

## Maurice Echeverría's *Labios*: A Disenchanted Story about Lesbians in Guatemala's Postwar Reality

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Explorations of literary manifestations of queer subjectivities, identities, and desires have become more prolific within the field of Latin American cultural studies in the last twenty years. A number of such studies are to be found in the pioneering anthologies, *Latin American Writers on Gay and Lesbian Themes* (1994), *¿Entiendes?* (1995), *Bodies and Biases* (1996), *Sexual Textualities* (1997), *Sex and Sexuality in Latin America* (1997), *Hispanisms and Homosexualities* (1998), *Reading and Writing the Ambiente* (2000), *Tortilleras* (2003), and in special issues of journals such as the volume of *Revista Iberoamericana* devoted to “los estudios lésbico-gays y *queer* latinoamericanos” (Martínez 2008), ‘Latin American lesbian, gay, and queer studies,’ of *Letras Femeninas* (2010) focused on lesbianism, and of *Revista Canadiense de Estudios Hispánicos* (35.1 2010) that explores queer space. Several of these compilations strive—although somewhat problematically as Luciano Martínez observes—to bridge the gap between Peninsular, Latin American and US Latino studies (862). Despite the intended breadth of these studies, all of them fail to include any critical works that engage Central America and its cultural production. The only exceptions are discussions centered on Nicaraguan poet, Rubén Darío, and the homophobia that plagued the broader modernist movement.<sup>1</sup>

Such an omission recalls Arturo Arias's contention that in what concerns literary production, Central America is a doubly marginalized region—excluded from both the “cosmopolitan center and by countries exercising hegemony in Latin America” (xii). It also underscores the fact that in most of this region, the emergence

of a political consciousness with regard to sexual minority rights and the forging of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) movements are relatively new occurrences in contrast to other regions that witnessed such developments in the 1980s, if not earlier.<sup>2</sup> Key reasons for this chronological difference were the revolutionary wars, violent repression, and economic instability that beleaguered Guatemala, El Salvador, Nicaragua, and to a lesser extent, Honduras, in the 1970s and 80s. Such conditions presented grave obstacles to the mobilization of LGBT communities and their struggles for political representation. Moreover, as Florence Babb observes in the case of the Sandinistas in Nicaragua, the revolutionary movements that meant to transform society were also limiting as they promoted a notion of society that remained premised on a heterosexist model of family and coupling (275). Much of the writing produced by Central American authors during this period was similarly impacted by and engaged with the immediate political reality to the detriment of other pressing social concerns related to gender and sexuality-based oppression.

However, this is no longer the case. Since the mid-1990s, and with the end of the armed conflicts, LGBT activism has begun to slowly gain more ground in the region, a result, in part, of the growing presence of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and the proliferation of global discourses of gay and lesbian identity politics.<sup>3</sup> It has also led to the production of literature and, to a lesser extent, literary criticism that engages with the complex lives and struggles of gay, lesbian, and transgender individuals.<sup>4</sup> This is not to say that queer sexualities and the expression of same-sex desire are not discernible in the narratives produced prior to the postwar period, but in more recent works they are depicted in more markedly explicit ways. LGBT individuals have become central characters with greater depth and do not solely occupy marginal or stereotypical roles.<sup>5</sup>

This article adds to the body of literary scholarship on sexual minorities in Central America, centering on Maurice Echeverría's *Labios* (2004) 'Lips,' a novel that stands out for its overt representation of lesbians and its exploration of queer desire, as well as for having garnered significant national awards and honors.<sup>6</sup> *Labios* was the recipient of the *Primer premio nacional de novela corta Luis de León*

‘The Luis de León First National Prize for a Short Novel’ in 2003, an award sponsored by three entities: BANCAFE, one of the leading financial institutions in the country during the 1990s; Magna Terra Editores, an editorial agency committed to social change and aided by various non-profit organizations; and the Dutch non-governmental agency HIVOS, whose work in Guatemala has consisted of HIV/AIDS prevention and the promotion of human rights and gender equality. As these characteristics suggest, this work of fiction is implicated in a broader process of sexual minority visibility that extends beyond what is shown on the page. It is precisely this issue of visibility that drives the exploration of Echeverría’s text undertaken in the following paragraphs.

Between *lo cosmo* and *lo queer*

In the opening chapter to his *Tropics of Desire* (2000), José Quiroga draws on the image of a masked participant in the Gay Pride March in Buenos Aires in 1993 as a means of grounding his discussion of queer subjects in the Latino American context, including writers of the 1930s, 40s, and 50s. What makes these “melancholic subjects”—as Quiroga designates them—pivotal, is that even though they opt to mask their sexuality in their works, they also show us the mask (19). Similar to the veiled figure of the Gay Pride Parade who brings into public contention the issue of homosexuality without asserting an openly gay identity, these authors also enact a strategic coding of their homosexuality. For Quiroga, this coding constitutes a form of social praxis allowing different publics to participate in the social sphere while also calling into question the “unproblematized visibility” in gay and lesbian identity narratives deployed in the United States (3). This coding constitutes another mode of visibility and agency, one not solely tied to the notion of coming out of the closet or to the affirmation of a delimited gay or lesbian identity.

The semi-anonymous male narrator of *Labios* recalls, but also complicates many of Quiroga’s observations regarding “melancholic subjects” who strategically code their homosexuality, yet still allow themselves and their sexuality to be seen. The sickly narrator is in the midst of writing a sordid and sexist novel about lesbians, replete with betrayal, sex, and murder. As a “melancholic subject,” he betrays

an acute fascination with the lesbian subjects and homoerotic entanglements, yet he refuses to explicitly address the issue of his own sexuality and queer desires. Thus, ironically, the story about lesbians the narrator elaborates constitutes the very means by which he toes the line between masking and revelation. He makes visible his own queerness not through a public confession or the act of coming out of the closet, but by contemplating and staging displays of others.

In coding his sexuality, the narrator illustrates a mode of queer visibility akin to that posited by Quiroga. This is not true of the lesbian characters and experiences portrayed. In fact, these affirm many of the identity narratives and notions of public visibility his masked stance undermines. For instance, the highly stylized and somewhat monochromatic representations of lesbians—the majority of which are femme, professionals, and *ladinas* of mixed or non-indigenous heritage belonging to the middle and upper classes—recall marketable and mainstream images of lesbianism evading overt ethnic, racial, and class differences. Rather than manifest one specific mode of visibility, *Labios* showcases the simultaneous enactment of visibilities.

The coexistence of these different modes can be understood as a new composite articulation of sexual minority visibility, a *visibilidad cosmo-queer*. It is cosmopolitan in that it re-inscribes the type of visibility narrative associated with global discourses of gay and lesbian identity by employing or referencing the trope of the closet and by privileging a Westernized and consumerist ideal of gay and lesbian urban lifestyle. It is also queer because it just as readily encompasses alternate expressions of sexual minority visibility—such as the coded representation of one's queer desires and the conscious refusal to claim a set identity—destabilizing hegemonic constructs of sexual knowledges. In stating this, a more broadly conceived notion of queerness is used here as standing in opposition to any normative presentation of gender and sexuality, influenced by Michael Warner's conceptualization of the term in *Fear of a Queer Planet* (2004), as one that “rejects a minoritizing logic of toleration ... in favor of a more thorough resistance to regimes of the normal” (xxvi), and in keeping with Quiroga's own use.

This new expression of sexual minority visibility is, in many

respects, a manifestation of the artistic leanings and generational ties of Echeverría as writer. He belongs to a newer cohort of Guatemalan artists primarily born in the 1970s whose narrative and poetic styles are influenced by film, television, and Internet technologies, most notably, blogging. Dubbed “la generación de los desencantados” or ‘the disenchanted generation’, the works of these authors are populated by self-centered and politically disaffected urban *ladinos/as* attempting to make sense of having to live in a country like Guatemala, which as the narrator of *Labios* states is “estrepitosamente mediocre” (Echeverría 38) ‘spectacularly mediocre.’<sup>7</sup> The disillusionment and cynicism that plagues these *desencantados* (and their characters) does not necessarily derive from the loss of revolutionary ideals or utopian projects as has been argued in the case of prominent Central American postwar writers such as Horacio Castellanos Moya and Jacinta Escudos; rather, it is tied to a more immediate existential crisis.<sup>8</sup> This focus on individualist concerns and postmodernist aesthetics in which Echeverría has matured and currently lives has, in many ways, propelled his engagement with LGBT representational politics and popular culture outside of the scope of Guatemala.

As further contended, the *visibilidad cosmo-queer* articulated in *Labios* is also an expression of the complex nature of sexual minority livelihoods and representational politics in postwar Guatemala. Susan Berger’s case study of the nascent lesbian movement in Guatemala in the mid-1990s helps to ground this broader claim. As Berger explains, movements such as these need to be understood in light of global struggles for LGBT rights as well as local dynamics such as the personal and/or cultural views held by individuals with regard to their sexuality and sexual practices. Doing so makes visible key contrasts such as the one she notes between lesbian activists who are out and advocate an identity politics based on US and European models, and Guatemalan lesbians in general who see lesbianism not as an identity, but as a behavior and/or practices (Berger 74). Such differences are further complicated by issues of class, race and the all too real threat of violence faced by sexual minorities, which has kept many organizations serving the LGBT community in Guatemala from being officially out.<sup>9</sup> Consequently, the position and identity politics of lesbian activists in Guatemala should not be taken to be a

uniform stance adopted by all lesbians in the country.

Berger's findings underscore the fact that it is not possible to understand the experiences of sexual minorities in Guatemala only in reference to a set model of gay and lesbian liberation—an argument also raised by queer and postcolonial scholars in the case of the US and Europe.<sup>10</sup> Although a select group of individuals may claim the teleological narrative of coming out as their own and advocate the adoption of public gay and lesbian identities, others (perhaps the majority in Berger's observations) understand and embody their sexuality in ways that undermine perceived gender and sexual binaries. They espouse a notion of their sexuality that is more queer (to recall this previous use of the term). It is this multifaceted reality that the *visibilidad cosmo-queer*—brought to bear in Echeverría's narrative—ultimately illuminates. The narrator's strategic masking and revelation of his queerness and desires draws attention to the queer subjectivities and struggles that also characterize and are at stake in this community.

### Reflections of Queerness

It is difficult to argue with recent critiques of *Labios* that maintain that the male narrator is a sexist individual whose portrayals of lesbians affirm rather than destabilize patriarchal norms and practices.<sup>11</sup> It is enough to think of the novel's opening scene in which two attractive women are depicted fornicating with gusto in front of a television set on which a girl-on-girl porn video is playing. This encounter—an evocation of the stereotypical male heterosexual fantasy—is the initiating chapter of *Labios*, the novel the narrator is in the process of writing, and also a source of sexual arousal for the narrator. In the midst of writing, he stops to state: "Escribo esto y me excito. Si logro excitarme de este modo durante toda la novelita no habrá problema" (Echeverría 12) 'I write this and get aroused. If I manage to stay aroused in this way all through this little novel there won't be a problem.' What is debatable is the further claim made in those same critiques that these questionable aspects of the narrator's persona and his novel are undeniable proof of his heterosexuality. As suggested in the earlier discussion of the *visibilidad-cosmo queer*, it is possible to contemplate the narrator of *Labios* as a queer desiring subject. Reading him as such allows for

another interpretation of his *novelita* as the strategic means through which the narrator both hides and reveals his own queerness and, in the process, complicates notions of sexual minority visibility and politics in the Guatemalan context.

The central protagonist of the narrator's novel is Alejandra, a successful journalist whose partner, Irene, has been unfaithful with a closeted actress named BB. This sexual escapade between Irene and BB is recounted in the opening scene. Following her discovery of Irene's betrayal, Alejandra and Irene come to a mutual agreement that stipulates that Alejandra has one week to find and sleep with a woman of her choosing as restitution for Irene's transgression. Alejandra's interactions with different women, leading to her final choice who is ironically also BB, are detailed by the narrator in subsequent chapters. A secondary sub-plot concerns BB's girlfriend, a *novianovio* or butch bent on revenge who is looking for Irene and upon finding her, beats her to death. The narrator reveals his novel is less about the love shared between two lesbians and more about the consequences of that love (12). It is also a novel intended to put the narrator on display and call into question his own sexuality, as is evidenced by the narrator's characterization of and commentary regarding his lesbian protagonists, his cynical musings on writing, life, love, and politics (often capitalized), and use of intertextual referencing or mirroring.

As Ana Yolanda Contreras observes, the world inhabited by the lesbian characters in the novel is one marked by globalization. Alejandra and Irene, along with the majority of the women with which Alejandra interacts, are economically independent and have the university background and the social means to cultivate professional careers in the arts or letters—indicative, according to Contreras, of the gains achieved by the struggle for women's rights in Guatemala and of global economic changes that have created new opportunities for women as white collar workers and business entrepreneurs (10). Accordingly, the venues that these women frequent as well as the way they express and experience their sexuality is in keeping with their professionalization and social status.

Alejandra's different encounters with potential lovers take place in urban spaces such as trendy lesbian bars, restaurants that serve typical Guatemalan fare for the rich, art galleries, the

theatre, and commercialized bookstore-cafes. All the women she attracts epitomize, like herself, the ideal of modern femininity and sensuousness, meaning in Guatemala, non-indigenous or *ladina*, educated, sexually liberated, and fashionable. As femmes with comfortable lifestyles, these women do not necessarily threaten the status quo in the same way that a butch does (i.e. BB's *novianovio* who literally embodies the menace of the lesbian other when she kills Irene). Some, however, such as BB, choose to remain closeted so as not to risk losing their careers.

Although indicative of the social gains and the global economic restructuring noted by Contreras, this portrayal also evokes mainstream depictions of lesbianism made popular by cable programs such as Showtime's *The L Word*—a program that, according to Kris Scott Martí, is appealing because it emphasizes image over content. It speaks to the refinement of the “femmetrosexual,” offering storylines “about sensually stunning women in stylish outfits looking at and longing to have sex with whomever makes a more flattering accessory” (Martí 67). To a certain extent, the same can be said of the women of *Labios*, consumed by their corporal desires and wanton love affairs and with little regard for socio-political and economic issues. Alejandra is the only character that perhaps holds any such interest, attending a peaceful protest against US foreign policy in the Middle East organized by her friends. Her participation in this event turns out to be rather inconsequential, serving as a mere backdrop for her encounter with Jessica, a stylish woman who exudes sensuality in every direction, but whose lack of intelligence, and later, violent and irrational pursuit of Alejandra, squelch Alejandra's initial interest (Echeverría 55).

This portrait crafted by the narrator shows the impact that the commodification of Westernized gay and lesbian cultures and lifestyles has had in the global arena. Although not all the characters are out, their image as a whole is still suggestive of the same form of public lesbian visibility enacted in popular representations of LGBT individuals. The fact that these women are consumed by their sexual wants and desires also speaks to the narrator's own state of *desencanto* or disenchantment, which is ultimately linked to his queer subjectivity. The narrator often refers to Guatemala disparagingly, calling it at one point “el país más infame de este mundo, metáfora

para cualquier mal, dolor de culo extraño, esperanza del VACÍO” (28) ‘the most infamous country in the world, metaphor for any evil, a strange ass ache, a hope for EMPTINESS.’ Such resentment goes hand-in-hand with the cynical outlook the narrator has of himself and his generation, one defined by its individualistic pursuits and whose claims of political activism are nothing more, according to him, than an attempt to stave off boredom (54). Exacerbating this disillusionment is the narrator’s loneliness, which is contributing to his death as much as the cancer he also hints is eating away at his body (24, 50, 53, 74).

The lesbian characters the narrator writes into existence are plagued by a similar individualism and if not cynicism, indifference to broader social and political issues. Furthermore, their connections with each other, sexual or otherwise, are doomed to fail and are marred by death or violence in keeping with the narrator’s own sense of alienation. The reconciliation of the protagonists, Alejandra and Irene, at the end of the novel, for instance, is cut short by Irene’s death at the hands of BB’s *novianovio*. In this sense, the characters and the novel as a whole are a veritable reflection of the narrator’s opinions and sentiments—an obvious notion, but one that the narrator goes out of his way to underscore when he states that the interweaving of an author’s thoughts and the parallel events he or she experiences within the text he or she is writing (what, in fact, the narrator is doing) amounts to “una correspondencia, una conversación, una mancuerna, un ESPEJO” (61) ‘a correspondence, a conversation, a set of joined objects, a MIRROR.’ This notion of mirroring as metaphor for a correspondence or dialectical exchange and, indeed, mirrors themselves, are employed tactically by the narrator throughout his novel.

Such a narrative recourse calls on the reader to contemplate the lesbian characters and their livelihoods as a manifestation of the narrator’s disillusioned worldview, and also of the queer sexuality he only partially attempts to hide.

Examples of the latter are to be found in two noteworthy passages involving mirrors or the idea of mirroring. The first is done in reference to Alejandra who, during a somewhat filmic moment while at her familial home, contemplates and kisses her reflection in a wall-size mirror before proceeding to cry (45). This

scene brings to mind the novel's epigraph, a fragment from a poem by the Spanish poet Pedro Salinas:

¡Cuánto rato te he mirado  
sin mirarte a ti, en la imagen  
exacta e inaccesible  
que te traiciona el espejo!  
'Bésame', dices. Te beso,  
y mientras te beso pienso  
en lo fríos que serán  
tus labios en el espejo.

How long have I looked at you  
without looking at you, in the image  
exact and inaccessible  
that the mirror betrays!  
"Kiss me," you say. I kiss you,  
and while I kiss you I think  
of how cold your lips  
will be in the mirror.

The narrator's description of Alejandra—vulnerable and saddened by Irene's betrayal—evokes the same melancholic tone and emotional distancing of the object of desire in Salinas's poem. What is more, Alejandra's actions literally incarnate the central image of the poem, that of lips being pressed against the glass. Considering Salinas's known bisexuality and that many of his love poems lacked Spanish gender markers, this intertextual referencing does more than simply establish a dialogue between Alejandra's representation and Salinas's take on love.<sup>12</sup> By way of this epigraph, the narrator is also positing Salinas's bisexuality and ambiguous expression of sexual desire as a mirror image of his own queer subjectivity and desires.<sup>13</sup>

The second equally revealing mention of mirrors involves the narrator himself.<sup>14</sup> While reminiscing about his failed relationships with women, in particular one named "la FLAKA," and speculating about his own mortality, the narrator poses the question: "¿quién es el más bello en este juego?" 'who is the most beautiful one in this game?', followed by the statement "las espero a todas en el espejo"

(74) 'I wait for all of you [women] in the mirror.' In suggesting that he is the most beautiful player in the game of love and life that both he and his lesbian characters are playing, the narrator shows himself to be in league or competition with these women and draws attention, yet again, to the notion that he identifies with them on a deeper or more personal level. A notable, although passing reference to Salinas in the same paragraph as well as the depiction of himself as the man waiting for them in the mirror, suggest that it is the elusiveness of intimacy and human connection that the narrator shares with his characters as well as the status of sexual outsider and the isolating feelings that accompany such a reality. Whereas the inclusion of Salinas's name has the effect of destabilizing the seemingly heterosexual yearnings the narrator is projecting, the mirror in this instance constitutes a metaphor for the closet. It can be argued that this is the case given a previous passage in which the narrator alludes to himself as the someone lurking in Irene's closet who she senses is spying on her, a someone that as he stresses "no quiere salir DE ALLÍ" (25) 'does not want to come out OF THERE.'

Although not a form of intertextual mirroring per se, in this second instance the narrator is still making use of the *leitmotif* of the mirror to insinuate (rather than explicitly declare) his bisexuality or homosexuality. That the narrator refers to himself as being in the closet or in the mirror is as much a ploy as is using Salinas's poetry. Both draw attention to the fact that the narrator is donning a mask and that although he is not keen on removing it completely, he is still willing to expose his queerness. The lesbian characters the narrator writes into existence are just as integral to this process. Made in the image of the narrator, they reflect, to a certain extent, the narrator's queer desires and subjectivity as well as the disillusionment that pervades every aspect of his life. Because their representation also calls to mind the type of sexual visibility linked to mainstream depictions of gay and lesbian lifestyles, it has the added effect of showcasing the impact dominant discourses of sexualities have had in Guatemala. In short, these lesbian characters enact a cosmo-visibility that coexists alongside the alternate queer visibility of the narrator.

## Conclusion

As the previous exploration of *Labios* details, the narrator is engaged in a highly nuanced game of hide and seek concerning his own queer subjectivity and desires. He does not purport a public gay identity. Yet the novel about lesbians that he is writing betrays his homosexuality just the same. The narrator may seemingly attempt to hide his queerness by underscoring and contemplating that of his lesbian subjects, but ultimately comes out of hiding in one way or another. In fact, he baits readers with his intertextual references and use of mirrors, challenging them to discover his hiding place and queerness. To recall Quiroga one last time, this narrator can be said to be engaged in a strategic “coding” of his sexuality, giving way to an alternative mode of sexual minority visibility that does not presuppose a set gay or lesbian identity nor entail a public process of coming out.

There is more at stake than the enactment of a destabilizing mode of queer visibility by the narrator. The ways in which he depicts and contemplates the lesbianism and livelihoods of his characters do not affirm his own queer positioning, but the visibility narratives upheld by dominant discourses of gay and lesbian identity politics and consumer-oriented portrayals of gay and lesbian urban lifestyles. This complex interplay of different modes of visibility signals what is termed here *visibilidad cosmo-queer*, an articulation of sexual minority visibility that speaks to the diverse subjectivities, experiences, expressions of sexuality, and livelihoods of sexual minorities in postwar Guatemala. Bringing to light *visibilidad cosmo-queer* is one of the significant contributions of *Labios* to the broader struggles for sexual minority visibility and political representation in Central America, including the bearing that global and local factors have on how LGBT individuals see and experience their sexuality. Within the context of an emergent corpus of Central American literature that engages with the reality of sexual minorities in the region, it can further be argued that the project of visibility in which this text is engaged does not end here. Echeverría, and other emergent writers like him, are forcing scholars to recognize that Central America also has a claim to Latin American lesbian, gay, and queer studies.

## Notes

- 1 See Sylvia Molloy's essay, "Too Wilde for Comfort: Desire and Ideology in Fin-de-siècle Latin America" (1992) and Oscar Montero's "Modernismo and Homophobia: Darío and Rodó" (1997).
- 2 Costa Rica follows a different pattern. LGBT organizations first emerged in Costa Rica in the 1980s in response to the global AIDS epidemic.
- 3 Recent studies document this development, including Babb (2010), Susan Berger (2006), and Millie Thayer (2010).
- 4 Perhaps the most noteworthy publication in this regard is the 2009 special issue of *Istmo: Revista virtual de estudios literarios y culturales centroamericanos* on "*Sexualidades en Centroamérica*."
- 5 Contemporary writers from Guatemala, El Salvador, and Nicaragua whose work is recognized in this respect include Arturo Arias, Maurice Echeverría, Jacinta Escudos, Ronald Flores, Claudia Hernández, Jessica Masaya Portocarrero, Mildred Hernández, and María del Carmen Pérez Cuadra, as is the Costa Rican anthology *La gruta y el arcoiris* (2009), the first compilation of gay and lesbian literature to be published in any Central American country.
- 6 All translations are my own, including quotes from primary and secondary sources.
- 7 The categorization "la generación de los desencantados" is referenced by Echeverría in the interview "Ya hice mis paces con Guatemala" (2009) and by Jacinta Escudos in her editorial "Flotante: Maurice Echeverría" (2004).
- 8 For discussions regarding Central American postwar writers see Beatriz Cortez (2010), Misha Kokotovic (2006), Héctor Leyva (2005), Werner Mackenbach (2004), Alexandra Ortiz Wallner (2001), and Padilla (2008, 2009).
- 9 According to the news report "Activistas Lesbianas" by the Sexual Diversity News Agency/Agencia de Noticias Sobre la Diversidad Sexual (ANODIS), Vanesa Anzora, a transvestite and activist member of the Coordinating Citizenship Coalition for Sexual Diversity/Coalición Coordinadora Ciudadana para la Diversidad Sexual (CCDS), was killed on July 2004 after participating in the Gay Pride Parade in Guatemala City. The report also mentioned death threats received by members of Lesbiradas, the only out lesbian organization in Guatemala, during that same month, as well as numerous attacks perpetrated against the Organization of Support of an Integral Sexuality Against AIDS/Organización de Apoyo a una Sexualidad Integral Frente a la SIDA (OASIS), including the kidnapping of its president Jorge López in 2003.
- 10 See the critical volume *Queer Globalizations* (2002), Dennis Altman's "Global Gaze/Global Gays" (2001) and Martin F. Manalansan IV's "In the Shadows of

Stonewall" (1995).

11 The two referenced studies are Ana Yolanda Contreras's "Mujeres, lesbianas y el ámbito laboral guatemalteco influenciado por la globalización" (2009) and Claudia García's "Mirando al bies" (2009).

12 See David William Foster's introduction to *Spanish Writers on Gay and Lesbian Themes* (1994).

13 García also comments on Echeverría's use of Salinas's poem in her analysis of *Labios*. She discusses the poem in relation to another cinematographic intertextual reference present in the novel, Pedro Almodóvar's film *La ley del deseo* (1987) whose opening scene depicts a film crew in the middle of shooting a pornographic movie. According to García, Echeverría's portrayal of BB and Irene's sexual encounter is reminiscent of this scene. The image of female lips against the mirror conjured in Salinas's poem constitutes, for García, another link between Echeverría's novel and Almodóvar's film because in the same opening scene of the movie one of the actors is instructed by the director to kiss his own reflection in the mirror. Although García highlights the connection between the epigraph and Almodóvar's film, she does not contemplate the possible association between the epigraph, a work by Salinas, a poet known to be bisexual, and the narrator's own queerness.

14 Although this possibility is not explored here, another form of mirroring that takes place in the novel is the appearance of a character named Mauricio, a friend and ex-lover of Alejandra's who is arguably the narrator himself. With features akin to those of the actual author—thin, blonde, and sporting glasses—this character/narrator "Mauricio" is also a reflection of Maurice Echeverría.

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