On the Textualization of Sexuality and History in Hispanism

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Lorca

> [A] theoretical position that dismisses the history of materialities as a "progressivist modes-of-production narrative," historical agency itself as a "myth of origins," nations and states (all nations and all states) as irretrievably coercive, classes as simply discursive constructs, and political parties themselves as fundamentally contaminated with collectivist illusions of a stable subject position--a theoretical position of that kind, from which no poststructuralism worth the name can escape, is, in the most accurate sense of these words, repressive and bourgeois. *In Theory*, Aijaz Ahmad[1]

Aijaz Ahmad may not enjoy the support of many First World literary critics for his open denunciation of poststructuralism's complicity with bourgeois ideology, but he has elucidated, in a sorely needed way, the incompatibility between poststructuralism and Marxism. Indeed, it is interesting that Ahmad has incurred rath (not lucid critiques) from poststructuralists, postmodernists, and Cultural Studies enthusiasts. This I take to be a sign that Ahmad has argued persuasively and correctly that poststructuralism is shot through with holes that can only be filled with more doxa and retrenchment. In concert

with Ahmad my objective is to point up specifically some of the contradictions and shortcomings in Paul Julian Smith's *The Hispanic Body*, which I consider to be symptomatic of poststructuralism in its questioning of referentiality, science, meaning in language and social structures (class, gender, race).2 In this first part of this essay I critique and contest his poststructuralist conceptions of referentiality, which create insuperable barriers in his critical enterprise. These philosophical problems further hamper Smith's attempt to critically evaluate the validity of theories of (homo or hetero)sexuality. In the second half of this essay--following the work of philosophers of realism--I suggest another way of conceiving of referentiality, which offers a more consistent yet fallibilist, or open-ended, account of human knowledge. Realist theories of philosophy are thus offered as counterpoints to poststructuralism--particularly to the works of Lacan and Foucault. Lastly, since Smith himself examines Federico Garcia Lorca's representations of homosexuality, I then turn to *Poeta en Nueva York* to show that García Lorca's own theory and his depiction of (homo)sexuality go beyond the confines set up by Smith's interpretation of García Lorca's posthumous play *El público*. For the Spanish playwright and poet (homo and hetero)sexual liberation is intricately tied to structural problems under capitalism. Consequently, any radical change in sexual and gender relations indispensibly leads to a critique and transformation of the class, gender and race structures of capitalist society. García Lorca's position vis-à-vis sexuality then is more advanced and suggestive than the poststructuralist stance defended by Paul Julian Smith.

As *The Body Hispanic* demonstrates very well, poststructuralist and postmodernist theories tend to reduce subjectivity to the body. With reason and objectivity "under erasure," or "problematized," taking control of the body--in as much as even this is possible under poststructuralism--becomes a type of social and personal "resistance." The question is how one arrives at the postulation of the natural flows of the body and why one needs to dispense with rationality. Positing this position rests on perceiving reason and science to be impotent when it comes to analyzing subjectivity because science is generally deemed positivist. By implication, according to poststructuralism, all science is equally objectivist and hence disempowered when studying subjectivity. Smith states this very clearly: "There can be no scientific assessment of the world according to bodily criticism" (2). Faced with mind/body dualism, the poststructuralist chooses the body because reason has ostensibly been discredited (71). In place of science we find a series of psychoanalytical theories--Freudian, Lacanian, and Kristevan in nature--as well as the theory of Foucault.

Since "traditional" science and reason are declared ineligible, poststructuralist thinkers supplement the alleged lack of a theory of a subject in the hard and social sciences with psychoanalysis. But if science was rejected *tout court*, why import psychoanalysts into the scene--since they too purport to be scientists? Why would Smith invalidate the claims to science per se if he intended to rely on other scientific work? Why not simply call for an alternative science? Although there is nowhere an open discussion of this issue, it appears that Smith wants to critique biological determinist (or naturalist) arguments on sexuality and subjectivity; so psychoanalysis serves as the alternative critical tool with which to "disarm" these "traditional" theories. What Smith correctly objects to is the

tendency of essentialists to use biology to advance ahistorical positions on heterosexuality, homosexuality, and bisexuality. As Jeffrey Weeks shows in his study of nineteenth century English laws and Foucault in his history of sexuality in France, Smith's skepticism is not unfounded.3 Of course, this shouldn't imply that biology doesn't play a fundamental role in our sexual dispositions.

But the question still remains: what virtues does psychoanalysis have that science is left wanting? To begin with, Freud, by Smith's account, "consistently resists the temptation to ascribe any essential identity or unchanging characteristics to deviants, to women, or indeed, to men. Thus he states that 'inversion' (homosexuality) is neither innate nor degenerate, and that physiological hermaphroditism is not the cause of psychological disturbance" (5). Furthermore, as Smith notes, "Freud rejects the claim that homosexuality can be defined as a feminine brain in the masculine body on the grounds that a brain has no gender" (6). As one might expect Smith does not accept Freudian theory wholesale. For instance, he critiques Freud's contention that little girls' sexuality is masculine in character. Nonetheless, the overall framework of Freudian metapsychology proves to be, for Smith, satisfying in its evaluation of sexuality and subjectivity.

Why psychoanalysis becomes a privileged and valid method in literary and cultural studies in an age of cognitive and neural science is a matter of speculation at the moment. My guess is that, like literary criticism, psychoanalysis furnishes critics with accessible studies on narratives of the subject. Both domains, in other words, focus on the nexus between discourse and subjectivity, with psychoanalysis providing the scientific credentials (albeit dated) which literary or cultural studies cannot furnish. According to poststructuralist accounts, historians and scientists have been less apt to acquiesce to developments in discourse theory, so the hard and social sciences are not commonly employed in the analysis of narrative and subjectivity. It is worth bearing in mind that, in accepting psychoanalysis' explanatory model, poststructuralists rely on a nineteenth-century science that pales in comparison to developments in cognitive science in the late twentieth century.

Without delving into the specific details of Freudianism, for which there is no space here, it might be helpful to examine the due that Paul Julian Smith's acceptance of psychoanalysis and poststructuralism must pay in his own study on literature and the subject.4 As we underlined above, he attempts to avoid falling into the dilemmas of biological determinist arguments ("the level of genital acts") and essentialist discussions of sexuality (what he calls the "universal ideal" [8]). Yet one of the concessions Smith must make is to question the legitimacy of knowledge. To be self-critical or self-reflexive--in Pierre Bourdieu's sense of the term--in relation to one's discipline is a matter of singular importance. However, in the case of Foucault, reason itself becomes the equivalent of domination so that the very ground on which one might formulate a counterargument to biological determinism and essentialism is cut out from under him. In agreeing with Foucault's stance--to which we will return below--or with Deleuze's observations about the "tyranny of knowledge," Smith, like the poststructuralists, can only offer an "intersubjective" notion of truth and reason. Consequently, I would argue that he ends up advocating relativism. Rejecting science and accepting poststructuralist

stances on referentiality invade his attempt to create a convincing theory of subjectivity. From Smith's vantage point one cannot argue persuasively that any given explanation for a specific set of phenomena is any better than another without resorting to moral or ethical appeal. And even within the boundaries of ethics it would be difficult to argue in favor of this or that premise given the philosophical foundation that has been laid. These are the consequences, for example, of Smith's conclusion regarding sexuality: "each age considers its articulation of sexuality to be natural and each is deluded" (9). The framework that would allow one to distinguish ontologically and historically between one explanatory model and another becomes muddled in truth-as-illusion. Since reason and science are suspect they cannot possibly lead poststructuralism to a coherent notion of societal progress (119). While social formations (gender, class, race, sexuality) may be present in poststructuralist works, they are never "fixed" or "monist"; instead they are perceived as undecidable or precarious categories of social relations. And the root of this deconstruction of sociological and economic terms is discourse.

This explains literary critics' overwhelming interest in a figure like Jacques Lacan. For he manages to critique Freudian psychoanalysis and establish a case for a discourse theory of the subject. According to left-wing critics the appeal of Lacanian theory is that it provides a theory of the subject that Marxism ostensibly lacks. Elsewhere I have expressed my reservations about the validity of this claim.[5] While it is true that Marx and Engels never dedicated any essays to this topic, from reading their works one does come away with a sense of what is entailed in mapping out a materialist notion of subjectivity. But even if one entertains the argument to be true, there are still the questions as to why the latest developments in cognitive science, neural science and linguistics are not consulted and whether Lacanian psychoanalysis and materialism are philosophically compatible. I would suggest that in effect there is an epistemological and ontological gulf separating these two systems of thought.

We can see clearly by turning to Smith's chapter on Galdós, Valera and Lacan. It is only on the most abstract level that Smith is able to locate some affinities between Lacanian thought and Marxism. "Marxist alienation," he argues, "might be compared to Lacanian castration: the process by which people become estranged from themselves through enforced submission to an economic order beyond their own control seems similar to that by which subjects gain access to language and society only at the cost of psychic integrity" (71). But, as Smith himself later concedes, materialist and psychoanalytic views of the subject hinge on radically different suppositions. Marxism, Smith admits, necessarily reverts back to the "existence of science (itself) and a material base (the concrete)" whereas Lacanian thought "rejects any claim to authoritative knowledge, and has little use for the 'real' (the irreducible and inaccessible substance outside representation)" (72). If the claims are correct--and according to my readings of Lacan and Marx they are--some interesting conclusions follow. Lacanian psychoanalysis, following Smith's interpretation of it is *not* a science and is *not* drawn to an engagement with the "real." Given this definition, which is reinforced by Lacan's notion of *méconaissance,* what we are dealing with is an idealist system of thought.[6] To deny the Lacanian "real" is, in essence, to refuse referential access and detachment. On the one hand, this implies that human beings cannot approximate in knowledge the dynamics of

reality. On the other hand, this position seems to ignore the existence of laws of the universe which have an impact on our daily life even though we may not (yet) be aware of them.

By contrast, from the point of view of realist philosophy (and Marxism) events can happen without our being fully conscious of them, and these occurrences may be intransitive, that is, they may not need human beings in order to occur. Furthermore, in contrast with Smith's Lacanianism, realist philosophy argues that it is the job of science--understood here as "*scientia*" (human knowledge)--to identify and describe a phenomenon, to postulate a hypothesis that would explain the effect of the phenomenon, and to attempt to show the existence and causal powers of the phenomenon (through experimentation). But science thus conceived is necessarily fallibilist, or open-ended: it is quite possible that a hypothesis can be disproven by experimentation. So a realist conception of science, without conceding ground to judgmental relativism, does not claim to be a science of "authoritative knowledge," if by that Smith means an absolutist and non-fallibilist notion of science (72). Taking the example of human sexuality, realist philosophy should lead us to make more approximately accurate assumptions that depend on biological and sociological hypotheses about the factors which shape human conceptions of homosexuality, heterosexuality, bisexuality, and so on. Errors will not only be made, but they are expected as part of the realist process of studying the situation.7

According to Lacanian literary critics, science and Marxism also uphold naiveté with respect to language. Poststructuralists argue that both science in general and Marxism in particular are unable to see in language anything other than a "pure transparency"--as Smith puts it--whereas poststructuralists have allegedly shown that the signifier produces a plethora of signifieds which can never really be arrested in a "fixed" meaning. So language, according to poststructuralists, like meaning itself, is not only unstable, but seems virtually impossible. In the case of Lacanian theory once the human subject has gone beyond the "mirror stage"--beyond her pre-conscious state of being--she is given a rude awakening in the world and in language as she becomes conscious of herself. The child then takes leave of the "imaginary" realm and joins the realm of language and society--the "symbolic." After this point we are nothing but a fragmentary self whose full union or actual self-identity will never take place (this is *méconnaissance*).8 Thus Lacan extends his skepticism from reason to discourse.

But if Lacanianism stakes out its claims in literary theory based on a critique of science and discourse, how does it establish its legitimacy? The answer to this question lies in how the opposition is portrayed. In literary appropriations of Lacan's thought, as we noted in Smith's characterization of Marxism, the alternative to psychoanalytic discourse theory is naive reflectionism. In the case of language it is what Deleuze and Guattari term the "despotic signifier," which attempts to colonize and subjugate the signifieds.9 The end result, quite frankly, is that the level of philosophical and aesthetic debate gets lowered several notches. One can imagine the young literary critic, fresh out of graduate school, opting inevitably for psychoanalytical theory in the face of naive reflection theory. Who in his right mind would, after all, equate reality with appearance?

Yet discussions of literary analyses often hinge precisely on this facile association. Again Smith's work is exemplary in this sense:

> The ceaseless movement of linguistic structure (metaphor and metonymy) precludes the achievement of any definitive or self-sufficient meaning. But if it is the letter (the material specificity of language) which produces "the effect of truth" then there can be no possibility of authentic self knowledge, no possibility of reaching what Freud calls the "Kemel" or "essence" (Kem) of our being. Identity, like meaning, is thus ever precarious. Our (spurious) sense of self is a compromise formation between ego and Other. In other words, identity is necessarily intersubjective (91).

The conclusions which Smith reaches in his analysis of Lacan's "L'instance de la lettre" seem so obvious as to merit no further commentary. How could one possibly argue that meaning, like self-knowledge, is always definite? Yet this is the position we are seemingly obliged to take if we are to take issue with Lacan's theory. And again, if Marxism is cast in the role of naive reflectionism, it can offer no possible alternative to Lacanian psychoanalysis. This of course may be a description of mechanical Marxism, but it has little to do with Marx's own work. Smith's remarks and his acceptance of Lacanian thought may indicate that the dialectical method is still an underexplored area of research in Euramerican universities. While convinced of the virtues of poststructuralism, Smith has also apparently been persuaded by critiques of materialism--however oblique they may be. The lesson seems to be that there are some interesting insights in materialism, but, as in the case with most "totalizing" theories, it has overextended itself. The dialectic, we are led to believe, is a static a priori consisting of thesis, antithesis, and synthesis and making scientific claims. Enter Lacanianism.

Before turning specifically to the issue of sexuality in *The Body Hispanic*, I would like to briefly propose a counterargument. *Pace* poststructuralist discursive constructions of Marxism, the dialectic suggests a much more complex and subtle treatment of epistemology, ontology, history, politics, and society. Dialectical thought, as Roy Bhaskar has concisely described it,

> in contrast to "reflective" (or analytical) thought, grasps conceptual forms in their systematic interconnections, not just their determinate differences, and conceives each development as the product of a previous less developed phase, whose necessary truth or fulfillment it is; so that there is always a tension, latent irony or incipient surprise between any form and what it is in the process of becoming.[10]

Notice here that the "process of becoming" in contrast to the Lacanian "ceaseless movement"--as Smith puts it--while fluid, leads to an approximate understanding of the diachronic and synchronic developments as a related, yet multifarious, totality. This definition of the dialectic, as the "pulse" and not the"Authentic" freedom of humankind--as Bhaskar eloquently argues in his *Dialectic: The Pulse of Freedom*--is a far cry from

the strawman found in the now canonical works of poststructuralism, and it should invite us to begin to reread Marx without the misreadings of, inter alia, the works of Foucault, Althusser, Lyotard, Kristeva, and Baudrillard.11 In its misreading of Marxism Paul Julian Smith's work is symptomatic of the poststructuralist moment.

Keeping this realist philosophy foundation in mind, one can then analyze specific social phenomena more adequately. The point that I would like to pursue, in contesting Smith's Foucauldian reading of *La casa de Bernarda Alba*, is the question of sexuality. In relying on Foucault's theory of sexuality in the chapter on García Lorca's well-known play, Smith inherits the philosophical problems that accompany Foucault's theory. Those fundamental slippages, found in his three volumes on the history of sexuality, are summed up in Peter Dews' *Logics of Disintegration*. Foucault tends to neglect class struggle as the motorforce of history, collapse history into discourse, essentially equate cognition with negative forms of power, and replace the dialectic with the category of difference.12

In his work on sexuality Foucault alleges that the State and science produce discourses in the hopes of regulating and classifying sexual behavior. In a Nietzschean tradition then science is cast in the positivist role of promoter of some impossible transhistorical objectivity and of the idea of linear progress. When represented in this way science does seem discredited. But while this depiction of science may be accurate as far biological determinism is concerned, does it necessarily apply to all science? If it does not, then why does Foucault not show empathy for and work--albeit self-critically--within the traditions of other scientific methods? His answer serves as a paradigm of poststructuralism: his "science" is discourse theory.

Foucault's work on sexuality then--and this is true of Smith's as well--focuses on the institutional discourses generated on the topic. Foucault states this very clearly in the first volume: "the history of what functioned in the nineteenth century as a specific field of truth-[sexuality] must first be written from the view point of a history of discourses."13 Nineteenth century society, according to Foucault, "put into operation an entire machinery for producing true discourses concerning it. Not only did it speak of sex and compel everyone to do so; it also set out to formulate the uniform truth of sex" (69). Science, the State, and the bourgeoisie are responsible for the production, deployment, and institutionalization of these discourses about sexuality. We are faced then with a vertical history of discourses on sexuality orchestrated by reason and power from on high. But once knowledge and science are attacked, they are not summarily replaced by a different (scientific) method, but rather virtually erased from the picture. This questionable stance, which we observed also in the case of Lacan, suggests that the pursuit of knowledge is implicated in power and that *reason per se* is the object of Foucault's critique:

> The West has managed not only, or not so much, to annex sex to a field of rationality, which would not be all that remarkable an achievement, seeing how accustomed we are to such "conquests" since the Greeks, but to bring

> us almost entirely--our bodies, our minds, our individuality, our history--under the sway of a logic concuspiscene and desire (78).

What we have here, in so many words, is Smith's "bodily criticism." Mind/body dualism is embraced as a way of counteracting the repressive discourse of the nineteenth, and, by implication, the twentieth century. Giving up science and rationality to the bourgeoisie and the State leaves the oppositional forces with no rational and conscious means of critiquing and debunking those hegemonic discourses and the political and economic apparatuses which are their cornerstones. If discourse, as Smith's summary of Foucault's position aptly puts it, "is not objective but strategic" (113), what is its truth value? How is any given discourse any more convincing than another? If philosophy too is a "theatre because it cannot engage directly with the real but can only mimic or reproduce differences," as Smith condenses Deleuze's stance, what is left? What remains is the "infinite" production of unregulated individual pleasures generated by the body and discourse analysis. The purported solution in both cases reverts back to the premises of the argument. Following the logic here we find that since there is no mediation, there is pure production of discourse or pleasure. But the paradox of Foucault's discourse theory is this: while he attacks traditional historicism and science for their "naive realism"--a poststructuralist commonplace--he too takes discourse to be unmediated reality because socio-historical events and their structural formations appear as discursive elements in his own discourse. This metadiscursive method, while it obviously does not completely circumvent the referent, effectively accepts unmediated reality as a given. In other words, by homing in on the production and dispersal of discourses and not conducting engaging and dialectical historical research, Foucault's work--as well as Smith's--suggests that philosophical questions regarding the referent are either resolved--in which case he is a "naive realist" who believes in "blockism"--or he believes that epistemological and ontological problems can only be worked out in discourse--in which case he is an idealist.[14] My impression is that Foucault's work oscillates between these two positions. Discourse theory, then, grounded in a dated Saussurian not Chomskian linguistics, in its poststructuralist variation, legitimates itself by negating and supplanting science.

Because Smith's conception of (homo)sexuality is undergirded by Foucauldian thought, he frequently brings interesting questions to the fore only to opt for a poststructuralist differal of the plausible answers. Thus, in referring to García Lorca's *La casa de Bernarda Alba*, Smith's interesting question about the place for "minority" discourse in a patriarchal and heterosexual culture, while provocative because of its radical potential, merely gets postponed. This query could lead to an interesting analysis of patriarchal society in Spain in the 1920s and 1930s. But this "empirical" analysis, in which the historical moment limits the "genuine autonomy" or "real satisfaction" of the female characters, is considered by Smith to be too limiting. "The alternative view, however [and this is the Foucauldian one] is that there is no essential self to liberate in any period, because knowledge and pleasure are always bound up with power and institutions" (119). His alternative, however, fails to respond to the historicist point of view. Smith imputes to this historicism an essentialism that does not seem to apply to this circumstance. If the literary historian's intent is to analyze social relations during the period in which García Lorca wrote this play, it is hard to see how that might be

construed as essentialist. To the literary historian there is no "essential self to liberate" either, so why is this point brought up in the first place? This argument is contingent upon the type of opposition Foucauldianism is facing. As with science, historical studies, as an alternative to Foucauldian thought, is not fleshed out appropriately enough for us to have a sense of any geniune option.

By contrast, a realist (or materialist) account would generally be consistent with historicist methods and follow the methodological principles that Teresa Ebert has outlined in her definition critique as a:

> practice through which the subject develops historical knowledge of the social totality: she or he acquires, in other words, an understanding of how the existing social institutions ("motherhood," "child care," "love," "paternity," "taxation," "family," etc.) have in fact come about and how they can be changed. Critique, in other words, is that knowledge-practice that historically situates the conditions of possibility of what empirically exists under patriarchal-capitalist labor relations and, more importantly, points to what is suppressed by the empirically existing: what could be (instead of what is).15

Foucauldian criticism, of course, does focus on institutional roles in capitalist society, but it describes and does not explain the ways that that institutional oppression might be overcome. Moreover, the solutions it offers point to individual escapes from institutional pressure, and not to collective or systemic alternatives. In the case of *La casa de Bernarda Alba*, the daughters and the grandmother are virtually quarantined in their home by the mother, who has so internalized patriarchal values that she recreates that sexist atmosphere in her home. Smith's own assessment of this play is symptomatic of poststructuralist answers to questions of a systemic nature. Traditional humanist critics, Smith maintains, essentialize gender relations in this play; they see "the essential nature of (ungendered) individuals: they seek freedom and sexual gratification. This knowledge is held to be universal and, hence, apolitical" (124). But, in a typical poststructuralist vein, Smith counters with a prototypical liberal (not "radical") argument. His point is that self-gratification and freedom *are* political issues. "The personal is political":

> Once more nature and the individual are set against repression and society, but this time with overtly political intent. The radical critic will praise Adela's rebelliousness but lament her adoption of a new subordinate position: she continues to define herself in patriarchal terms as the fallen woman, the mistress. She takes control of her body, but only to surrender it immediately to a man (124).

A radical critic would generally agree with this argument. However, he or she would object that taking control of one's body does not, in itself, constitute a form of rebellion. What we are confronted with is an *individual* solution to a *sociostructural* problem (patriarchy). Thus, Smith contends that "Adela cannot transcend her position, but resistance is to be found not in transcendental imperatives but in bodies and their very

particular pleasures" (125). While this may indeed be a *symbolic*, micro-political form of resistance, it is difficult to see it as disturbing the status quo. Yet the founding principles of poststructuralist philosophy encourage us to take these types of positions.

The philosophical inconsistencies we have underscored so far in Smith's work carry over into his analysis of Lorca's treatment of homosexuality. There are two main problems to outline here. First, Smith's skepticism regarding identity and truth leads him to posit the tenuous and vague notion of difference as their basis. Lorca, argues Smith, "invokes no general 'law' of nature to differentiate between desires" (130). Respect for sexual difference, from a sociological point of view, is accurate when it is inextricably entwined with economic, political and social egalitarianism. But if "power structures," which, following Foucault, Smith associates with an "ethical" problem, are not clearly identified as systemic in nature, then his critique differs little from liberal pluralism. Strictly speaking, as Teresa Ebert has astutely observed, heterosexuality is a "necessary means by which patriarchy naturalizes gender divisions of social relations, particularly labor."[16] It does not follow automatically, as witness the successes and problems in revolutionary Nicaragua and Cuba, that changing the economic and political system to a more egalitarian one will necessarily bring about radical transformations in gender relations, but the chances are certainly increased that it will. In other words, to take sexual difference or pluralism seriously involves identifying, critiquing and altering existing socio-economic inequalities endemic to capitalism. Smith consequently upholds sexual difference in an uncritical way without exploring the roots behind the mirage of difference.

Second, the battle to establish one's sexual identity is almost exclusively discursive. Thus, for instance, Smith stresses the need to examine "discursive warfare" in Lorca's *El público*. The concept of difference is passed on to the discursive realm where, as we commented above, referentiality is put under scrutiny. Following the current of poststructuralism, the flight from referentiality or the fixation on subjectivism are deemed to be virtues, not liabilities. In that light, Lorca's references to Antiquity in *El público* "undermine our sense of the reality of history" and the playwright's uses of parody and dissociation lead to the "sacrifice of a univocal truth (of a subject presumed to know)," both of which, according to Smith's argument, lead to provisional ideas of sexuality, reality, and knowledge (133). Hence, while the critic correctly notes that masks "serve in Lorca's text to parody the real, to dissociate the spectators from fixed identities, and to disabuse them of the faith in absolute knowledge," they also serve to obfuscate the question of sexual identity. We do not gain more knowledge of human sexuality in general, or of homosexuality in particular, in Lorca's nebulous representation of sexuality.

Like poststructuralist difference, Lorca's masks blur the vision of the spectator and his or her socially accepted ideas about sexuality. But this constitutes an assault on the level of appearance which fails to critique the structural basis that gives rise to these ideologies. Here again, it would help if Smith provided the reader with a historical background for Lorca's stance with respect to his own homosexuality.

Unsuprisingly secretive about his own homosexuality given the entrenchment of patriarchy and homophobia in Spain during the 1920s and 1930s, Lorca aimed at confusing the boundaries of the established gender relations. In *El público* at least he failed to uncover the social forces that reproduce sexual relations. However, in his last classical book of poetry, *Poeta en Nueva York*, Lorca did launch a scathing attack on the division of classes, racism, and homophobia in the United States.17 This book, more than any other of his works, vividly depicts the catastrophic social, political and economic problems that were plaguing the United States during the Great Depression and puts into question the putative essence behind the appearance. In 1929, living in the city, Lorca wrote to his family in Granada that New York is:

> the spectacle of the world's money in all its splendour, its mad abandon and its cruelty. There'd be no use in my trying to express in words the immense tumult of voices, cries, people dashing hither and thither, lifts, all engaged in the poignant, Dionysian exaltation of the money. Here you see the typist with fabulous legs that we have seen in so many films, the cheery bell-boy winking and chewing gum, and your pale individual with his collar up to the throat timidly holding out his hand and begging for five cents. This is where I have got a clear idea of what a huge mass of people fighting to make money is really like. The truth is that it's an international war with just a thin veneer of courtesy.18

Significantly, Lorca's radicalization in the heart of the capitalist system guides him to a reconceptualization of sexuality as well. In *Poeta en Nueva York* he calls for sexual freedom and ties it to the liberation of the oppressed. His "Ode to Walt Whitman" signals, to my mind, more than any other poem in this volume, Lorca's own guarded "coming out" as a gay man as well as his open advocacy of social revolution. In a speech published posthumously, which he gave several times between 1931 and 1935, the Spanish poet had openly declared that he saw workers "chained and deaf; chained by a cruel economic system which soon will have to have its throat slit" (316). Judging from his plays and poems--and especially *Poeta en Nueva York*--Lorca considered his homosexuality to be a private affair, although he never seemed to have shied away from his own sexual preference in public. "Oda a Walt Whitman" indicates with some clarity that he identified himself as a gay man--a "queer" rather than a "fairy" in the language of this period--yet seemed to object to the open display of effeminate "fairy" life in public.19 So it is that García Lorca pays homage to Whitman as a poet, who happens to be gay. This move in itself ushers in a complex image of the Spanish poet's conception of his own homosexuality as well as Whitman's. Thus, in a revealing dialectical phrase, García Lorca speaks of the American poet's having "virile beauty" ("*hermosura viril*," 234). From a heterosexual point of view, of course, this would be an oxymoron. But the poet selects attributes ordinarily associated with female and male genders respectively, and, in depicting the homosexual as their negation, transcends the antinomy of traditional gendered roles. This he achieves in one phrase. In the next stanza García Lorca expands the image:

> Ni un solo momento, Adán de sangre, Macho,
> hombre solo en el mar, viejo hermoso Walt Whitman,
> porque por las azoteas,
> agrupados en los bares,
> saliendo en racimos de las alcantarillas,
> temblando entre las piernas de los chauffeurs
> o girando en las plataformas del ajenjo,
> los maricas, Walt Whitman, te señalan (234-35).
>
> [Not for a moment, Adam of blood, Male,
> man alone at sea, beautiful old man Walt Whitman,
> because on the rooftops,
> together in the bars,
> emerging in bouquets from the culverts,
> trembling between the legs of the chauffeurs
> or turning on the platforms of absinthe,
> queers, Walt Whitman, salute you.] (my translation)

Here too Whitman is cast clearly as a "Male" who is a "beautiful old man" revered by gay men. Judging from both contexts--the first verse cited and this stanza--Male, as it is construed here, carries with it social power and recognition. What is important for García Lorca is that Whitman has acquired the kind of cultural capital that other heterosexual authors have even though he is a homosexual. Historian George Chauncey maintains that Whitman became a "prophetic spokesman" for queers during the 1920s and 1930s who "stood for a noneffeminate gentleness, a love for other men that was unquestionably masculine."[20] García Lorca, it appears, was strongly influenced by this "queer" role and generally repelled by "fairies." But it is evident that the Spanish poet's interpretation of Whitman's life and works goes beyond identity politics. The poet is not content to be assimilated into the mainstream of bourgeois culture. For García Lorca, as well as for Whitman, the transformation of the sexual division of labor, of social gender roles, and of homophobic repression requires a systemic change:

> Because I have known only men; and you know that...the fairy makes me laugh, amuses me with his womanish itch to wash, iron and sew, to paint himself, to wear skirts, to speak with effeminate faces and gestures. But I don't like it. Normality is neither your way of knowing only women, or mine. What's normal is love without limits. Because love is more and better than the morality of a dogma, Catholic morality; there is no one [that] can make me resign myself to the sole stance of having children. In my way there is no misrepresentation. Both are as they are. Without switching. There is no assigning of roles. There is no substitution or imitation. There is only abandon and joyous mutual possession. But it would take a real revolution. A new morality, a morality of complete freedom. That is what Walt Whitman was asking for.[21]

There are several things to observe in this passage recorded by García Lorca's friend Cipriano Rivas Cherif. In this and other contexts the poet makes it clear that sexual freedom is bound to egalitarian social relations which capitalism cannot offer. Thus sexual repression and capitalism are closely aligned in Garcia Lorca's stance: to challenge the institutionalization of heterosexuality is, for him, to consider disarming capitalism itself. This quote also clarifies a quagmire in "Oda a Walt Whitman" vis-à-vis homosexuality. It has been puzzling to Lorquian critics that the poet condones homosexuality in a lengthy stanza in this poem only to then apparently scathingly condemn it (238-39). However, the quote above helps us to reread these bewildering verses:

> Pero sí contra vosotros,
> maricas de las ciudades
> de carne tumefacta y pensamiento inmundo.
> Madres de lodo. Arpias. Enemigos sin sueño
> del Amor que reparte coronas de alegría (239).
>
> [But I am against you, city queers
> of swollen flesh and filthy thought.
> Mothers of mud. Shrews. Tireless enemies
> of the Love that shares crowns of happiness.]
> (my translation)

García Lorca here objects to "fairies" who take on the submissive and sexist gender role of "woman," particularly in the public realm. In assuming this role homosexual men unwittingly support unequal gender and sexual relations. So when García Lorca exclaims, in an echo of Marx and Engels' famous line in *The Communist Manifesto*, "*¡Maricas de todo el mundo, asesinos de palomas!*" [Queers of the world, assassins of doves! (239; my translation)], he is referring, it seems to me, to gay men who willingly reproduce the sexual and gender inequalities under capitalism.[22] García Lorca himself rejects this view and fuses his "identity politics" with the struggle to abolish capitalism.[23]

Conclusion

What I am suggesting then in this essay is that, contrary to currently accepted literary-critical doxa, poststructuralism has been able to argue persuasively about human sexuality only at the cost of dispensing with a dialectical assessment of science and reason. In other words, the appeal of neo-Freudian and especially neo-Lacanian theories is based upon their popularization, which makes them accessible to literary critics who are not well-versed in philosophy, science, and the social sciences. These aporias in effect prevent literary critics from identifying the pitfalls in neo-Freudian and neo-Lacanian theories and from conducting a transformative critique of poststructuralist notions of the subject.

I see Paul Julian Smith's works as paradigmatic of poststructuralism's philosophical limitations. Smith, of course, like most poststructuralists would certainly lay no claim to

proposing any kind of a definitive statement on sexuality. His objective is to destabilize gender identities. Blurring the boundaries, from his perspective, is seen as a problematization of sexuality. Smith's discussion takes place on a discursive level where the initial appearance of difference belies the real social contradictions under capitalism. In positing difference as the momentary and oscillating model for analyzing sexuality Smith overlooks the very structural categories--gender, sexuality, and class--that challenge the legimitacy of the ideology of difference.

By contrast, in *Poeta en Nueva York* García Lorca points out many subtleties with respect to (homo)sexuality and perceives his own identity as a gay man as part of a larger struggle for socialist liberation. In *Poeta en Nueva York* class, race, and sexuality are not only part of García Lorca's analytical tools, but also part of his representation of a major crisis in the capitalist system. García Lorca understood, unlike many poststructuralists today, that sexual liberation involved socio-structural change. As poems like "Oda a Whitman" attest, what we call "identity politics" or "micropolitics" today for Lorca could only be conceived as part of a larger struggle. Many poststructuralists would argue that this demonstrates the limits of left-wing politics during the 1930s, whereas I would contend that that was its strength.

Notes

1 London, Verso, 1992.

2 Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989. See also Smith's *Laws of Desire: Questions of Homosexuality in Spanish Writing and Film, 1960-1990* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992).

3 Jeffrey Weeks, *Against Nature: Essays on History, Sexuality and Identity* (London: Rivers Oram Press, 1991) and Michel Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, Trans. Robert Harley (New York: Vintage Books, 1980); *The Use of Pleasure*, Trans. Robert Harley (New York: Pantheon Books, 1985); and *The Care of the Self*, Trans. Robert Harley (New York: Vintage Books, 1988).

4 For an interesting critique of Freudian psychoanalysis see V.N. Volosinov's *Freudianism: A Critical Sketch*, Trans. I.R. Titunik (Bloomington and Indianapolis: University of Indiana Press, 1987).

5 See my "A Marxist Critique of Poststructuralist Notions of the Subject" in *Transformation* 1.

6 Jacques Lacan, *Écrits: A Selection*, Trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: W.W. Horton,

1977). See especially "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the I," 1-7.

7 For an introduction to realist philosophy, see William Outhwaite, *New Philosophies of Social Science: Realism, Hermeneutics and Critical Theory* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1987). Along similar lines see Roy Bhaskar, *Plato Etc: The Problems of Philosophy and Their Resolution* (London: Verso, 1994). Bhaskar's *Dialectic: The Pulse of Freedom* represents the most compelling study on Marxism, Humanism, and realist philosophies to date.

8 Consult Lacan's *Écrits*. See footnote 6.

9 See particularly "The Barbarian Despotic Machine" in *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, Trans. Robert Harley, Mark Seem and Helen R. Lane (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983).

10 See Bhaskar's entry on dialectics in Tom Bottomore ed., *A Dictionary of Marxist Thought* (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 1983): 122-28.

11 (London: Verso, 1993).

12 (London: Verso, 1987). These are scattered observations in *Logics of Disintegration* on Derrida, Lacan, Foucault and Lyotard.

13 I am referring to volume one of *The History of Sexuality*, page 69. See footnote 3. Subsequent citations in my essay make reference to this first volume.

14 For a concise explanation of Bhaskar's argument against "blockism," see *Dialectic*, 252-53. In the second case here Foucault is a proponent of the "linguistic fallacy," which Bhaskar--in *Dialectic*--defines as the "form of the analysis of being as our discourse about being" (206).

15 Teresa L. Ebert, "Ludic Feminism, the Body, Performance, and Labor: Bringing Materialism Back into Feminist Cultural Studies," *Cultural Critique* (Winter 1993) 9.

16 See Ebert's article cited above, 36.

17 I am using the Spanish edition. Federico García Lorca, *Poeta en Nueva York*, Eutimio Martín ed. (Barcelona: Editorial Ariel, 1983). Hereafter the pages are cited in the text.

18 Ian Gibson, *Federico Garcia Lorca: A Life* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1989): 250.

19 For more on the complex social tensions and sexual patterns in gay communities in New York, see George Chauncey, *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay Male World, 1890-1940* (New York: Basic Books, 1994). "The fairies reaffirmed the conventions of gender even as they violated them: they behaved as no man should, but as any man might wish a woman would. Their representation of themselves as

'intermeditate types' made it easier for men to interact with them (and even have sex with them) by making it clear who would play the 'man's part' in the interaction" (57). Chauncey also argues that the "fairies' style, then, was not so much an imitation of women as a group but a provocative exaggeration of the appearance and demeanor ascribed more specifically to prostitutes. As a result, many men seem to have regarded fairies in the same terms they regarded prostitutes" (61). This may explain why "queers" like García Lorca reacted so negatively to "fairies": the latter were internalizing sexist values in society in order to have relations with men. In searching out companionship, they tried to become submissive and available "women" and thus dehumanized themselves while lessening the chances that gay relationships would be accepted in society.

20 See Chauncey in footnote 19. The quotation is from pages 104-105. Here the danger as far as gender roles are concerned is the opposite but complementary one of "machismo." By "imitating" sexist male heterosexuals, queers risked reproducing unequal gender roles and "lifestyles" under patriarchy. As I show below, García Lorca, however, did not approve of this abusive social choice either.

21 In Richard L. Predmore, *Lorca's New York: Social Injustice, Dark Love, Lost Faith* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1980): 82-83. I have inserted spaces here in place of "the homosexual"--which appears in Predmore's translation--because, given the discussion we have been pursuing here about queers and fairies, the most appropriate translation of "*marica*" is probably "fairy". Predmore was the first major Lorca critic to investigate the relation between Lorca's sexuality and his left-wing politics. See also, Anthony L. Geist's "*Las mariposas en la barba: una lectura de* Poeta en Nueva York," *Cuadernos hispanoamericanos* (julio-octubre 1986): 547-65. Geist links Lorca's sexual and political "crises" to the crisis in his poetic language. See also Peter B. Medawar, *Pluto's Republic* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982).

22 For a historical background on the gay culture which García Lorca experiences in New York see Chauncey (footnote 19), especially chapters 2 and 4, as well as the Introduction.

23 *Poeta en Nueva York* is really the beginning of García Lorca's Socialist radicalization which crystallized in the last two years of his life--before he was assassinated by the ultra-nationalist National Guard in 1936. For more information on his political involvement during these years see Gibson's *Federico García Lorca* (footnote 17), chapters 10 to 12.