition, heterosexual—male who created it, heterosexuality is the only natural lifestyle; homosexuality is, therefore, an unnatural one, an aberration. It stands to reason, then, that within a “natural” setting, homosexuality would be the rule rather than the exception. As the urban world is one characterized by change,

which, for its human element, manifests itself in the life and death cycle, heterosexuality makes sense, as does emphasis upon the physical, the body, by which he participates in the cycle. By contrast, the elements of nature are regarded as timeless, eternal; the soul thus presides as that which, in man, is likewise everlasting.

Unfortunately, since Western man has, as the speaker sees it, confined himself, at least for the time being, to living within civilization, the homosexual finds himself in a painful situation. He may continue to be actively gay, disrupting the "natural" order of things as defined by those with the power to do so, in which case he inevitably brings destruction upon himself and others. Or he may resign himself to sexual unfulfillment, escaping the suffering he endures at the physical level through the spiritual, through his dreams—testament to his sensitivity, patience, and active imagination. As he is thus put in the position of the martyr on the one hand, the dreamer/poet on the other, we may see how the homosexual could quickly be "promoted" to prophet or even savior, just as the speaker has done with Whitman. And it is in this way, by finding an exception to a rule he does not otherwise dispute, that the speaker hopes to be able to justify homosexuality without risk of estrangement from those who wrote it, nor their world, in which he lives.

With these concepts in mind, we may return to the poem to determine his success in this regard. For instance, the utter revulsion he purports to feel for the "maricas" manifests itself in the fact that they are not simply contributors to the filth and decay of their world, as are the heterosexuals; they embody it. "[A]grupados en los bares" (l.48) and "saliendo en racimos de las alcantarillas" (l.49), they appear as swarms of insects, infesting the city. That they are, in fact, pests, who make something dirty out of that which was to remain pure, is confirmed as they "se despeñan / sobre tu barba [la de Whitman] luminosa y casta" (ll.53-54)—an image which further serves to exonerate the Whitmanesque homosexual just as it implicates the "marica," not only because the "chasteness" of the beard indicates the bard's sexual purity, but also as its "luminousness" hints at the old adage, "cleanliness is next to godliness."

In fact, according to the speaker, the "maricas" have more in common with the heterosexual than they do with those of Whitman's ilk, even in terms of their sexuality, characterized as it is not by spiritual unity but by physical lust. For instance, the notion of being driven by lust, seen in regards to the heterosexuals in the image of the herd of bison, is revived as we find our urban gays "temblando entre las piernas de los chauffeurs" (l.50). Choosing to live by the body rather than the soul ensures, as we saw with the heterosexual, eventual collapse; here, the verb alone signifies their weakness. It also suggests that they have confined themselves, unlike Whitman, to the place of the woman, as a result of

disclosing their sexuality to the heterosexual, patriarchal society; they are typecast into her traditional submissive role, losing the freedom to spiritually gender-blend they would have within the natural world. Conceivably, their acceptance of such unnatural sexual roles would correspond to a willingness to engage in unnatural sexual acts—i.e. perversions, such as sadomasochism, as they make available their flesh “*para fusta, / bota o mordisco de los domadores*” (ll.59-60). Even imagery which depicts them as animals appears to contradict all that the natural world ideally stands for, as with the insects. For instance, as “*muchedumbres de gritos y ademanos*” (l.56), they are the poet’s nemeses, being either cacophonous or silent. Their being “*como los gatos*” (l.57) has imagistic implications ranging from the domesticated animal, who is stripped of his nature (to be cast into a submissive role, no less), to the alley cat, who embodies all the filthiness and seediness of the city streets, to, in light of the reference to “*domadores*,” a lion, reduced from “*king of the jungle*” to whimpering slave to man, within the concrete jungle. Meanwhile, the simile’s counterpart, “*como las serpientes*” (l.57), forces us to recall the animal that brought about the fall, that caused Adam’s ejection from the garden of Eden (with which Whitman’s situation is to be equated, just as the two men have been). The message is clear that the “*marica*” is to blame for any prejudice directed towards the homosexual, as first conveyed by the vermin inhabiting Whitman’s beard.

Just what such clues add up to is finally relayed in the next stanza, as “*[d]edos teñidos/[que] apuntan a la orilla de tu sueño [el de Whitman]*” (ll.61-62). As the image coincides with that of “*el amigo*” who “*come tu manzana / con un leve sabor de gasolina*” (ll.63-64), we see the speaker attempting to revise the garden of Eden myth to the homosexual’s advantage: having already cast Whitman in the role of Adam, and the “*marica*” in that of the snake, he now reintroduces the “*camarada*,” Whitman’s ideal homosexual partner, in the word “*amigo*”—as a substitute for Eve, the implication being that God’s original intention for man was homosexuality. This pure homosexual has his innocence compromised by the “*marica*” on two counts: not only is “*Eve*” seduced into eating the tainted apple, but the very fingers of guilt for the seduction point in accusation at “*Adam*.” Confirmation of his fall from grace comes from the reference to “*el sol [que] canta por los ombligos / de los muchachos que juegan bajo los puentes*” (ll.65-66), in which the “*boys*” (i.e. heterosexuals, as previously determined) have taken his place in the sun; in addition, the appearance of the navel injects an element of eroticism into an already appealing image, so that further accusations—in this case, of pederasty—are just asking to be made.

As if the speaker were thus all the more determined to prove his idol’s total innocence, his manner of expression becomes increasingly emphatic

as well as graphic. In terms of the aforementioned crime, he absolves Whitman of guilt by swearing that he wasn't looking for "el pantano oscuro donde sumergen a los niños" (l.68), as the latter's dream of the river is turned into a nightmare. To show his belief that Whitman himself would have denied any affiliation with the stereotypical homosexual, the speaker asserts that he wasn't looking for "los ojos arañados" (l.67); considering the earlier description of the "maricas" as being "turbios de lágrimas" (l.59), we may take this to mean that Whitman would not have attempted to make eye contact with them, let alone engage in their activities. Finally, the speaker offers an extremely gory interpretation of the sexual intercourse of the "maricas": "las curvas heridas como panza de sapo / que llevan los maricas en coches y en terrazas / mientras la luna los azota" (ll.70-72). In the horrifying realization that the "curvas" are a gruesome metaphor for buttocks, Whitman's own slightly masochistic desire to obtain "un pequeño dolor de ignorante leopardo" through sex (l.44) seems by comparison perfectly acceptable, or at least forgivable. At the same time, the view offered of a sadistic moon reminds us of an earlier image of Whitman's shoulders as frayed; it's as if the moon, like the heterosexual majority, is mistaking Whitman for one of the "maricas," and punishing him for their sins. Such a notion insists upon the martyrdom of him whose overall good intentions are utterly misunderstood by his peers—in other words, the speaker seems to be casting him as something of a Jesus figure.

By the same token, the speaker's recollection of just what Whitman was up to while others were practicing pederasty and sadomasochism—"buscabas un desnudo que fuera como un río" (l.73)—essentially provides the defendant with an alibi. The detailed account which follows functions not only as supporting evidence, but also an explanation of his true actions; that is, it serves as a defense of Whitman's vision of sex between gays as a merging of the masculine and the feminine, whereby issues of gender and procreation are of little importance in comparison with recapturing a pre-fall harmony and unity. In his hopes to find "toro y sueño que junte la rueda con el alga" (l.74), for example, we have the juxtaposition of a decidedly masculine figure of potency (the bull), with the "dream," already known to us as the femininity-laden river. The union of these with two objects related unequivocally to neither sex (for instance, the wheel's shape associates it with the female, its origins with the male) communicates the cooperative spirit Whitman sought in relation to sex. The extent of his commitment to such a vision is confirmed by the sacrificial aspects of his ideas about intercourse (as distinguished, by the absence of lust, from the sadomasochistic). For it is "en las llamas de tu ecuador oculto" (l.76)—at once that part of the anatomy that is penetrated in homosexual copulation, and his soul, wherein all of man-

kind is equal, where the two halves of the world (the hemispheres of male and female, if you will) meet—the “padre de tu agonía” and the “cama-
lia de tu muerte” (l.75) come together, sexually and spiritually speaking. Yet as their groans of ecstasy signal the achievement of Whitman’s goal—to unite the masculine and feminine within himself—it also signifies that he has sacrificed himself, in the unformed form of future offspring, for the sake of his ideals; hence his relationships with “agony” and “death,” as well as with the martyr.

Of course, the very idea of engaging in sex for anything other than reproductive purposes, even when the intentions are as idealistic as Whitman’s, raises the main objections to homosexuality, as a matter of morals. Nonetheless, having done his best to appease his opposition by conceding to its offensiveness when linked to lust, the speaker proceeds to question the moral logic of procreation as motive as well. By defining the world as “agonía, agonía” (l.82), and insisting that “la vida no es noble, ni buena, ni sagrada” (l.87), he nips in the bud any counterargument to the directly preceding assertion that “es justo que el hombre no busque su deleite / en la selva de sangre de la mañana próxima” (ll.77-78). A violent image which serves both as a grisly reference to female sexual anatomy, and an apocalyptic vision of the decline of civilization, it basically asks us to reconsider heterosexuality by making the thought of bringing a child into the world more horrifying than joyous. Between this dire prediction for “la mañana próxima” and the renewed emphasis upon the rapid decay of humanity within present-day society—from the “pequeños moribundos iluminados” (l.86) which serve as bribes for prostitutes to the “muertos [que] se descomponen bajo el reloj de las ciudades” (l.84)—we see that time is running out for the urban dweller, and that hell on earth is imminent if not arrived. This seems especially true when the speaker offers the comparative view of the sky as having “playas donde evitar la vida” (l.79), and therefore neither birth nor death is cause for concern—in other words, he is locating us in heaven; and, as its “playas” recall the “orilla” of Whitman’s dream world, we are given yet another reason to equate the two places. In this light, the speaker’s opinion that “hay cuerpos que no deben repetirse en la aurora” (l.80; recalling “la selva de sangre de la mañana próxima”), gives us an added sense of the Whitmanesque homosexual as singularly beautiful, the epitome of goodness, who does not deserve to bear the suffering he necessarily encounters in the hostile environment to which he is presently confined. (Of course, we may also interpret the line as proof of the speaker’s failure to convince himself of the rectitude of homosexuality, an expression of the self-abnegation often part of the minority individual’s psychological make-up; its ambiguity is a sure sign of the ambivalence to which the speaker never admits but which underlies the entire poem.)

A final defense of homosexuality as embodied by Whitman begins with the speaker's statement that "[p]uede el hombre, si quiere, conducir su deseo / por vena de coral o celeste desnudo" (ll. 88-89). For by simply rewording the vague phrase "si quiere" to state "on the condition that he dreams," we see that the speaker is confining such abilities to the Whitmanesque homosexual who in the narrator's construct, we may remember, is the only sexual type whose circumstances automatically equate him with the dreamer and the poet. Implicit is the Freudian concept of sublimation in which energy generated by lust is redirected towards the performance of good deeds and/or artistic endeavors; in this case, we see it being used to facilitate a union with nature and with the spiritual. Although "[m]añana los amores serán rocas" (l.90)—i.e. the body will petrify, human beings will perish—in time (or perhaps in no time), a heavenly body is everlasting, and the man who focuses his desire upon it is essentially committing himself to the eternal. Furthermore, we might attribute to one who channels his bodily impulses through something so unexpected as a vein of coral an artist's keen imagination, and as the age-old notion that one achieves immortality through one's works applies here, we see, once again, the homosexual as a potentially superior being, whose physical handicap, so to speak, is mitigated by a spiritual freedom, by which he is able to live, love and create to his heart's content.

And, in that light, what finally becomes indisputable is that, for all of the speaker's genuine admiration of Whitman, he has, in defending the poet so fiercely, an ulterior motive—a basic need to explain himself, to himself, and to the world that created that need in him in the first place. For just as he is apparently uncomfortable with identifying himself as a homosexual, the line "[p]or eso no levanto mi voz, viejo Walt Whitman" against certain homosexuals (ll. 92-93)—also suggests his discomfort with the role of poet, in his apparent need to defend even his defense.

And the self-reflective elements of the poem do not end there. Because Whitman's world—essentially heaven—has not actually been attainable on earth since the Garden of Eden, those homosexuals against whom our speaker's voice is not raised, and who presumably deserve our approval and/or pity, are listed as those who do not attempt to force their sexuality upon a world in which it is inappropriate—but rather, who either sublimate it (such as the budding actor who "se viste de novia / en la oscuridad del ropero" [ll. 95-96]) or who stoically resolve to "do as the Romans do" (and even "beben con asco el agua de la prostitución" [l.98]); in any case, that he is actually referring to himself is not to be denied. For instance, behind "el niño que escribe / nombre de niña en su almohada" (ll. 92-93) and "los hombres de mirada verde / que aman

al hombre y queman sus labios en silencio" (ll.99-100), we can see a poet who finds himself incapable of expressing his true feelings, especially where sexuality is concerned—just as, we realize, we have been seeing all along. As martyrdom is also implied in the endurance of loneliness each of the figures presents, we may conclude that the speaker is trying to emulate Whitman as he has portrayed him; in doing so, he is also aligning himself with the homosexual.

As a result, the vehemence with which he then returns to his attack on the "maricas" may be viewed as the last bit of resistance to acknowledgment of his gayness, and/or as insurance against any possible linkage of himself with the "marica"—in other words, as a form of appeal to himself and to his audience for acceptance. Once again, they are shown as embodying all of the negative qualities of the heterosexual world, in addition to the perversity qualified by their daring to expose a very delicate subject (no pun intended) to a world in which it does not inherently belong, one which will inevitably bring it to its proverbial knees. We might even characterize them as the living damned, between the filth and decay of their "carne tumefacta y pensamiento inmundo" (l.102), and the Dantean transformations they appear to have undergone, becoming "[m]adres de lodo" and "[a]rpías" as they continue to distort Whitman's quasi-hermaphroditic ideal into an unnatural identification (l.103) with the female, rather than the feminine, with the physical rather than the spiritual. Such images illustrate how they have made a travesty of the true spirit not only of man, but of woman as well, as they give birth to dirt (and therefore, paradoxically, to death, as we equate dirtiness with the declining city) in the one, and in the other, appear as the mythological epitome of the evil woman—whose inhumanity is also exhibited by grotesque rather than pleasant associations with the animal world (her body is that of a vulture's). Furthermore, whereas the heterosexuals stood in opposition to the dreamer/poet due to the circumstances of the moment (in which "ninguno se dormía"), the "maricas", lack of "sueño" rings of permanence, an implied aberrance by which they become our purist's "enemies." And if they are "[e]nemigos sin sueño del Amor" (ll.103-04), they are, by the speaker's own definition, enemies of the true homosexual—as is proven by their apparent rejection, in favor of lust, of the "[a]mor que reparte coronas de alegría" (l.104). Moreover, as such love is reiterated as heavenly (its "coronas" being metonymy for the kingdom of heaven), it follows that a parallel must be drawn between lust and hell, their respective opposites. Such thorough condemnation of the "maricas" supports the notion that, by appeasing the "moral majority" to the extent that they would be more receptive to the rest of his views, the speaker would eventually be able to bring about tolerance of Whitmanesque homosexuals, so that they could bring them-

selves down to earth, so to speak, granted a chance to merge the real world with their dream one, to discover heaven on earth. At any rate, the speaker's determination is evident by the increasing fervor, an almost frenzied self-righteousness, with which he continues his damnation, the images becoming more and more explicit, the references more and more specific. For instance, recalling the earlier insinuation that the "maricas" were making false accusations of pederasty against Whitman, the next stanza may be read as a vengeful attempt to point out the true culprits. Having described the crime in horrifying detail—in which the "gotas de sucia muerte con amargo veneno" given to the omnipresent "muchachos" (l.106) represent their literally and morally tainted semen—he goes on to reveal not only the names, but the whereabouts, of the criminals, that none may escape punishment ("Faeries de Norteamérica, / Pájaros de La Habana," etc. [ll. 108-09]). That his voice will "siempre" (l.107) be raised against these individuals is an effort to gain our trust and lend his accusations credibility, the adverb serving as a reminder of the constancy of poetic truths.

Indeed, his desperate need to prove himself a highly moral being (despite or because of his sexuality), becomes apparent as his denunciations acquire a certain urgency; for instance, he does away with any hint of ambiguity created by the earlier phrase "[e]nemigos sin sueño del Amor" (ll.103-04) in its scathing revision "asesinos de palomas" (l.116), the seriousness of which is immediate. Similarly, as "[e]sclavos de la mujer" and "[p]erras de sus tocadores" (l.117), their perversity, their masochism, such as the narrator had so far dealt with only metaphorically, is now expressed in no uncertain terms.

And having already conveyed the solitude surrounding the sexual life of the "decent" homosexual (as might create in him the respect for intimacy ideal in lovemaking), the speaker contrasts it with the "maricas'" utter lack of discretion, presumably a result of their lustfulness, that causes them to be "[a]biertos en las plazas con fiebre de abanico" (l.118; again, they are cast in submissive female roles, the fan being metonymous for the *señorita*). This rather coarse allusion to copulation is superseded by another, more sinister one: as "cicuta" recalls their priapically-administered poison, their being "emboscados en yertos paisajes de cicuta" (l.119) suggests they are being given a dose of their own medicine, so to speak, bringing upon themselves the untimely demise of body and soul.

Such pitifulness culminates in the image of "[l]a muerte / mana de vuestros ojos" (ll.120-21). For, in the face of the Grim Reaper, the possibility of repentance, implicit in the allusion to crying, no longer exists. Not only does the fact that the essential element of life, water, has been converted to death in their tears, verify their doom; so do the speaker's

suggestions for punishment: “¡No haya cuartel!” he assures us (l.123) adding that “las puertas de la bacanal” should be closed to them (l.126).

That those in charge of making sure the “maricas’ ” party—or orgy, as the case may be—is indeed over, are homosexuals is clear; just as his ambivalence throughout the poem earns the speaker a place among “los confundidos,” and his love for Whitman among the “suplicantes,” so too does Whitman’s character, stainlessly as it is portrayed, include him with “los puros, / los clásicos, los señalados” who guard the doors (ll.124-25; as proof, the references to his beard, to Apollo, and to “Adam” come to mind). In all this, we see how the speaker has now fully accepted the role of modern-day prophet (and therefore, however roundaboutly, of the homosexual) hinted at all along, both in his employment of hellfire rhetoric, and in his predictions of Biblical proportions; of Judgment Day, for his antagonists; of the Second Coming, in relation to his protagonist.

So it is that the speaker entreats his object of worship to keep dreaming, to retain sight of his utopia even as he remains “a orillas del Hudson” (l.127). In response, we find Whitman calling for soft clay or snow—as the enjambment allows the line “[a]rcilla blanda o nieve, tu lengua está llamando” to be read (l.129)—as opposed to the mire of the city, advocating once again a return to nature, where the homosexual may live in peace. As the actual object of the verb appears on the next line, the image is revised so that Whitman’s tongue is actually composed of clay and snow, in yet another reminder of the spiritual symbiosis between the poet (the metonymous “tongue”) and the natural world. And what it now calls for are “camaradas que velen tu gacela sin cuerpo” (l.130)—an ultimate expression of Whitman’s transcendence. Firstly, the most nimble and graceful of animals represents the freedom of his soul (as well as the feminine spirit the poet embodies, as opposed to the masculine brute strength of the earlier lions and bison). Secondly, the “camaradas,” already identified as his lovers, appear here as guardian angels, so that their sexuality is again shown to be alien to lust, characterized instead by a spiritual intimacy. Finally, the import of the vigil as a whole lies in the expectation that Whitman will wake up to the dream come true, a notion clearly paralleling that of Christ’s Second Coming. Between the immaculate Whitman and his angelic comrades, not to mention our pious speaker, that the homosexual is to be seen as a superior individual is now certain.

As reality momentarily disrupts the speaker’s reveries, he concedes the chances for attaining his utopia are decreasing in proportion to urban growth, for “[u]na danza de muros agita las praderas” (l.132), and the river, so vital to Whitman’s world, is replaced by the “máquinas y llanto” in which “América se anega” (l.133). Nonetheless, he is unwill-

ing to give up hope, either as a poet or as a homosexual. Indeed, as the poem ends with the announcement of "la llegada del reino de la espiga" (l.137), we see that, in some aspects, Whitman's—and therefore, the speaker's—dream *has* come true. The "niño negro" who makes the above announcement to the "blancos del oro" (l.136) as both a messenger and a minority—the innocent target of much prejudice—surely symbolizes our speaker, as he informed us of Whitman's presence with so much reverence. As the "reino de la espiga" becomes, in that case, Whitman's domain, we see, once again, the homosexual as Jesus—the word "reino," in combination with the return to the "pradera" via the word "espiga," denotes heaven on earth, the Second Coming, the dream come true—proof, once and for all, of our speaker's prophetic insight. In the end, we see that the speaker, having finally asserted himself as poet, has, for all intents and purposes, admitted to his own homosexuality. As we ourselves have accepted him as such, just by being a willing audience, we may conclude that, in time, society as a whole may grant the homosexual the chance to let the stigmata of the outcast heal, and to use the energy formerly expended either in repression, or in defiance of his oppression, to make positive, valuable contributions to society without fear of reproof.

The problem remains that our speaker's hard-won acceptance of himself seems to come only at the expense of many other homosexuals, who remain objects of ostracism within the poem. True, religious dogma such as had had very real impact on Lorca, who is clearly visible through the thin disguise of the speaker, explains it to some degree. But possibilities other than a genuine conviction of the inferiority of homosexuals do present themselves. For instance, it has oft been noted that, for individuals with inferiority complexes, building self-esteem is contingent upon knocking others down. The attendant logic is as follows: by pointing out the faults in others, one detracts attention from one's own; the worse one is able to portray another, the better one will appear by comparison. In regards to the poem, our speaker designates the "marica" as a sinner and a pervert, that he himself may be seen as a man of morals, whose sexuality seems relatively normal. In other words, the unstated concern is with the self rather than with the other; indeed, the target of criticism is, for the critic's purposes, of secondary, if any, importance—in which case, charges against him of actual bigotry would not really apply.

Another conceivable motive for what might be considered verbal abuse, closely related to the aforementioned, is simple jealousy. It is essentially a matter of the woman with the crooked smile scribbling a moustache on the Mona Lisa: as one wants what one cannot have, one tries to make sure no one else can have it either. Surely, that the "maricas" obtain sexual fulfillment while our speaker remains celibate

might be cause for some disgruntlement on his part; the loving detail with which he paints the unflattering portrait of the "marica" in coitus seems to indicate a preoccupation with the subject based as much on curiosity, even voyeurism, as contempt; hence the desperate attempt to strip it of its appeal, for his own sake.

Finally, there is the possibility that, if our speaker is truly disgusted by the actions of his antagonists, it is only because he expects better from them; in other words, it is his belief in their superiority, rather than their inferiority, that fuels his attack. In that light, we may say he saw "maricas" as potential Walt Whitmans wasting away; considering his feelings for the American poet, we thus understand if not excuse the violence of his diatribe against them.

In the end, then, we may assure ourselves that, however seemingly to the contrary, Lorca bore no more animosity towards the homosexual than he bore towards himself, and the likelihood is that he would have had just as much towards those heterosexuals whose bigotry had influenced him in the first place, from church officials to schoolteachers. In that light, it seems clear that the lesson to be learned from "Oda a Walt Whitman" is one of tolerance and open-mindedness—for the individual you think you despise could turn out to be your closest ally, your greatest love.

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