

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE QUEER AND THE DOG IN ALEJANDRO GONZÁLEZ IÑÁRRITU'S *AMORES PERROS* (2000): A MASCULINITY AT WAR

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Abstract: The Mexican New Wave film *Amores perros* (2000) directed by Alejandro González Iñárritu was an international commercial success and was highly acclaimed by critics. Even though it has been extensively studied, certain aspects of the film have been neglected, in particular the existence of a queer undercurrent. In this essay I argue that *Amores perros* offers a portrayal of masculinity as both a gender performance and a return to animal instinct. The latter is emphasized through the canine allegory which is constantly present in the film. Masculinity is shown more in terms of hypermasculinity as it is characterized by aggression, violence, rivalry, sexual promiscuity and demonstrations of pugnacity. Not only are men at war against each other, but they also appear to be at war with themselves and this is all the more evident in the context of queer masculinity. Indeed, men struggle to maintain their (hyper)masculine image, yet certain inconsistencies in some of the male characters' behavior or appearance reveal their queerness and thus lack of compliance with the ideals of *machismo*. In short, this essay highlights the extent to which gender roles and in this particular case the *machista* role, imprison individuals and lead to a vicious circle of violence and death allegorized by the dog fighting in the film; alternative manifestations of masculinity must be repressed for survival and thus are often hidden behind an exaggerated version of mainstream masculinity. This repression however is just another symptom of a gender order in crisis.

This essay explores aspects of the portrayal of masculinity in the internationally successful debut feature film of Mexican director Alejandro González Iñárritu: *Amores perros* (2000), a title translated into English as *Love's a Bitch*. The film was both commercially successful and critically acclaimed: it received numerous awards at different festivals including Cannes, Tokyo, Los Angeles, Havana, Chicago, Sao Paulo and Edinburgh. It was also nominated for an Academy Award for Best Non-English Language Film (D'Lugo 2003: 221) and for Best Foreign Film at the Golden Globes despite the censorship problems it had to face in Germany and the UK due to the dog fighting scenes (Smith 2003: 13). It also obtained a BAFTA for Best Film not in the English Language and the Mexican Academy of Film's Ariel awards in several categories (Best Director, Best Actor, Best Cinematography and Best Editing), including the Golden Ariel (Wood 2006: 90-91). *Amores perros* is the first film in Iñárritu's trilogy of death; it was followed by *21 Grams* (2003) and *Babel* (2006).

The film is divided into three parts, each one deals with characters from completely different social backgrounds and all are linked by a tragic car accident in Mexico City which is the opening scene of the film. In this article, I only focus on the first episode of the film named 'Octavio y Susana' and in particular on the minor characters of El Jarocho and Mauricio. This episode concentrates on characters from the Mexican lower-class. Octavio and Ramiro are brothers and they live with their mother Doña Concha and Ramiro's wife, Susana and their baby son, Rodrigo. Octavio is infatuated with Susana, he begins a love affair with her and plans to escape

to northern city Ciudad Juárez with her and the baby. His interest in her appears to stem at least partly from his rivalry with his brother. Octavio uses their dog Cofi in illegal dog fights against the dogs of street bully El Jarocho in order to save money to leave the capital with his sister-in-law.

I argue that masculinity in this film is represented as both a gender performance and a return to animal instinct and that it is portrayed in an extremely negative light as men are compared to dogs and monsters who not only attempt to control and contain women, but are also constantly at war against one another and with themselves. Indeed, men are depicted as competitive, aggressive, violent, domineering, sexually promiscuous, unfaithful, corrupt and selfish. In other words, they are portrayed as hypermasculine or *machistas* to use a specifically Mexican concept. In this way, the film shows a gender order which is in crisis and in urgent need of change. *Amores perros* has been criticized for offering stereotypical portrayals of male and female characters, which seems unfair when the film is analysed in more depth. The two aspects that this article will deal with are the tension between performance and instinct in the male characters' behavior and the queer undercurrent noticeable in certain characters, namely El Jarocho and Mauricio (the 'manager' of the dog fighting business). Both aspects appear to be symptoms of a gender order in crisis reflecting a national crisis.

Performance and Instinct in *Amores perros*

Post-structuralist philosopher and theorist Judith Butler who contributed a great deal to the fields of feminism and queer theory with her books *Gender Trouble: Feminism and The Subversion of Identity* (1990) and *Bodies That Matter: On The Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (1993) amongst others, developed the theory of gender performativity. This theory maintains that gender is a performance, a masquerade and Butler thus argues that: 'There is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very "expressions" that are said to be its results' (1990: 33). Butler not only finds gender roles to be unnatural, but she also explains the constructed status of heterosexuality, which is made to appear natural in order to reinforce and ensure its power as an institution: 'The replication of heterosexual constructs in non-heterosexual frames brings into relief the utterly constructed status of the so-called heterosexual original. Thus, gay is to straight not as copy is to original, but, rather, as copy is to copy' (1990: 41). In short, what Butler affirms is that there is no original heterosexuality or original masculine and feminine, it is all fictitious: 'The notion of gender parody defended here does not assume that there is an original which such parodic identities imitate. Indeed, the parody is of the very notion of an original (...)' (1990: 175). The concept of masquerade to which Butler refers to resonates with Mexican writer Octavio Paz's historically and socially grounded analysis of Mexican society and identity in his acclaimed work *El laberinto de la soledad* (1950), as he also discusses the concept of 'the mask'. These theories serve here as an illuminating template to better understand the portrayal of masculinity and in particular its representation as a cultural performance, which must be complied with in order to be socially integrated.

As already mentioned, masculinity in the Mexican context often equals *machismo*, which David Gilmore defines as 'an extreme form of manly images and codes', or in other words a type of hypermasculinity (1990: 16 cited Gutmann 1996: 25). Matthew Gutmann emphasizes that *machismo* is related to male sexual conquest, procreation, bragging and the defiance of death (1996: 26). According to Paz, being a man in the Mexican context implies impenetrability and not displaying emotions (1950: 34). All these definitions help to grasp the masculine performance to which the male characters of *Amores perros* adhere in order to be socially recognised. Of course, they remain invisible citizens, as it is the lower-class which is concerned here,

but they still need to be recognised within their social sphere by fulfilling certain gender and social expectations, which in this case imply demonstrations of pugnacity. The conventions of the masculine performance however have precipitated a return to nature, which is perhaps even more evident within the lower-class, as it is allegorised through the dog fights.

Indeed, the numerous dog fights which take place in the film are crucial as they serve to establish a comparison between hypermasculine and canine behavior. According to Geoffrey Kantaris: 'The film uses dog-fighting as a displaced metaphor, an allegory even, for human violence, and indeed dog-fetishism substitute for impeded human relationships. (...) At an even more fundamental level, the dog metaphor functions to de-fetishise social relations for the spectator' (2003: 186-187). The fights represent aggression, violence, impulsiveness, and rivalry. In other words, despite the fact that hypermasculinity is portrayed as performance, upholding Butler's theories which maintain that gender is based on cultural requirements rather than natural ones, Iñárritu shows that in the Mexican context, the enactment of masculinity has led men to behave like dogs and the animal instinct has overtaken the human. This idea has precedents in Mexican discourses on identity. In this regard, it is interesting that the Cannes press kit of the film was described as a 'letter-box format and boasted gorgeously distorted images of the actors, both human and animal, merging and disintegrating into blurred go-faster stripes' (Smith 2003: 83). This image recalls the famous mural by Diego Rivera, *Carnaval de la vida mexicana* (1936), displayed in El Palacio de Bellas Artes in Mexico City. Two parts of the mural, namely 'La dictadura' and 'México folklórico y turístico', also feature humanised animals or humans animalised.

Not only does the first dog fight scene in which Octavio and El Jarocho's dogs compete establish a comparison between (hyper)masculinity and canine behaviour due to the noteworthy editing (as the previous scene featured Ramiro hitting Octavio in the shower),¹ but it also stresses (hyper)masculinity as performance in an alternative way. Indeed, the dog fights take place in a pit and are arranged so that the dogs have no choice but to fight: these fights function as entertainment for lower-class Mexican men. In other words, the dog fights also constitute a type of performance and are in fact a 'cultural' event. In this sense they echo the concept of (hyper)masculinity as performance and cultural in addition to displaying the animalistic side of (hyper)masculinity. The dog fights serve as an allegory of (hyper)masculine performance in the Mexican context, where men are expected to behave in certain ways competing against each other and enclosed in restricted gender roles just as the dogs are enclosed in a restricted space with no choice but to fight to death. Thus, not only is (hyper)masculinity aligned with canine behaviour in the sense that it appears to return to nature, but dog fighting as performance alludes to the destructive nature of restrictive gender roles. The director thus establishes a connection between teaching a dog to fight and teaching a man to be a man (especially within the Mexican context in which manliness is characterized by rivalry and pugnacity), further blurring the lines between the natural and the cultural.

Magaly León goes as far as to link this portrayal of *machismo* to a generalised 'guerra civil subterránea' (underground civil war) (2000: 16 cited Schaefer 2003: 92). What is meant by this 'underground civil war' is that the country lacks consistently applied laws and what prevails is thus the 'law of the jungle'. Indeed, all of the male characters are depicted as being extremely individualistic. This phenomenon is strongly linked to *machismo*, as it is symptomatic of the masculine mentality of competition and self-centeredness. Brothers Octavio and Ramiro are at war as are Octavio and El Jarocho. The dog fighting allegory stands specifically for this male war. Both are part of the underground, never officially declared, and thus lacking clearly defined rules. The fact that the dog fights end with the death of one of the

animals is also significant, as death is also part of the men's war here. This emphasises the fact that the 'guerra civil subterránea' has no limits, a notion well illustrated by the scene in which El Jarocho shoots Cofi and Octavio responds by stabbing El Jarocho in the stomach.

It is also interesting when comparing the dog fights to the male war to examine the positions of the characters in the film. During the fights, the dogs stand facing each other, ready to attack. This positioning recurs several times in the film between the different male protagonists and of course recalls any war with the enemies facing each other.² One illustration of this positioning occurs in the scene where El Jarocho decides to let his dog, Pancho, kill all of El Chivo's stray dogs (El Chivo is a character from the third episode of the film). El Chivo produces a knife and stands to face El Jarocho, who then changes his mind and retreats. This scene is also interesting since it precedes the scene in which El Jarocho first threatens Octavio, and thus emphasises the extent to which El Jarocho's victims are carefully chosen. The positioning of rivals facing each other also occurs many times between Ramiro and Octavio, for example when they eat opposite each other rather than next to each other. The oppressive conventions of masculinity as represented in *Amores perros* and the tension between fulfilling a cultural performance and a precipitated return to animal instinct leads men to be at war against one another. The following section emphasises how these same men are not only at war against other men but also with themselves. Although this is true of all male characters in the film, it is more evident in the context of a repressed queerness noticeable in some characters.

The Queer Undercurrent in *Amores perros*

Heterosexuality and the heterosexual lifestyle are cornerstones of what defines *machismo* even though some theorists argue that what counts when evaluating *machismo* is the sexual role performed by the individual and whether he is active or passive. In this regard, Prieur explains that: 'The Spanish word heterosexual is rarely used, so many do not have an opinion of what it means, but some think that being heterosexual is being a man, or being normal – and a man is a man, or is normal, as long as he looks like a man and sticks to the active role, regardless of whether he has sex with women or men' (1996: 87). Despite this, on a practical level, most of the time *machismo* excludes homosexuality (whether active or passive) as a possibility and therefore any queerness (in gender or sexual performance) must be hidden. This of course is due to the fact that gender definitions are so restrictive. El Jarocho provides us with an illustration of this, as he attempts to conceal his sexuality behind an extremely hyper-masculine performance and a feminisation of other men.

El Jarocho is the street bully and he is feared by most men in the neighbourhood. He has a group of followers, his henchmen and has been the victor at the dog fights for some time winning ten fights in a row. He appears very *machista*, involved in dog fights, leading a group of aggressive bullies and constantly attempting to inspire fear in others, as for example when he threatens Octavio after Cofi has killed his dog, Pancho, in the street (an incident provoked by El Jarocho himself):

El Jarocho: ¡Bajen al Pancho! Mira no más cómo me lo dejó cabrón. Ese animal no valía menos de veinte mil pesos, ¿sabías? (Bring Pancho out of the car! Look what's left of him because of your dog. This animal was worth at least 20,000 pesos, did you know that?)

Octavio: Pues deberías diseccionarlo buey, se vería bien en la sala de tu casa. (Well you should dissect it man, it would look good in your living room.)

El Jarocho: No te quieras hacer el chistosito pinche escuincle. Tienes de dos sopas o me lo pagas, o me lo pagas, cabrón. (Don't try to be smart with me stupid kid. You have two options, either you pay me for this or you pay me, man.)

Octavio: ¿Sí por qué te lo voy a andar pagando yo buey? (Yeah and why the hell would I pay you for this ?)

El Jarocho: Te vas a poner mamón. Orale. (Are you going to be a smartass?)

Octavio: No, no, oye, oye. ¿Pero pues tú por qué le andas echando al Pancho? (No, no but hey why did you send Pancho after him ?)

El Jarocho: Mira buey, te lo perdono si me das a cambio tu perrito. (Look man I will forgive you if you give me your dog in exchange)

Octavio: No seas pendejo. (You must be kidding!)

El Jarocho: Pues ahorrale, eh. Que te lo voy a cobrar cabrón. (Well then start saving up, because I am going to charge you for this.)

Jorge (Octavio's friend): ¿Por qué mejor no se lo cobras a Ramiro a ver si él es tan lansa. O le sacas a que te rompa otra vez tu madre? (Why don't you charge Ramiro instead and see if he is so nice. Or are you scared he might beat you up again?)

El Jarocho: No le saco cabrón. Me cae que no me voy a quedar como pendejo, eh. ¿Entiendes, Octavio? Vámonos. (I am not scared asshole. And I won't let you get away with this, do you understand Octavio? Let's go.)

What makes El Jarocho appear hypermasculine in this scene is the fact that he places himself in a position of superiority. First he is the leader of his group of henchmen which is evident when he orders his 'boys' to bring the dog's body to him ('¡Bajen al Pancho!'), secondly he is the driver of the car and is thus perceived as the one who controls (although this control is often only illusionary). As well as that, he puts himself in a position of superiority with Octavio by talking down to him and calling him names such as 'pinche escuincle' (stupid kid). It is interesting to note that El Jarocho is careful about who he threatens and in what situation, ensuring that he is always in a privileged position. In this particular case, he has his friends to back him up and Octavio and Jorge at this point in the film do not appear dangerous, but rather innocent and helpless.³ As Jorge suggests, El Jarocho would not threaten Ramiro in such a way, were his friends not present to defend him.

As soon as El Jarocho sees Octavio at the dog fights, he makes a comment comparing Octavio to a little girl or a sissy, in order to belittle him and thus reaffirm his own sense of masculinity and superiority. El Jarocho addresses Mauricio, referring to Octavio, saying: 'Qué, ¿Desde cuando le entras con niñas?' (Since when do you play with sissies?) Then, to Octavio, he says: 'Estoy hablando con el dueño del circo reinito' (I am talking with the owner of the circus little king) and winks at Octavio. The use of the diminutive in 'reinito', when addressing Octavio is intended to subordinate him, as is the refusal to pay attention to him. By using the words 'niñas' and 'reinito' with the diminutives, El Jarocho feminises Octavio (niñas means little girls but could be translated here as sissies) and reduces him to 'something less than a man', that is, to a homosexual man (and even a homosexual man in the passive position as he feminises Octavio).⁴ In this way, he can feel more "manly" and avoid being perceived as gay, or at least that is his intention. At the final dog fight, El Jarocho addresses Octavio as 'muñequita' after shooting Cofi: 'Se me fue un tiro muñequita.' (The shot just went off dolly.) He adds: '¡No anden de chillones niñas!' (Don't go off crying sissies!) By using terms such as 'muñequita', 'niñas' and 'chillones', he repudiates the feminine and that which is associated with it traditionally (that is, tears) and thus believes that in this way he distances himself from it.

El Jarocho thus displays a misogynistic and homophobic attitude, which according to Michael Kimmel, may reveal a fear of being uncovered as not male enough: 'Homophobia is more than the irrational fear of gay men, more than the fear that we may be perceived as gay... Homophobia is the fear that other men will unmask us, emasculate us, reveal to us and the world that we do not measure up, that

we are not real men' (1994: 131). Prieur refers to this power struggle in her study of homosexuality in Mexico, when she says: 'My interpretation would be that men display their masculinity by putting their fellows in feminine or subordinate positions' (1996: 96). She makes use of Eduardo Archetti's work to support this position: 'Archetti interprets this as a ritual where men's identity is constructed by underscoring the difference between being a man and being a homosexual, where being a man stands for power, strength, independence and authority. Reducing the other to less than a man, to a homosexual, implies an enhancement of one's own masculinity, while showing that the other is unable to defend his masculine identity' (Prieur 1996: 96). The relationship between homophobia and the repudiation of the feminine is also noted by Kimmel (1994: 126-127). This strategy has ironic results as it causes El Jarocho to appear simultaneously *machista* and queer. Indeed, by constantly subordinating or feminising other men around him he draws further attention to his own 'masculinity' and provokes further questioning about it instead of reaffirming it.

The ambiguity surrounding El Jarocho's masculinity and sexuality in comparison to that of Octavio or Ramiro is reinforced by the fact that he is never seen with a woman⁵ and he never physically fights another man.⁶ Instead he uses his dogs to reaffirm his masculinity as well as his gun when he shoots Cofi, illustrating the fact that he cannot bear to lose against Octavio (as it clearly undermines his sense of masculinity and its approval by others). The gun, with its obvious phallic connotations, thus acts as a sort of substitute masculinity for El Jarocho. Interestingly, after El Jarocho has shot Cofi, Octavio returns and stabs him saying: '¡Por puto!' (This is for being an asshole!) This ironic choice of phrase, 'puto' in Mexico meaning faggot but also used as 'asshole', suggests that El Jarocho's performance has been uncovered. It is also noteworthy that Octavio uses a knife as a weapon against El Jarocho, as the term 'puñal' (dagger), is also used in Mexico to refer pejoratively to a gay man.

During his commentary on the film, Iñárritu confirms that the ambiguity surrounding El Jarocho's character, and in particular his sexuality, is intentional. His bleached blond hair, a common look in gay male communities, leads to interrogation of his sexual orientation as do his numerous ear-rings. The tattoos, in contrast, suggest pugnacity. Therefore it seems that El Jarocho adopts extremely *machista* behaviour in order to hide a gender and sexual inadequacy of his own or in order to pass as straight. In addition, as Kantaris emphasises in his article on gender and violence (2004: unpaginated), street violence can in some cases be used as a masquerade for one's sexuality. In short, El Jarocho's character demonstrates Butler's theory of gender performativity, and even the ways in which gender performance can be used to pass as, a crucial concept in queer theory.⁷ Indeed, Ramiro, Octavio and El Jarocho all appear as though they are constantly trying to prove their masculinity. According to Judith Hicks Stiehm, masculinity, unlike femininity, needs to be reaffirmed and thus appears to be more of a performance than its counterpart:

"Biology is certainly not destiny, but it remains true that women can give birth to and nurse the young, while men cannot. In contrast, there is nothing men can do that women cannot. Because men do not have a unique capacity by which to define themselves, they tend to define themselves by oppositeness - specifically, as being the opposite to women. (...) Again, because their special role is only socially defined, men need to assert and protect it. This is because their masculinity is vulnerable, more vulnerable than women's femininity" (2000: 224).

Mauricio is another questionable character in terms of gender and sexuality. First of all, with regard to his physical appearance, his numerous gold chains, bracelets and rings give him a kitschy look, particularly since he is a lower-class citizen.⁸ This

particular look and choice of fashion, although related to social class, is also associated with camp, a term which Susan Sontag links to homosexual cultures:

“The peculiar relation between Camp taste and homosexuality has to be explained. While it's not true that Camp taste is homosexual taste, there is no doubt a peculiar affinity and overlap. (...) So, not all homosexuals have Camp taste. But homosexuals, by and large, constitute the vanguard -- and the most articulate audience -- of Camp’ (1964: unpaginated).

As Sontag clarifies, ‘camp’ is first and foremost a mode of aestheticism, she associates it with a certain bad taste, but one which is liberating and does not take itself seriously: “The experiences of Camp are based on the great discovery that the sensibility of high culture has no monopoly upon refinement. Camp asserts that good taste is not simply good taste; that there exists, indeed, a good taste of bad taste” (1964). Camp is part of Mauricio’s looks, but also of his actions, when for instance he licks his plate after having finished his food and does this in front of Octavio and Jorge. In fact, this particular action is reflected somehow in the following quotation by Sontag: ‘The old-style dandy hated vulgarity. The new-style dandy, the lover of Camp, appreciates vulgarity. Where the dandy would be continually offended or bored, the connoisseur of Camp is continually amused, delighted. The dandy held a perfumed handkerchief to his nostrils and was liable to swoon; the connoisseur of Camp sniffs the stink and prides himself on his strong nerves’ (1964: unpaginated).

In short, Mauricio’s style not only testifies his social class, but also links him to homosexuality. Other significant details reinforce his queerness such as the scene in which he hands money to El Jarocho who gives him a tap on the buttocks. This gesture calls into question both characters’ sexuality. Later, as Mauricio agrees to commence a business arrangement with Octavio and his fighting dog, he offers Octavio money which he has taken from his underpants, a gesture with obvious sexual connotations and which again denotes a camp style. Mauricio does not attempt to reaffirm his masculinity constantly in the same way as El Jarocho does, but his dog-fighting business contributes greatly to his manly image and approval by others. In other words, his business serves as his passing device as it is illegal, dangerous and ruthless, part of the underground economy and therefore *macho*. Besides, the fact that he has several men working for him to whom he gives orders contributes to his masculine image.

In short, both El Jarocho and Mauricio display a *machista* image in order to pass as heterosexual males while often employing other devices to emphasise their (hyper)masculinity (dogs, business, subordinates, guns). The idea of passing is an important concept within queer politics since it supports the notion that gender is merely a performance and that one can ‘be’ something and pass as something else.⁹ However, it is the inconsistencies in El Jarocho and Mauricio’s appearances and performances that betray them. In other words, these characters make the performance of (hyper)masculinity all the more evident, since they appear to use performance as a disguise. However, their repressed queerness also suggests the restrictiveness of the current gender order in Mexico as it is shown in the film. In this way, it alludes to a crisis in the gender order and by extension a national crisis. The canine allegory and in particular the dog fights which symbolise the underground war taking place in Mexico City is another aspect of the film which serves to suggest this crisis in the gender order and in particular in what defines masculinity.

In conclusion, *Amores perros* presents us with a violent masculinity pulled between a restrictive gender performance and a savage return to nature and the law of the jungle. Not only are men at war against each other including against their own brothers, but they also appear to struggle with themselves and their own identities. This seems to be partly due to such a restrictive gender order and the repression of homosexuality and queerness is just one symptom of this current crisis in Mexico.

Although many critics have perceived *Amores perros* as reactionary with regards to gender, another perspective, such as the one suggested here, could classify *Amores perros* as much more progressive in that it constitutes an urgent call for change in society, change which it appears, need not only come from political institutions but also from individuals and particularly male individuals as they are the ones who hold most power and perpetrate most violence as it is shown in the film. The fact that each episode focuses on male characters at different stages of their lives highlights the fact that they are somehow at the centre of this national crisis represented metaphorically through the car crash. So as Schaefer says: 'Even if we don't know what we are waiting for, we must break our addiction to sleep and let the dogs out, for the frightening visions of sleep cannot hold a candle to the potential horrors of our waking hours' (2003: 173). To the expression 'Let the dogs out' one should add 'Let masculinity out', or in more general terms 'Let gender out', that is free society from its restrictive gender roles, which incarcerate individuals and society and prevent any real progress.

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NOTES

¹ Laura Podalsky notes the significance of the editing when referring to the association between the dogfights and fraternal rivalry between Octavio and Ramiro: 'Taking place within the confines of their small kitchen, the family conflict is situated between scenes of a dogfight taking place in a nearby building. This sequencing creates an interesting parallel between the two 'combat zones' and characterizes Octavio and Ramiro as a pair of vicious dogs engaged in a meaningless battle to the death for the right to rule over an already disintegrating family home' (2003: 282).

² However, as an underground war lacking any rules, characters also strike from behind at many stages.

³ This is relative of course, as Octavio is certainly not completely innocent; however he is not yet familiar with the dog fights. His aggression mounts as he becomes more confident within this sphere.

⁴ Prieur explains that: 'Locally, the Spanish word *homosexual* is used to denote a man in the woman's role who has sex with a masculine man – ideally, he retains the passive role' (1996: 86). By feminizing Octavio, *El Jarocho* not only brings attention to the fact that he may be homosexual, but also that he probably takes on the role of the woman in the relationship, that is, the passive role.

⁵ The fact that he is never seen with a woman may be a further indication of his queerness; however this fact alone would be insufficient to support such a conclusion, since this may simply be due to the fact that *El Jarocho* is a minor character and his personal life is therefore neglected in the film. He is only observed in the context of the dog fights or in the street which are both male environments.

⁶ Although Octavio and Ramiro choose their moments to fight each other carefully to ensure their success, *El Jarocho* is not seen at any time to physically strike another man.

⁷ Butler illustrates the importance of the concept of passing through her analysis of Nella Larsen's *Passing* (1992) in which the character Clare passes as white thanks to the lightness of her skin. Her passing is what enables her to maintain her relationship with her white racist husband Bellew. After her deception is discovered, she dies (1993: 167-185). This shows how important passing can be in a repressive social order where one either belongs or does not and if (s)he does not belong, (s)he dies, whether this death is literal or social. This explains why *El Jarocho* makes such an effort in order to fit in and disassociate himself from any suspicions which may arise in relation to his sexual orientation. However, his excessive effort is actually what 'outs' him.

⁸ Kitsch is in fact a term used by the director in the commentary on the film when referring to the aesthetics of the lower-class world, an aesthetics which is even more present in the case of the character of Mauricio.

⁹ The term 'be' here is problematic however, since according to Butler, there is no essential being, it is all only a performance. Thus I am not arguing here that *El Jarocho* and Mauricio are essentially

homosexual. Their *machista* performance is of course part of their identity; however it is used to cover up certain desires they may have and which would not be acceptable in this social context.

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