



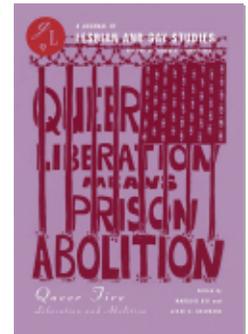
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HEMISPHERIC THINKING AND QUEER KIN

Nicolás Ramos Flores

Argentine Intimacies: Queer Kinship in an Age of Splendor, 1890–1910

Joseph M. Pierce

Albany: State University of New York Press, 2019. 336 pp.

In *Argentine Intimacies: Queer Kinship in an Age of Splendor, 1890–1910* (2019) Joseph M. Pierce analyzes how the family structure inherently sits outside normative heteropatriarchal structures that it claims to establish. By analyzing cultural productions—literary texts, family albums, private writings, and critical essays—from the aristocratic Bunge siblings, Pierce develops the notion of a “queer kinship,” which orients the body through structural norms that not only conform to but also challenge and point toward new sorts of kinship “that may not yet exist” (16). Through a broad cultural analysis, Pierce asserts that the family structure is, at its core, already queered because of its various relational contradictions. It is in view of this tension that Pierce develops the book’s five chapters, proposing a productive intersection of queer studies and Latin American studies that moves away from essentialist paradigms.

Chapter 1 thinks through how the literary writing of the eldest sibling, Carlos Octavio Bunge, queers the family novel as an idealized national project through desires. Pierce goes beyond reading Carlos Octavio’s work at face value, arguing that his writings are “queerly productive in refashioning what desire means, how it means, and under what circumstances this multifaceted desire becomes legible” (89). Pierce underscores how the family structure is used to reify heteropatriarchal relationships through literature. Carlos Octavio’s novel *La novela de la sangre* shows both the contradictions and the futurity of the family, portraying the existential angst that Argentina experienced at the turn of the last century. At times the chapter dwells too long on minute details of book production in Argentina and Carlos Octavio’s life that distract from the broader points Pierce is making.

The second chapter looks closely at the diaries of Delfina and Julia Bunge, Carlos Octavio’s younger sisters, spanning from 1897 to 1952 and 1903 to 1911, respectively. Pierce asserts the diary as a queer genre in the way that it breaks traditional literary structures in form, speaker, and audience. Pierce uses the diaries

to consider the ways these women think about their social context, thus theorizing queerness through this writing form. Pierce dissects each sister's subjectivity as an understanding of Argentina's attitudes toward sexuality, kinship, and gender during this era. These diaries have a particular way of pointing to the *porvenir* through Delfina's and Julia's self-reflection in the diaries and the future reader that Delfina gestures toward in her rewriting and editing. The diaries become palimpsestic through the various edits, commentary, and intertextuality and through the women's relationships with each other, their family, and society.

Moving away from written texts, the third chapter explores the Bunge family's photo albums through personal portraits and family pictures that simultaneously challenge and reify the heteronormative family structure. Pierce methodically weaves together analysis of individual pictures and family portraits, positing that the intimate family gaze can be read to link nostalgia for the past with the possibility of the future. Pierce makes it clear that the photographs themselves are not queered; instead, his scholarly analysis contextually queers our understanding of them. The albums, where "representation, cultural nationalism, and modernity intersect," are "an intimate disciplinary site, as well as a site of disciplining intimacy, gender, race, and class" (139). It is in this chapter that Pierce's analysis shines the most. Similar to his exploration of the diaries, he offers a unique examination that points to the possible future this family could have lived, using the futurity of his theoretical framework in his analysis.

Pierce then shifts from analyzing family albums to looking at Carlos Octavio Bunge's textbook *Nuestra patria: Libro de lectura para la educación nacional* and Julia and Delfina's children's book *El Arca de Noé*. Pierce considers how education was used as a national building project that centered not on securing material gains for the country but rather on fostering affection for the nation and social growth. These texts are queer because the "pedagogical texts shed light on struggle between a nostalgic yearning for an idyllic (aristocratic) past, and a programmatic future in which queerness holds a central, though seldom recognized position" (191). In both, Pierce argues, the intimate familial space is used to convey a national socialization that rejects queered standards. Private love is linked to public love of the nation.

In the final chapter, Pierce analyzes critical essays via Carlos Octavio's *Nuestra América: Ensayos de la psicología social*, Alejandro Bunge's *Una nueva patria*, and Delfina Bunge's *Las mujeres y la vocación*. The three essays show both the family's elite status and its attempts to replicate the very problematic structures that led to Argentina's national malaise by conceiving idealized futures that inherently replicate extant structures. Race, gender, and religion are dissected in

these texts to provide a multifaceted portrayal of Argentinian national constructs that are unique to the country. While Pierce acknowledges the limited engagement with other Latin American thinkers, this chapter would have been enhanced by a deeper connection to the works by theorists such as Cuba's José Martí or Mexico's José Vasconcelos to give a broader contextualization of national constructs of the time. Additionally, Alejandro Bunge (Carlos Octavio, Delfina, and Julia's brother) receives little attention in the book and feels more like an appendage to this chapter than a central figure in the family.

Finally, the epilogue provides a critical, nuanced contemplation of the coloniality of US-based queer studies and its application in Latin American studies. Pierce explains the importance of queer studies in Latin America, but he cautions against universal application of such endeavors and asks queer studies to critique its own coloniality when studying Latin American subjects. He states, "This is not a field statement so much as a reflection on the possibilities of queer studies as it engages with multiple contexts" (268). Pierce again points to decolonial possibilities in this analysis, underscoring the need for these intellectual endeavors.

The book is an expansive project that provides an insightful and thorough analysis that breaks with heteropatriarchal understandings of family structures in Latin America. While the analysis is incisive and at times poetic, it is often lost in the breadth of texts studied and contextual details. I wish Pierce had focused on only one or two cultural products. Furthermore, a deeper consideration of the broader region regarding both intellectual history and queer studies would have been a fruitful addition. Even so, Pierce provides a critical interrogation between U.S.-based queer studies and Latin American studies that will allow scholars in the two fields to think in more hemispheric terms.

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