

Seu Amor é Cômico:

Sexual Wordplay in Latin American Music, Poetry, and Fiction

Rosa Stern Pait, Department of International Literary and Cultural Studies, Tufts University

Introduction

Since the European conquest, a series of strategies have been used in Latin America to culturally resist oppression and subtly undermine the powerful. This project looks into wordplay in contemporary Latin American music, poetry, novels and colloquial language, focusing on double entendres and sexual innuendo in cultural productions from Mexico, Cuba and Brazil. The goal is to explore how sexual wordplay has been used by Latin Americans to embed countercultural themes within popular art and communication, especially as a mode of queer subtext to resist homophobia and heteronormativity and as resistance to oppressive regimes and hierarchical cultures.



Linn da Quebrada in the “Enviadescer” music video (2016).

“fake dói” by Linn da Quebrada

[Refrão 2]

O amor é cômico, come cu

O amor é cômico, come cu

Cômico, come cu

Cômico, come cu

Cômico, come cu

Cômico -> comical

come cu -> eats ass

Sources

- *Borderlands/La frontera: The New Mestiza* (Gloria Anzaldúa)
- *Diary of Fire* (Eliás Miguel Muñoz)
- “fake dói” (Linn da Quebrada and Lao)
- “Táxi Pra Paris” (CTRL+N)
- *Now the Volcano: An Anthology of Latin American Gay Literature* (Winston Leyland, editor)
- *Altazor* (Vicente Huidobro)
- “La caída” (Virgilio Piñera)
- “Cálice” (Chico Buarque and Milton Nascimento)

Conclusion

Early avant garde poet Vicente Huidobro’s *Altazor* plays with gendered language to countercultural themes within popular art and communication. Writers such as Virgilio Piñera encrypt homosexual subtext into fiction to resist homophobia and heteronormativity. Musicians have historically used non-sexual double entendres as undermine oppressive regimes and powerful figures, such as in Chico Buarque and Milton Nascimento’s 1978 “Cálice” in response to Brazil’s military dictatorship. Contemporary queer artists continue this tradition by embedding sexual puns in their music, in lyrics, such as in funk musician Linn da Quebrada’s “fake dói”, or in beats, such as in electro-pop duo Ctrl+N’s “Táxi Pra Paris”, to resist efforts to make queer people miserable and invisible through sexual pleasure, joy, and visibility. Writers such as Salvador Novo use euphemisms to hide gay subtext and explicitness to shock the straight reader as a way of scandalizing the public to assert their existence and pride. Writers like Eliás Miguel Muñoz and Gloria Anzaldúa play with Spanglish and colloquial sexual humor to assert linguistic autonomy from dominant cultures. These artists use wordplay to subtly or unsubtly assert queer existence and happiness.

Acknowledgments

Pablo Ruiz, Anne Moore, Miguel Muñoz, Carina del Valle Schorske, Haroldo França, Nigel Anderson, Michael Snyder, Quetzalli Barrientos, and the accountability comrades.

Seu Amor é Cômico: Sexual Wordplay in Latin American Music, Poetry, and Fiction

by Rosa Stern Pait '21

In a challenge trend that swept TikTok in February 2020, Bad Bunny's new hit "Safaera" featuring Jowell & Randy and Ñengo Flow approaches its climax, as a Hispanic TikToker encourages their parent or grandparent to bop along. Grandma's cheeky grin melts into shock when the Puerto Rican reggaetonero declares that "if your boyfriend doesn't eat your ass...I'll lick it all up".

The shock is not that Bad Bunny would talk about wanting to have sex with a gorgeous woman - the whole song is about wanting to drink and smoke with friends and then go to bed with a girl with a big butt. The shock isn't that he would graphically discuss various sexual acts either - he has already described fellatio and vaginal and anal penetration. What is so shocking is that a male artist would proudly announce his willingness to engage in anilingus - this sexual act specifically.

Anilingus and cunnilingus are often coded as queer sexual acts, performed only by gay or emasculated men. Shabba Ranks' "Dem Bow", which popularized the dem bow rhythm that is key to contemporary reggaeton, describes which sexual acts are unacceptable for men to engage in, because they are submissive, meaning gay, meaning antirevolutionary.

"Doing nasty things is core to reggaeton philosophy," said writer Carina del Valle Schorske in an interview I did with her this summer, shortly before she herself interviewed Bad Bunny for the New York Times Magazine. "But it's funny because musically it's coming from a tradition that's about not doing those things."

Although grandparents may be shocked at "Safaera"'s explicitness and glee, this kind of sexual wordplay has antecedents in the avant garde poetry of the early 20th century. Chilean poet Vicente Huidobro, in his magnum opus *Altazor*, published 1931, played with the gendered nouns that are key to Spanish grammar as a way of exploring the possibilities of breaking linguistic regulations and using poetry to create new worlds. But in referring to "la montaña y el montañao (the female mountain and the male mountain)" and "su luna y su luna (the male moon and the female moon)", Huidobro ended up creating a genderqueer space of sexual exploration within the Spanish language.

Thirteen years after *Altazor*, the Cuban writer Virgilio Piñera would publish "La caída", a short story about two mountaineers falling off a mountain protecting each other's favorite feature. As a gay writer who hid his sexuality from his peers, he used this fantastical story as a metaphor for gay men shielding their essence from a world that wants to tear them apart. In his memoir, Mexican gay icon Salvador Novo, of a similar generation, would contrast euphemisms to amuse the gay reader with explicitness to shock the straight reader.

Latin American musicians have used non sexual double entendres as well to undermine oppressive regimes. For example, Chico Buarque and Milton Nascimento released "Cálice" in 1978 to criticize Brazil's military dictatorship. The duality of "cálice", meaning "chalice", in reference to Matthew 26:39, and its homophone "cale-se", meaning "shut up", refer to the regime's policy of silencing critical artists.

Contemporary musicians strategically toggle between explicit and subtle sexual references to embed queer themes into mainstream media to resist hetero- and cis-normativity. Brazilian funk singer Linn da Quebrada, who is a travesti or transgender woman, also refers to anilingus in her 2019 song "fake dói". Unlike Bad Bunny, she uses wordplay to hide the reference in the phrase "seu amor é cômico", or "your love is comical". She repeats the word "cômico" until it becomes clear she is saying "come cu", or "eats ass" - "your love eats ass".

Linn da Quebrada, in the tradition of writers and artists before her, resists attempts by the dominant culture to make queer Latin Americans miserable and invisible by asserting her existence and fearlessness through the pleasure of sexual double entendres and wordplay in her music.