

**“HE AHÍ UN HOMBRE”:
COMPOSITE MASCULINITY IN
RETRATOS Y RECUERDOS BY
LUCIO V. MANSILLA**

**“HE AHÍ UN HOMBRE”:
LA MASCULINIDAD
COMPUESTA EN
RETRATOS Y
RECUERDOS DE LUCIO
V. MANSILLA**

Joseph M. Pierce

Stony Brook University, Stony Brook, Nueva York, Estados Unidos



RESUMEN

Típicamente los estudios de Lucio V. Mansilla se enfocan en su apropiación de lo otro en *Una excursión a los indios ranqueles* (J. Ramos), su 'pose' como causeur (S. Molloy) o bien su función cultural al centro de la Generación del 80 (D. Viñas). Estos acercamientos giran en torno a la naturaleza fragmentaria de la construcción de su 'yo' narrativo. En cambio, este artículo se enfoca en el retrato compuesto de la masculinidad argentina que Mansilla detalla en *Retratos y recuerdos*, publicado en 1894. Mansilla intenta retratar las características físicas y psicológicas, además de las ideologías políticas y morales, de los hombres argentinos que forjaron la nación moderna. Así, el autor sugiere una masculinidad de la élite que se construye en base a una extensa red de relaciones fraternales, lazos homosociales, cargadas de una tensión erótica inexplicable.

Palabras clave

Argentina; Memoria; Masculinidad; Deseo; Homosocialidad.

ABSTRACT

Studies of Lucio V. Mansilla typically focus on his appropriation of otherness in *Una excursión a los indios ranqueles* (J. Ramos), his literary 'pose' as causeur (S. Molloy), or else his cultural function at the center of Argentina's Generation of 1880 (D. Viñas). These approaches hinge on the fragmentary nature of Mansilla's self-construction. In contrast, this article focuses on the composite portrait of Argentine masculinity Mansilla constructs in *Retratos y Recuerdos*, published in 1894. Mansilla's text aims to portray the physical and psychological characteristics, as well as the moral and political ideologies, of the Argentine men who shaped the modern nation. In doing so, the author suggests an elite masculinity that is constructed by an elaborate network of fraternal relations, homosocial bonds, which are charged with an inexplicable erotic tension.

Key words

Argentina; Memory; Masculinity; Desire; Homosociality.

1. Introduction

Retratos y recuerdos by Lucio V. Mansilla (1831-1913) is comprised of 17 portraits, “retratos,” of the author’s colleagues during his tenure as a delegate at the Congreso de Paraná and subsequent years as part of the Confederación Argentina. The period begins with the defeat of Juan Manuel de Rosas (1793-1877) to Justo José de Urquiza (1801-1870) at the Battle of Caseros in 1852, includes the latter’s attempts to establish order as head of the interim government—the Confederación Argentina—, the secession of Buenos Aires in 1854 from that government, and eventual election of Bartolomé Mitre (1821-1906) as President of the newly consolidated (and re-named) República Argentina in 1862.¹ A decade of economic jousting and military conflict between Buenos Aires and the Provinces, a decade in which a young Mansilla sought to distinguish himself from the recently fallen dictator (his uncle) and (re)build a reputation in national politics. Published in 1894, 40 years later, *Retratos y Recuerdos* is based on the memories, “recuerdos,” of one the few remaining men who participated in the Congress.

The text details the relationships Mansilla established and those he wished to have made. To write this memoir—to construct these portraits—is to relive a specific moment in Argentine history in which a group of men—as they were called, los Hombres del Paraná—attempted to build the political and social institutions that would fill the power vacuum left by the fall of Rosas. Mansilla maps the relationships between an intimate circle of men, tracing their backgrounds, their affinities and differences, and their missed opportunities. In short, he is interested in recording how these men operated and how they interacted with each other. He describes the

¹ For more information, see Scobie (1964) and Rock (1987) pp. 120-125.

habitus of a generation of nation-builders.² It is a nostalgic take on the unspoken mechanisms that structure a shared masculine project.

As is the case with much of Mansilla’s writing, *Retratos y recuerdos* combines his idiosyncratic perspective on national politics with an eccentric literary style. The text is based on personal experience and proximity—dilettante in its philosophical speculation—and told from his unique position in the Argentine elite. Not as wide-ranging or conversational as his *causerie*³, it serves to highlight Mansilla’s role in a crucial moment in Argentine history, his place among a group of men whose memory, he claims, needs saving. In keeping with late-century naturalist texts, it seeks to characterize human behavior through the observation of physical characteristics, family history and environmental factors. But it also relies on an artistic sensibility that Mansilla sees as lacking from turn-of-the-century personality studies, a heterodox approach intended to provide a more nuanced way of understanding these ‘great men’, their desires, their inner conflicts, their true nature.

Likewise, the men described in *Retratos y recuerdos* played an important part in forming the man who would become General Lucio V. Mansilla. He served under them and alongside them at the Congress, transcribed speeches and drafted bills for them; he absorbed their attitudes and their mannerisms, their hopes and their regrets. In registering the qualities of these men, the author also reveals his own take on what matters as manliness. These are men who seduced Mansilla with their psychological complications; with whom he identified not only as a member of the Congreso de Paraná but as equally heterodox thinkers in an era characterized by dogmatic schisms

² For a classic definition, see Bourdieu (1977) chapter 2.

³ For more information about orality in Mansilla’s writing, see Carricaburro (2000).

between political factions. This is a text meant to recuperate a generation and pay tribute to its foundational role in the development of the Argentine republic, but it also reconstructs a network of affective relations, an index of the range of desires felt by the author toward these men.

Mansilla’s retelling of these relations and his portrayal of the way they impacted his own emotional, psychological, and moral development describe a yearning for recognition by the men for whom he served. He relates a sense of attraction for his contemporaries—ranging from admiration to fascination to subjugation—, a desire that simultaneously seeks to appropriate certain modes of behavior (i.e. artistic talent, sensuality, nobility) and disqualify others (i.e. hesitancy, moral weakness). This article argues that Mansilla proposes a composite masculinity that emerges out of his recollection and interpretation of his contemporaries; that he constructs his self as part of the Hombres del Paraná through a constellation of homosocial relations.⁴ More specifically, he describes an elite masculinity that is anchored by a network of fraternal bonds that stretches forward and backward in time, and the connective material of this network, metaphorically, as kinetic or magnetic energy, revealing not only the intensity of feeling between Mansilla and his contemporaries, but also its impossibility to name.⁵

⁴ As is discussed in the Methodology section, the notion of homosocial relations is taken from Sedgwick (1985) pp. 1-20.

⁵ Though I do not engage fully with this line of critique, recent work in affect studies has influenced my thinking here. For example, see the Cvetkovich (2012) pp. 1-26 and Muñoz (2009).

2. Objectives

There are two objectives that motivate this article. The first is to revise how Mansilla writes his self as a man. By describing his textual production as performing a composite masculinity rather than an a priori subject position, we can flesh out the homosocial bonds that define elite masculinity in the second half of the 19th century in Argentina. Mansilla is invested in characterizing the nature of his relationships with his colleagues, relationships whose affective charge seems ever-present yet impossible to name. The second is to explore the methodological shift Mansilla proposes in describing the physical and psychological qualities of his contemporaries. Filtered through memory and personal experience as well as the author's 'artistic license', *Retratos y recuerdos* is a text that also serves as a program for the study of personality that is distinct from positivist renderings of human behavior (such as José María Ramos Mejía's *Las multitudes argentinas*), on the one hand, and *modernista* attempts to privilege strangeness and artistic genius (such as Rubén Darío's *Los raros*), on the other. This article is not meant to be an exhaustive study of the network of personal relations Mansilla details in the text, nor of the historical relationship between the Congreso de Paraná and the turn of the century, but rather a focused discussion of the way relational masculinity, homosocial bonds, and the specter of queer desire intersect in this text. In this, the article is concerned with Mansilla's literary praxis as much as with the qualities he values in the men portrayed in his text.

3. Methodology

Studies of Lucio V. Mansilla typically focus on his appropriation of otherness in *Una excursión a los indios ranqueles* (Ramos 1996), his literary ‘pose’ as *causeur* (Molloy 1991), or else his cultural function at the center of Argentina’s Generation of 1880 (Viñas 1975). These approaches emphasize the fragmentary nature of his self-construction, evidenced on the one hand by his impressionistic literary style and on the other by his problematic relationship with Argentine politics. To cite just one example, when Molloy (1991) turns to Mansilla’s autobiographical writing, she describes it as “an endless exercise in self-reflection and self-dispersion” (p. 173). The image of Mansilla’s iconic Witcomb Gallery studio portrait serves to support this argument, a man whose theatricality, whose self-styling as an *agent provocateur*, is evidenced in both his textual and visual production. A self that projects outward, or, perhaps more in line with the Witcomb portrait, various selves that reflect back on Mansilla, a personage that becomes whole by retaining the images of its own self-reflection.

Molloy counts among the four essential texts for critiquing Mansilla’s construction of self, *Una excursion a los indios ranqueles* (1870), *Entre-Nos. Causeries del jueves* (1889-1890), *Estudios morales o sea el Diario de mi vida* (1896), and *Mis memorias* (1904). She focuses on the final of these works for its formal affiliation with the autobiography, a retrospective telling of one’s own life, though Mansilla complicates this with his characteristic roaming, chatty style. While it would be nearly impossible to consider all of Mansilla’s autobiographical writing, one of the ways to refine this argument about his representation of self is by considering one of the works that is not mentioned by Molloy: *Retratos y recuerdos*.

This article proposes a reading of Mansilla’s positioning not as self-reflection or self-dispersion, but rather as produced by the homosocial network he “portrays and recalls”. That is, rather than thinking about Mansilla reflecting a unified narrative self outward—as in the self photographed as multiple—I propose that in *Retratos y recuerdos* he constructs a composite image out of the relationships, events, and personalities he describes. This is a self-portrait that emerges as *bricolage*. To clarify, I am not employing this term to refer to the fragmentary and iterative structure of mythical thought, as in Lévi-Strauss (1966), but rather the more generic sense in which an object (or concept) becomes whole through its composition by various materials, pieces, or fragments. This is primarily a textural notion; one that speaks to the sedimentation of feelings between men that Mansilla draws on to portray his autobiographical self. Thus, in contrast with Molloy’s argument that Mansilla’s autobiographical writing “discourages the recognition of a communal memory” (1991, p. 185), here I am claiming that it is precisely through the construction of a communal masculine past that his self takes shape.

By focusing on the author’s depiction of relationships we can better understand his construction of self; by reading subjectivity as contingent rather than unitary, we can refine some of the existing literature on nineteenth century studies of gender, in particular the understanding of masculinity as an intrinsic subject position, marked by operating in the public sphere, military prowess, and rationality.⁶ This methodology is informed by Sedgwick’s (1985) writing on homosocial relations, but rather than focusing on the triangulation of desire between men, I aim to describe the

⁶ A good introduction can be found in Peluffo & Sánchez Prado (2010). An excellent analysis of the *caudillo* figure and its relation to martial masculinity can be found in Polit Dueñas (2008) pp. 13-61.

constellation of affective bonds that undergirds the development of an individual account of masculinity. That is, rather than focusing on rival male relationships, this article discusses how Mansilla shapes his own masculine position by *sampling* that of his contemporaries. Sampling here implies not just trying on/out, but is more closely related to contemporary musicians' creative use of prior material to hearken the past while creating something new. Mansilla's composite masculinity is composed of echoes of other men's voices, glances nostalgically recalled, handshakes that linger in memory, images that overwhelm.

4. Content

“¿Había aquí un atavismo, una predestinación fisiológica?” (p. 10) Mansilla asks himself of the reactive irritability, what he describes as a peculiar innate quality of Nicolás Avellaneda (1837-1885). Laying out his methodological approach to these *retratos*, Mansilla continues, “No lo sé; no conozco bastante sus antepasados” (p. 10). The positivist influence is evident, though merely a pretext to arrive at what Mansilla considers “lo que se quiere y se desea conocer sobre todo” (p. 11).

He writes:

Hay que pensar hondo; hay que tener lo que en la ciencia moderna se llama una introspección, –un examen como esos en que Hobbes, Locke, Berkeley y Hume han sido precursores, –y maestro, Taine, el gran filósofo francés, cuya mirada desciende y penetra hasta los más profundos abismos de la personalidad psíquico-fisiológica. (p. 11)

What I find noteworthy about his approach is that it is not a doctrinary Spencerian view of human progression, but rather one that attempts to judge the psychological and physiological qualities of his objects of study by searching his own memory—incomplete, fragmentary, influenced by legend—as a historical participant-observer. Mansilla certainly does consider observable physical traits (race), family history (milieu), and historical juncture (moment), but it is his take on the spirit, the unique essential quality of each man he describes, that completes each *retrato*. In this way his license as an artist, inflected by memory and his unique position in Argentine politics, frees him from the scientific dogma of these “precursors,” allowing him to access a more profound level of comprehension of what makes each of these men unique. Importantly, especially for the purposes of this article, this essential quality is almost always portrayed as a judgment of each man’s quality *as a man*. In other words, Mansilla views his methodology as an *ars poetica* that, according to him, improves on the sociological approaches of others.

4.1. On Mansilla’s Writing Practice

To demonstrate Mansilla’s approach, let us turn to his *retrato* “Derqui,” which begins with the following paragraph: “Hay en la galería del Congreso un retrato, de medio cuerpo, de este hombre de estado argentino, segundo presidente de la Nación. Es un modo de hablar” (p. 53). The image of Derqui serves as a point of departure for the author’s reflection on the link between painting and writing, between historical realism and creative license, between verisimilitude and the sublime. The painting ‘speaks’ as the representation of a historical figure, as the artist’s interpretation of the

essence of his subject. It is also the point of departure for Mansilla’s reflection on his own writing practice in *Retratos y recuerdos*.

Mansilla continues:

Ese retrato, lo mismo que tantos otros, se parece en un algo al original; pero no es el hombre. Se parece a él, como la leyenda se parece a la historia. Pintar bien es tan difícil como escribir bien; porque escribir es hablar mentalmente, con exactitud; y pintar es reproducir la verdad histórica, real o el ideal histórico, –sin anacronismos de mal gusto. (p. 54)

Not quite arguing for a strict realism, Mansilla nonetheless advocates a type of representation that adheres to the “historical truth”. This is a subjective “historical truth”, however, one that may borrow from both fact and fiction. Legend, as a collection of discourses generated over time becomes the foil against which history gains relief. Mansilla is quick to point out, though, that portraits, both literary and pictorial, should avoid anachronism and exaggeration. In part, this is a rhetorical strategy employed by the author in order to mitigate accusations of historical infidelity in his *retratos*. It is also a foundational aspect of what I am describing as a composite masculinity, one based on verifiable characteristics of those men Mansilla describes, namely their physical traits, family history, and upbringing, but also those more open to interpretation: moral quality, personality, and masculinity. These are the layers employed by Mansilla as *bricoleur*.

In this *retrato* of Derqui, Mansilla sets the ground for his own writing practice, comparing himself (with characteristic aplomb) to Raphael revealing through his paintings the “espíritu” of his subjects (p. 54). To characterize another, the

painter/writer must respect but not be limited by historical fact. “Hay así,” Mansilla concludes, “una preocupación legítima de lo bello, como la hay respecto de la historia, de la ciencia, de la biografía” (pp. 54-55). This statement positions the author first as a theorist of beauty, linking him to mid-century debates on representation taken up predominantly in British art criticism.⁷ However Mansilla does not dwell on this point, moving quickly from art to more ‘objective’ cultural expressions. Here, “legitimacy” becomes the essential element in the way Mansilla imagines his role in Argentine letters as a source and interpreter of historical memory. He attempts to identify through his own subjective appreciation—as with Raphael—, the essential quality of each of the men he describes, their nature, their unique gift as political actors—as men—in this shared national project.

Me propongo, pues —como se comprende, y nada más— reemplazar algunos de los materiales históricos existentes, inclusive los de la leyenda y las preocupaciones; o lo que es un equivalente, voy a tentar hacer ‘algo tolerable’, como diría Goethe. (p. 55)

This suggests that Mansilla’s conception of historical verisimilitude is largely a question of degree. That is, it depends on the extent to which subjective truth may be transformed by the memory or artistic license of the author/painter, conforming what we might provisionally call an aesthetics of the ‘tolerable’. At first glance the Goethian reference seems another instance of name-dropping, but it also serves to anchor

⁷ These debates, led by John Ruskin, of course focused on Raphael as the turning point between the Medieval and the Modern and bemoaned the latter’s privileging of “execution” over “thought”; “beauty” over “truth” (Ruskin 2007, p. 114). Though Mansilla does not mention Ruskin or pre-Raphaelite art, the resonance is provocative, but another instance of his favoring of the conversational over a sustained critique.

Mansilla's technique, his literary form as a portraitist, to a larger historical pattern of imagining fidelity as an essential principle of aesthetic beauty.⁸ He subscribes to European Romanticism's driving impulse toward the expression of the self while hearkening the Latin American concern with the psychology of the nation.⁹ This idiosyncratic proposal draws on the memory of and connection to a community of peers whose masculine qualities must be evaluated (and at times disciplined) as part of Mansilla's literary praxis, but which itself depends on the erotic tension of homosociality.

Not unlike his appropriation of the voices of others, as with the Ranquel Indians; his use of at times obscure epigraphs in multiple languages; or his method of personal networking by dedicating certain texts to members of the Argentine elite, *Retratos y recuerdos* becomes a space that allows Mansilla to imagine himself as simultaneously liminal and central to the production of an image of the new Argentine man. His personal judgment, his experience, becomes central to the project of defining, critiquing, and preserving Argentine masculinity; his proximity and memory, vehicles for understanding the inner truth of the men he portrays. He notes, finally, "Pues yo hablo de los hombres que he visto, que he conocido y tal como los he creído ver y conocer; así los presento y que la leyenda siga pensando lo que quiera" (p. 29). Begrudgingly sincere, Mansilla explains his methodology as a belief system that does not require validation or objectivity; his representational strategy, equal parts complicity and dismissiveness. Like so much of his writing, this aesthetics of the

⁸ It was Goethe, after all, whose appreciation of Raphael led to the artist's rise in popularity among eighteenth century intellectuals (Robson-Scott 1981, p. 127), which would later be rejected by Ruskin. For more information, see Goethe (1980), specifically the letters collected under the chapter "The collector and his circle".

⁹ For more information on Latin American Romanticism, see Anderson Imbert (1986) pp. 236-247.

tolerable asks the public to indulge him in maintaining a contradictory position between history and fiction; the individual and the collective; subject and object. In the end, this is a strategy that positions Mansilla at the center of a homosocial network whose literary representation depends on the memory of his desire for the Hombres del Paraná.

4.2. Carril: Fascination, Subjugation

One of the most intriguing *retratos* is that of Salvador María del Carril (1798-1883), Urquiza's Vice President during the years of the Confederación. “Como planta exótica en un invernáculo,” writes Mansilla, “vivía él, en el Paraná” (p. 21), opening this portrait with a simile describing a figure *out of place*. Carril survives in spite of the adverse circumstances of national chaos following Caseros, visible but uncomfortable. This is an image of strangeness and confinement, marking Carril as a man at odds with his surroundings and Mansilla as a witness to his struggle.

Tellingly, Mansilla attributes this strangeness to a physical composition characterized by “algo así como cierta mezcla de inclinaciones artísticas y sensuales” (pp. 22-23). Thus, Carril embodies a mode of masculine performance that associates him more with the decadence that fascinated *modernista* poets than the stoicism of the mid-century nation builders. Likewise, these were “inclinations” typically reserved for figures diagnosed with the one of the various maladies facing turn of the century men: ennui, spleen, mal-du-siècle, neurosis (Montaldo 1993, p. 42). Yet Mansilla does not judge Carril in the same way. That is, he does not position himself as a pathologist searching for answers, but rather as complicit in the overarching project.

“Yo era casi un niño por la inexperiencia; oía, no entendía bien entonces” (p. 25). Framed in terms of age difference and the lack of life experience, Mansilla sees Carril as a mentor from whom he could learn not only the basic functioning of the new political order in Argentina, but also the essential qualities that would turn this “child” into a man. Mansilla describes his younger self as “hearing” without understanding. Only at a distance of 40 years is he able to interpret his relationship with the man whom he served as personal secretary. What I find interesting about this relationship is the erotic charge Mansilla uses to describe it. Carril is not portrayed as a case to diagnose, but an alluring model: “El hombre me interesaba, me subyugaba, todo lo suyo me parecía noble” (p. 25). The distance from “interest” to “subjugation” is not insignificant, Mansilla perhaps exaggerating for effect. Still, there is a magnetic quality about Carril, with the earlier characterization of this man as “artistic” and “sensual” now attenuated by his “nobility”.

This is a homosocial relationship saturated with Mansilla’s desire to become the type of man that Carril represented. In this reflection, the narrator describes his attraction—indeed *subjugation*—to the man who would mentor the inexperienced Mansilla. In this sense, this *retrato* offers a glimpse of the potential erotics of the relationship between mentor and mentee (Sedgwick 1985). This tension between the social and the erotic—of which this is but one example—is what turns *Retratos y recuerdos* into a map of the affective circuitry that Mansilla recalls, imagines, and interprets as formational of his own particular masculine position as a part of the Hombres del Paraná. This is a work that details the ways in which masculinity develops as a system of relations; how becoming a man implies desiring what he wants to be.

But Mansilla is careful not to reveal too much. He continues: “Los hombres de esta tela, de esta escuela y de esta estructura intelectual y moral, —son verdaderas complicaciones psicológicas, —que no pueden ser explicadas sino analíticamente. Y yo no analizo, recuerdo, evoco, sugiero” (p. 27). There is more to Carril than Mansilla is willing to say. The “psychological complications” of this man, his mentor, require more analysis than he cares (or dares) to entertain. But to “evoke” and “suggest” is also to frame his writing as an invitation to further speculation, an invitation to read between the lines. Rejecting analysis in favor of suggestion is key to Mansilla’s poetics of the masculine. On the one hand it allows him to underscore his close proximity without falling under suspicion of impropriety, and on the other, it urges the audience to recall—to imagine—along with him, the same feelings produced by these men.

4.3. Bedoya: “He ahí un hombre”

Mansilla’s portrayal of Carril is not the only case in which the unique qualities of his subject produce a sense of fascination and seduction for the masculine ideal. His *retrato* of Elías Bedoya (1789-1870), Ministro de Hacienda of the Confederación Argentina, describes a man whose physical stature, “era un hombre casi gigante,” and interior qualities, “apasionada, vehemente,” combined to create an imposing, masculine figure (p. 32).

In contrast with Carril, Bedoya is characterized according to his physical stature: “Se movía con la solemnidad del que sabe que llama la atención, —y toda su persona estaba llena de *ese no sé qué* digno, que, sin quererlo uno mismo, va diciendo a voces: yo soy alguien (p. 32 emphasis in the original). Mansilla focuses on the

significance of Bedoya's stature and mobility, on the articulation of his body, which overwhelms the senses. The resonance of Bedoya's body in public, how it is read by others, indeed how this man's physical presence communicated an indescribable "dignity" is in fact what marks him as "someone". And yet his is not a rustic masculinity. Bedoya is no gaucho. This is evident in Mansilla's description of Bedoya's hands: "unas manos agradables, frescas, suaves, casi aterciopeladas, que no producían" (p. 32). His masculinity may be characterized by an imposing physique, but he is not engaged in manual labor. The hands, a synecdoche, signify a masculinity that is based on sheen, smoothness, and sensuality. Indeed, if Bedoya's velveteen hands produce anything it is the tactile residue of an aristocratic masculinity, the "sensación de confianza que nos dice: "he ahí un hombre" (p. 32). A man, imposing yet refined, Bedoya becomes a component in collective portrait of manliness by virtue of his hands: idealized, educated, and unproductive. Bedoya signifies not only through the aesthetics of his hands, which mark him as a dignified "someone," but also through the sensation produced by those hands touching others.

4.4. Luque: "Todas las miradas"

While Carril intrigues Mansilla with his psychological complications and Bedoya with the sensation of his handshake, the final *retrato* I would like to discuss provides a glimpse of the seductive power of a refined masculinity. "Le vi por primera vez en el teatro, siendo yo niño...un *paquete*, como entonces se decía, que en los salones y en las calles, atraía todas las miradas, por ser hermoso, cordobés y muy federal" (p. 47 emphasis in the original). The character in question, Mateo Luque (1820-1874), is

irresistible. Effortlessly at the center of attention, he has the power to seduce, to attract. This magnetism overwhelms.

From the privileged vantage point of his family’s opera box, Mansilla—again emphasizing his youth—begins his reflection on Luque not by describing the man’s physical appearance, but rather a collective feeling of desire. Luque fills the theater with a sense of expectation and curiosity. Rather than presence, we read about absence, about the affective residue he leaves behind. Mansilla, along with the rest of the public, is entranced by this fashionable young man, his stature, origin, and political affiliation: “hermoso, cordobés y muy federal”. Notably, this collective sense of desire crosses boundaries of public and private space, “en los salones y en las calles,” as well as gender and age, he attracts “todas las miradas”.

Mansilla’s first memory of Luque plays on the ability to see and be seen; it describes the shared desire for a man who circulates, phantasmagoric, imbuing the nationally significant space of the upper-class theater with his dramatic charm. Mansilla concludes this initial memory: “Pasó por me retina como una sombra, dejándome, sin embargo, esa sensación persistente de algo así como el recuerdo de un personaje de Byron, visto en sueños, después de haber leído un canto de Don Juan” (p. 48). Luque is described not as presence, but shadow, a remnant of a feeling, a memory of dream. In likening the feeling Luque generates to that of Byron’s Don Juan, Mansilla hearkens a form of masculinity concerned with refinement and style, rather than manual labor. “Un paquete,” as Luque was earlier called, is defined by Mansilla in a footnote, “Voz muy española: se le llamaba así al que vestía a la moda, o se componía mucho...” (p. 47). Signifying with his attire and his attention to detail, literally his “composition,” Mansilla’s Luque symbolizes the civilizing impulse of the

late-century *dandy*, a model of masculinity bound to the Liberal project of economic and cultural advancement after the fall of Rosas, to the taming of the pampas and the imposition of European models of sociability (Montaldo 1993, p. 42).

Insisting on Luque’s volatile personality, however, Mansilla continues: “Aquella alma debía vivir agitada por una tempestad constante; y vivía, al parecer, devorada por la fiebre de una pasión de Tenorio sin sensualidades” (p. 49). If the first reference to Byron’s Don Juan was suggestive rather than comparative, the second is more direct. He is characterized by a series of descriptors: agitation, tempestuousness, feverishness, passion, but importantly *not sensuality*. Likened to a legendary masculine figure, the archetypal male seducer, Luque is nonetheless spared his morally suspect carnality.¹⁰ Mansilla’s sense of restraint is notable, paired with his insistence on the effects of Luque’s physical appearance.

After all, this *retrato* depends on a shared gaze, eyes attracted by an irresistible force, as Mansilla writes, “todo su ambiente estaba lleno de imán” (p. 50). Mansilla construes Luque as the pole of attraction at the center of an affective field. There is no repellent force in this configuration, no like-charged pole. Rather, Luque’s is a magnetism that only attracts. But this magnetism, a metaphor for shared homosocial desire, is also dangerous. Mansilla continues, “siendo [Luque] uno de esos hombres peligrosos al contacto; porque una vez en sus intimidades, fácilmente podía descubrirse que, bajo aquella corteza helada, había mucho fuego interior” (p. 50). A series of contrasts structure this description: to view/to touch, exterior/interior, and cold/hot. Even if “contacto” in this instance refers to interpersonal relations rather than physical touch, the message remains consistent: Luque possesses a quality that

¹⁰ For more information see Mandrell (1992).

attracts those around him and which is potentially dangerous. What is this danger that Mansilla implies? Providing another example of the erotics of homosocial relations, the specter of queer desire imbues this *retrato*. To fall under the pull of Luque’s magnetism, to move from distant observation to form part of his intimate circle, is thus also to discover a latent “fuego interior”.

To put it more suggestively, this is a masculinity that attracts *in order to be* penetrated. The danger of knowing Luque is that one may not be able to resist his charms, to resist gazing upon, approaching, and desiring this man. To reach “sus intimidades,” one has to pass through the cool exterior, Luque’s impassive pose, his polished demeanor; to really know this man one must submit to his magnetism whose function is to seduce, attracting all glances, retaining all desires, pulling inexorably toward the fiery center of his magnetic charge.

5. Conclusion

This brief analysis of Mansilla’s *Retratos y recuerdos* has focused on the ways in which the author imagines himself as part of a group of men who inspire, seduce, and attract others. Carril and Luque are both described as magnetic, pulling eyes, generating affective connections. Bedoya’s perplexing dignity, meanwhile, is the product of his touch. These connections are constructed by virtue of the author’s subjective appreciation, by his artistic vision of the circuitry that linked the participants in a shared political project, the Congreso de Paraná. Imbued with the rhetoric of homosocial bonding, this interpretive framework positions the author at the center of the network of men charged with carrying out this project.

As such, this article has argued that the type of masculinity that Mansilla describes in this text depends on the relationships that he established with his colleagues. These bonds are characterized by energies difficult to name, but impossible not to feel. The feeling of masculinity, for Mansilla, is erotically charged by memories of faces, hands, silhouettes that pass furtively across his field of vision, memories laden with metaphorical depictions of forces that connect and sensations of irresistible desire. In the end, this article has attempted to show that these sensations give shape to the flows of erotic energy that sustain the relationships between men who shared a common social, political, and economic goal. This is a masculinity that coalesces around Mansilla’s recollections of the feelings produced by these men, feelings and images that are overlaid, sampled, to recreate the position of the author within the network of homosocial bonds during a formational moment in his life. This is a masculinity that relies on Mansilla’s memory, but also his sense of attraction to other men. It is through this attraction that he sees himself as a man.

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