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 **A Beautiful, Sinister Fairyland: Gay Sunshine Press Does Latin America**

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Social Text

Duke University Press

76 (Volume 21, Number 3), Fall 2003

pp. 85-108

ARTICLE

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**In lieu of an abstract, here is a brief excerpt of the content:**

*Social Text* 21.3 (2003) 85-108

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A Beautiful, Sinister Fairyland  
Gay Sunshine Press Does Latin America

## Fairyland

An essay about Gay Sunshine Press and Latin America should start off with an attempt at seducing the reader, which is why we opted for the tacky allure of "beautiful" and "sinister" in the title. The phrase itself appears in an essay titled "Latin America: Myths and Realities," written by E. A. Lacey and published in the tabloid journal *Gay Sunshine* in 1979, and it gives a good idea of what Latin America meant for at least part of the gay radical San Francisco arm of the movement. The two words, in tense relationship with each other, describe the state of mind of at least three authors who "worked" Latin America for the press: Lacey himself, Winston Leyland, and Erskine Lane. The words register what those observers saw as they engaged in missionary work from San Francisco to Rio de Janeiro, while they blended beat culture with samba, turned political liberation into a politics of identity, and experimented in the Guatemalan highlands with a transculturated politics, two-thirds Zen Buddhism and one-third Mayan spirituality. "Latin America was seen as being—with that exasperating quality of paradox that inevitably creeps into our perception of the alien and unfamiliar—both magical and menacing, a beautiful, sinister fairyland where the usual rules of logic were suspended and anything good or bad might happen, and usually did." <sup>1</sup>

It is an image that belongs to the imagination of the foreign voyeur, the disenchanted white homosexual who follows the footsteps of a modern-day Rimbaud—leaving civilization for the "menacing" context that beauty provides, in a constant "dérèglement des sens" of suspended logic. The magic was all in the eyes of the beholder, as was the sense of anticipation, the beauty, the threat, and even the "exasperating" paradox that is but the result of the perception of an alien object, or a place—"fairyland" as the unexpected, equivocal term in this scenario. As far as "fairyland" goes, Lacey was himself most probably not quoting Rimbaud but expressing the exoticism and marvel of the magical realist representation of Latin America. And one could not help but notice that the form of embodiment for this reality strokes the other meaning of *fairy*—"fey," or "queer." It is as if what Alejo Carpentier called "lo real maravilloso" [End Page 85] became, by some perverse, sexy, and paradoxical trope, something emphatically fleshy, warm to the touch, hard—and, above all, male.

The fairyland that Lacey talked about was an invented reality, of course, and it had all the trappings of a self-conscious invention. It was mostly an erector set meant to uphold an object called "Latin American gay literature" as this was apparently thought up in San Francisco in the 1970s by a group of non-Latin American gay white men, some of whom are still very active in the promotion and dissemination of the "sinister" fruits of that fairyland. The gay literature was there, but the links and the continental scope were provided by Lane, Lacey, and Leyland—the third of the trio also furnishing the marketing tools for its dissemination. These men were intellectuals bent on creating—to borrow Benedict Anderson's term—an "imagined community," spreading the gospel of gay liberation from San Francisco to the far reaches of the globe. The enterprise was managed by scholars, entrepreneurs, poets, historians, and translators who were keen on their sense of mission; they were serious enough about their pursuits to devote part of their lives' work to bringing out sexuality from what they perceived was its hidden closet. They were travelers and self-questing philosophers, and they created fields of knowledge heretofore unseen: queer Buddhism, Mayan post-hippie queerness projected back to pre-Columbian times, meditative set pieces that meshed quantum physics with Indian religion, Tikal with Lao-Tse, the Grateful Dead with the Aztec poet-warrior Nezahualcoyotl. That they worked out of sheer pleasure born out of their...

**Fairyland**

**Daniel  
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José Quiroga**

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