

The dismemory of homosexual discourse: analytical approach to the short story "Sergio el bailador" by Antonio Santos.

La desmemoria del discurso homosexual: acercamiento analítico al cuento
"Sergio el bailador" de Antonio Santos.

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Abstract:

This article provides a socio-critical analysis of Antonio Santos' short story "Sergio el bailador" (Sergio the Dancer), addressing the construction of cultural memory and its relationship with homosexual identity. Through the study of the discourses present in the narrative, especially those recorded in the main character's diary, it examines how the identity elements of the gay subject are configured and diluted in a specific social context. The analysis highlights intertextuality, the weight of cultural stigmas, and the role of forgetting in the amnesia of homosexual discourse.

Keywords: Discourse. Memory. Identity. Gay.

Abstract:

This article performs a socio-critical analysis of the short story "Sergio el bailador" by Antonio Santos, addressing the construction of cultural memory and its relationship with homosexual identity. Through the study of the discourses present in the narrative, especially those inscribed in the notebook of memories of the main character, it is examined how the identity elements of the gay subject are configured and diluted in a specific social context. The analysis highlights the intertextuality, the weight of cultural stigmas and the role of oblivion in the dismemory of the homosexual discourse.

Key words: Discourse. Memory. Identity. Gay.

"Although Sergio Hernán left his mark,
he was forgotten
because everything passes and
transforms."

Antonio Santos, *Sergio el bailador*.

When reflecting on the concepts of *memory* and *identity*, it is impossible not to notice the similarity between the two terms, as they are closely related. While memory refers to the act of remembering, identity focuses on the set of characteristics and circumstances that distinguish a person or social group. Literature, and especially the narrative genre, uses memory as a resource to represent the identity of a society, culture, gender, ideology, etc. For this reason, this text aims to provide an analytical approach to the short story "Sergio el bailador" by Antonio Santos (1968), which forms part of the anthology *Si era dicha o dolor* (2018) and was edited by Dr. Luis Martín Ulloa (1967). However, it is important to emphasise that this analysis focuses primarily on the discourses that circumscribe the narrative and construct a *cultural memory* (which will be discussed later) and that, in addition, the sociocritical vision has been taken as a theoretical reference to understand the enunciation of the social and cultural elements that shape a cultural identity within the work in question.

Firstly, it is necessary to define the term *cultural memory*. Manuel Maldonado Alemán (2010) revisits this concept in contrast to *communicative memory*, both of which were originally proposed by Aleida Assmann and Jan Assmann and which, according to Maldonado, correlate and complement each other. That is, while "collective memory draws on biographical recollection and is based on the social interaction of everyday life. [...] Cultural memory, on the other hand, is based on the recollection of objectifications that are firmly established in a society" (p. 174). Therefore, the difference between the two types of memory lies not in a temporal distance, but in the modality of recollection. Likewise, *cultural memory* does not focus solely on the oral and active socialisation of discourse, as *communicative memory* does, but includes multiple codes, media and forms of discourse (journalistic, historiographical, biographical, literary, audiovisual, etc.) that shape it and allow for the prevalence of a collective identity. That is why, when approaching the story of "Sergio the dancer," it is necessary to observe the multiple discourses, both biographical and social and cultural, that energise and construct a memory of the protagonist in the narrative.

As can be seen, gay narrative centres on the figure of the homosexual man, which will be shaped according to the era and context of the authors in question. Commonly, when talking about gay narrative, two thematic possibilities are raised: the homoerotic novel and the romance novel (Kolakowski, 2016). The former relates to desire and implicit and explicit discursive constructions of the sexual and carnal relationship between two men, while the latter alludes to the more emotional and romantic aspects of homosexual relationships. However, the gay short story has established itself within narrative as a more versatile literary form, or as Ernesto Reséndiz (2018) puts it:

The short story, rather than poetry, the novel, theatre, chronicles or memoirs, is the most cultivated genre of gay literature in Mexico during the 20th century. Its conciseness [...] makes it a wonderful medium for expressing the experiences of homosexuals, their fantasies, their anxieties, their sorrows, their passions, their joys, their memories and their secrets (Reséndiz, 2018, p.99).

If we start from this assumption, the story we are interested in not only represents the romance and desire between two men, but also, when reading Antonio Santos' story, we can appreciate the fantasies, anxieties, memories, secrets and other elements that make up gay short stories and, consequently, these elements will be the construction of an identity based on the cultural memory of the character.

The story of "Sergio el bailador" can be summarised as the story of Sergio Hernán, a man who is on the verge of death after a car accident and who turns to a close friend, who acts as the narrative voice, to rescue his notebook of memories from his mother's house. In the notebook, which is actually a diary, the anecdotes function, on a narratological level, as flashbacks that affect the chronological order of the narrative sequences. In this way, we can access the construction of the memory of the gay protagonist and the discourses that circumscribe it. On the other hand, it is necessary to mention that the character of Sergio Hernán has its intertextual basis in the song "Sergio el bailador," performed by the Mexican musical group *Bronco*. This relationship is evident from the title and the first paragraph of the story:

I live near Guadalajara, in a growing municipality in the metropolitan area. Today I want to tell you the story of Sergio Hernán. It is a true story, the evidence being a notebook of memories set in the last third of the 20th century. Have you heard the song "Sergio el bailador"? I would like to introduce the character in life, but he dies (Santos, 2019, p.45).

Undoubtedly, this intertextuality is relevant at the diegetic level, as it completely determines the narrative strategy of the story. We have the character of a friend who represents the intradiegetic narrative voice and who recounts the events of Sergio Hernán's life as a witness to his life, which establishes a parallel with the song, since in it, the voice of a friend is also what characterises Sergio the dancer and portrays him as a man who causes a sensation with his movements and his particular way of dancing, which are characteristics that he also shares with the character in the story and which, as León Guillermo Gutiérrez (2016) mentions, establishes an archetype of the homosexual figure within a cultural community.

At this point, it should be noted that the discourses that are perceived as constructing the memory of the gay character are found especially in the notebook of memories, which the narrative voice itself describes as "evidence," a word whose multiple connotations can refer to two possible meanings: on the one hand, evidence can be the manifestation or certainty of something; while, on the other hand, it is a word that alludes to the public exposure of a situation, and it is precisely this latter meaning that strengthens the meaning of the narrative, as Sergio Hernán wants that evidence to "disappear", which allows us to glimpse a desire for oblivion or forgetfulness on the part of the gay figure. Likewise, when the narrative voice recovers the notebook, he excuses himself to the character's mother by mentioning that he is looking for another novel entitled *Memoirs of Hadrian* (1951) by Marguerite Yourcenar, and with this, the incidence of intertextuality is once again perceived in the discourse, now not with a musical discourse, but with a narrative work that, like the story, uses the epistolary form to narrate the biography of a Roman emperor who had a homosexual relationship and who, as in the story, fails tragically with the death of one of the gay characters. It is important to note that there is a constant in gay narrative of creating testimonies in the form of memoirs, diaries, letters or anecdotes, as is the case in one of the first Mexican novels: *El diario de José Toledo* (1964) by Miguel Barbachano Ponce and, of course, once again in this story by Antonio Santos.

Returning to the analysis of the diegesis, the first anecdote presented in the character's notebook marks a temporal chronology, as it begins with Sergio Hernán's childhood: "My childhood was very nice, I was a handsome, restless boy who liked football. I did not suffer any kind of abuse because my brothers and I were good at fighting" (Santos, 2019, p.47). It is clear that the anecdotes begin to establish an autobiographical structure that reinforces the sense of a testimony. However, in this excerpt, we can already perceive some social traits that govern and establish the characteristics of a male figure inserted into a particular society; that is, a taste for a sport that has traditionally been

reserved for men: football, and, consequently, the presence of physical strength and violence, which, in this particular case, serves as a defence against social abuse.

Later on, another point emerges that should be emphasised: "The only sad moment was when I went to the village market [...] and overheard them talking about me. It was the rocket maker's wife and Retoña: 'I think Sergio turned out to be a faggot'." (Santos, 2019. p. 47). This is the turning point for the character and his determination as a homosexual figure, because when he is called the pejorative adjective "jotito," the character becomes aware of the category and begins to reflect on its meaning and, with it, the relationship it has with his identity:

I didn't know what the word jotito meant, but I felt it wasn't anything good and I cried. Later I learned that the adjective varied with age: a child could be a jotito, a mannered young man was a full-fledged joto, and an old man with bad habits was a jotolón" (Santos, 2019, p. 48).

What stands out is the particular way of naming, based on a particular slang, the sexual orientations of a group and, therefore, establishing a set of characteristics that, from Sergio Hernán's perspective, form part of a "fauna" that would later make up the LGBTQ+ community. What is interesting, then, is how the very vision of the homosexual figure determines the community from an animalising discourse by referring to it as fauna: is it part of a narrative satire, or is it trying to create an image that renders homosexual figures as beings that are not completely human?

In the following anecdotes in the notebook, the voice of Sergio Hernán, who seems to indirectly establish a dialogue with the narrative voice of his friend through his memories, focuses mainly on his adolescence and adulthood. At this point, greater importance is given to his encounters with the figure of Lizandro Osiris, the character who serves as Sergio Hernán's homoerotic interest:

Lizandro Osiris, the nephew of one of the town's rich men, appeared, cavorting in a white rejego cuaco. Lizandro was handsome, with listless green eyes, well-built and solid, tall and white. He was the perfect boy for me, just as I had imagined. (Santos, 2019, p. 48-49).

From this quote, we undoubtedly have discursive information that should not go unnoticed, because beyond representing the presence of homoerotic interest, it lists a series of social and cultural values that further emphasise the initial thesis on cultural memory and allow us to understand the configuration of the heteronormative male character in society. Sergio Hernán initially refers to Lizandro as the nephew of a "rich man," a statement that reveals his economic and social status, and later

describes the character physically with adjectives such as "well-built," "solid," "tall," and "white." Undoubtedly, the character's descriptions reveal the construction of masculinity from the character's point of view, as he meets certain physical and racial standards that define him as a model. Let us not forget that even Sergio Hernán refers to Lizandro as "the one hundred per cent perfect boy", which is perceived as an idealised social, economic and cultural construction that determines the figure of the man from the representation of homosexual discourse and, together with this narrative stance, the vision of a culture.

It is undeniable that the character of Lizandro Osiris is a presence that shapes the discourse of gay characters in the narrative, as his influence provides a point of comparison *between* homosexual and heterosexual characters. This is a point that should be emphasised, as Sergio Hernán's narratives not only reveal the idealised model of man, but also highlight a clash of cultures:

Lizandro is the only person I have ever loved. I met him when I was 16 and saw him again when I was 23, but we stopped talking for a while, first because he was very rude to me, and then because he went to the United States. But when he came back, he was very different, probably influenced by American customs. He was very macho and had a girlfriend, but he was also *open-minded*. (Santos, 2019, p. 51).

It is clear that, just as the heterosexual figure has an impact on the story, so does American culture, as it clearly influences the character's configuration. Now Lizandro not only complies with heterosexual norms by being "very macho" and having a "girlfriend," but he is also "open-minded," which gives the character a more tolerant view of the gay character. Clearly, the gay character versus the heterosexual character manifests itself as an analogy of Mexican culture versus American culture, representing a cultural clash that destabilises one vision and, in turn, energises a collective culture. However, the story of Sergio Hernán and Lizandro fails because of social stigma and the heterosexual norms established in society or, as Maldonado (2016) would say: "because of the objectifications solidly established in a society," since in the end Lizandro, despite having had a romance with Sergio Hernán, gives in to the pressure to comply with what is traditionally imposed and keeps his marriage intact, which guarantees him becoming one of the most recognised figures in the town, while Sergio Hernán is displaced by the preservation of the memory between them.

To conclude this brief analysis, it is pertinent to return to Manuel Maldonado's (2016) studies on the construction of cultural memory, since it is not only constructed but also diluted through forgetting and, consequently, identity as well:

Memory gives us awareness of ourselves. Thanks to memory, we construct identity; conversely, the loss of memory dissolves identity. When memory is lost, when the past from which one comes is forgotten, identity is diluted, erased, lost. Without memory, there is no identity (Maldonado, 2016, p.174).

This quote makes sense in the context of the last paragraphs of the narrative when the character Sergio Hernán dies, because "after his death, the family destroyed all evidence of his homosexuality, his clothes and underwear, and his entire collection of magazines featuring male nudes" (Santos, 2019, p.52). Thus, not only is the construction of a cultural memory perceived through his notebook of memories, his particular pink slang when recounting anecdotes, or his characterisation as Sergio the dancer, but his forgetfulness is also perceived, and with it, the forgetfulness of homosexual discourse.

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