

Gay love in two Argentinean soap operas. Between the reproduction of and the opposition to heteronormativity

Amor gay en dos ficciones televisivas argentinas. Entre la
reproducción y la contestación de la heteronorma

Amor gay em duas novelas argentinas. Entre a reprodução e a resposta
da heteronormatividade

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ABSTRACT

In this paper, we analyzed two gay love stories that had a leading role in two recent Argentinean soap operas, *Farsantes* and *Viudas e hijos del Rock & Roll*. We propose three analysis axes to think about how these stories reproduce and contest heteronormativity: talking about sex, the happy ending and the intersection between sexual orientation and social class. The aim is to read these stories not only in the gender matrix to which of each one belongs to, but also in their relationship with a specific narrative memory typical of stories about homosexuality.

Keywords: gay love; Argentinean soap operas; heteronormativity; telenovela.

RESUMEN

En este artículo se analizan dos historias de amor gay que ocuparon un rol protagónico en dos telenovelas argentinas recientes, Farsantes y Viudas e hijos del Rock & Roll, y se proponen tres ejes de análisis para pensar la reproducción y la contestación de la heteronorma: hablar de sexo, el final feliz y la intersección entre orientación sexual y clase social. El autor intenta leer estas historias no solo en clave de las matrices genéricas en las que se inscriben, sino también en su relación con una memoria narrativa propia de los relatos sobre homosexualidad.

Palabras clave: amor gay; ficciones televisivas argentinas; heteronormatividad; telenovela.

RESUMO

Neste artigo analisamos duas histórias de amor gay que tiveram destaque em duas telenovelas argentinas recentes, *Farsantes* e *Viúas e Hijos del Rock and Roll*, e propuseram três eixos analíticos para pensar a reprodução e a contestação da heteronorma: falar de sexo, o final feliz e a intersecção entre orientação sexual e classe social. O autor tenta ler tais histórias não apenas através das matrizes de gênero em que se inscrevem, mas também em sua relação com uma memória narrativa própria dos relatos sobre homossexualidade.

Palavras-chave: amor gay; ficções televisivas argentinas; heteronormatividade; telenovela.

How to cite:

Marentes, M. (2017). Amor gay en dos ficciones televisivas argentinas: Entre la reproducción y la contestación de la heteronorma. *Cuadernos.info*, (41), 141-154. <https://doi.org/10.7764/cdi.41.1142>

INTRODUCTION: DIFFERENT TYPES OF LOVE?

Love stories are usually the axes that structure television fiction. Traditionally and to a large extent, these stories have been between a man and a woman, leaving same-gender romances relegated to the background. Between 2013 and 2015 there were at least two Argentine daily fictions, broadcasted on open channels, in which the love story between two males held a central place. The emergence of these fictions can be explained by various social changes; however, although these love stories imply some ruptures with heteronormativity, they continue reproducing some of their features.

From the analysis of these love stories, throughout the work I try to demonstrate how and in which way one of the fictions has a more critical view of the heteronorm based on three specific aspects: the treatment of sexuality, the outcome of the story and the relationship with the social class. In order to do so, I recover contributions from British cultural studies that encourage to consider the experience of the actors; in this case, a narrative of homosexuality. The work is structured in seven sections. The first offers a theoretical discussion on the link between love and the media. It continues contextualizing the analyzed fiction, while the third section presents the methodological notes. Sections four, five and six refer to the aspects of the stories that question the heteronorm: sexuality, the end of the story and the relationship with social class, respectively. Finally, I present the conclusions of the work.

THEORETICAL DISCUSSION: THINKING ABOUT GAY LOVE IN THE MEDIA

The main characteristic of romantic love is the individual choice of the beloved subject (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2001; Giddens, 2004; Illouz, 2009, 2012; Jónasdóttir, 2014; Luhman, 2008). As Illouz (2012, p. 33) argues, there is a social environment that guides choices: the ecology of choice. The processes that constitute this ecology are both deliberate and unintended policies. An example of the first is the Law 26,618 of Equal Marriage, in force in Argentina since 2010, which allows two people of the same sex to marry; on the other hand, the incorporation of love stories between people of the same sex in the mass media is an example of unintended policies. Obviously, both processes are imbricated, since the greater presence of gay people in the media contributed to give legitimacy to the claims of that community (Meccia, 2006).

When Illouz (2009) analyzes the relationship between the media and romantic love, she concludes that the former favor the constitution of a romantic utopia. This leads her to consider how encoded the romantic experiences are, to the point that the mass media create the cultural scripts in which love experiences are framed. Her proposal—in which there are postulates similar to those of the Frankfurt School—suggests that what the media broadcast will be received and replicated by consumers in an uncritical manner and without mediation. A premise of her theoretical approach is the existence of a real way of loving that the media pollutes with their romantic and fictionalized stories¹.

When trying to replicate the analysis for male love stories, the specificity of the experience of homosexuality opens questions. Knowing that gay love stories in the media are recently accepted, how have gay men loved throughout history? Opposing their love to heterosexual romantic utopia or replicating its cultural scripts? The influence of the Frankfurt School, which emphasizes the way in which cultural alienation is reproduced, is not compatible with a position that attempts to underline the changes that have taken place in the way of telling love between men.

Following Illouz' (2009) epistemic proposal, it would be expected to find that gay love stories in the media only reproduce the heterosexual love course. This view is consistent with the ones that argue that when marriage—a reproductive institution of heteronormativity—is between two people of the same sex, the only thing that it would do is to reproduce the bases of compulsory heterosexuality. The gay movement, co-opted by the heteronormous regime, would thus lose its critical capacity².

The pessimistic view of the way in which the love stories between men are narrated in the mass media, even after the enactment of a law that would “normalize” the love trajectories of gays, would sustain that these stories are the mere reproduction of trajectories designed for heterosexual couples. This argument, consistent in some point with the vision of the Frankfurt School, can be objected from one of the critics of Butler (1999) on the mere reproduction of gender roles in same-sex couples. The philosopher, a referent of the queer theory, states that, in women couples, *butch and femme*³ would not be the copy of an original (male and female in heterosexual relationships), but, since there is no real original reference to imitate, *butch and femme* would in any case be the copy of a copy.

By accepting that gay love stories portrayed in the media do not imply a simple reproduction of what works to tell heterosexual love stories, their analysis needs to be complemented by another conceptual base. The aim of this work is to compare two love stories between men that were at the core of two recent Argentine telenovelas (between 2013 and 2015). The question that guides the work is which of the two stories, framed in different television genres, contains more heteronormative elements. Following Pecheny (2008), heteronormativity is the organizer “of the order of social relations, politically, institutionally and culturally reproduced, which makes reproductive heterosexuality the parameter from which to judge (accept, condemn) the immense variety of practices, identities and sexual, affective and loving relationships” (page 14).

Although I revisit some of the postulates of Mazziotti (1993) and Aprea and Soto (1998) about the importance of the discursive genre in the analysis of fictions, I try to follow the premise of Thompson (1995) and Williams (1982), exponents of the British cultural studies, to recover the experience in which events take place. My object, as well as that of the British historian – who analyzed riots in seventeenth-century England – have virtually nothing in common, but by tracing the meaning that the changes in economic relations brought to the people, Thompson placed those experiences in his particular history. Williams, when investigating the senses of the notions of culture and society, did a similar job: reconstructing the experiences of the authors on those terms.

The analysis that I propose of the fiction love stories *Farsantes* and *Viudas e hijas del Rock and Roll* is to recognize the generic specificities (dramatic soap opera and comedy, respectively), but in their intersection with a narrative of the stories about homosexuality. From this angle, seeing how the love relationships between the protagonists occur implies tracing features of love stories between men, which exceeds the analysis only focused on the discursive genres. For example, that a contemporary soap opera ends with a marriage between the protagonists is more probable than ending with one of them dead. It would be said, a priori, that the first reproduces the norms of the genre and that the second is more rupturist, but, as I try to show later, when these protagonists are two men: in the history of homosexuality, tragedy was the norm and the happy ending, the rebellious approach.

CONTEXTUALIZATION OF LOVE STORIES

The television fiction *Farsantes*, linked to the soap opera genre –strongly based on melodrama–, is a daily fiction that, having undergone schedule changes, was broadcasted after the child’s protection hours, at 10:00 pm. Although originally thought of as a miniseries, due to changes in the programming of *Canal Trece*, it became a daily soap opera. It was broadcasted from June 26, 2013 until February 12, 2014. In 125 episodes of approximately 60 minutes, it tells the stories of a criminal law firm in Buenos Aires. The central love story is that of Guillermo Graziani (Julio Chávez), a well-known criminal lawyer of approximately fifty years, with Pedro Beggio (Benjamin Vicuña), a young lawyer of about thirty years who joins the firm in the first chapters. The oldest of the lawyers, married and with a twenty-year-old son, maintains a homosexual life parallel to his marriage. His wife knows and accepts it. The youngest of the lawyers marries his partner during the course of the soap opera.

In *Viudas e hijas del Rock and Roll* (henceforth *Viudas* ...), the analyzed love story is between Segundo Arostegui (Juan Minujín) and ‘Tony’ Zoilo (Juan Sorini). This sitcom has 154 episodes of approximately 60 minutes and was broadcasted by *Telefé*, originally after 9.15 pm, although it later suffered some schedule changes, passing at 10.15 pm and finally at 11.00 pm. The first episode aired on August 18, 2014 and the last on May 13, 2015. Segundo, member of an aristocratic family, is a polo player of about thirty-five years, who is married and has two children. Tony is a *petisero* –the person in charge of taking care of the horses– of nearly thirty years old, who starts working for the family after Segundo met him and was dazzled by his body. Segundo has interests in other men, but he always fought against his homosexuality. Tony is known to be single and comes from a small rural area of the province of Buenos Aires. The love story between them begins as a secondary one and grows to the point that the marriage of the end of the sitcom was between them and not between the two protagonists.

In his analysis of cultural studies in Latin America, Restrepo (2012) recovers the premise of Grossberg on the importance of radical contextualism. The North American author replaces the need to contextualize the phenomenon being studied, in this case two television fictions, but not understanding it as a backdrop, but as a condition of possibility of said production. Sousa Dias (2013) maintained three months after the beginning of *Farsantes* that its success was due to a “social change”.

Both the egalitarian marriage and the coming out of the closet of many famous artists contributed to the acceptance and good reception of this soap opera. Regarding the first one, in July 2010 in Argentina, the Equal Marriage Law was passed, allowing two people of the same sex to marry. After a great parliamentary debate with quite agitated political mobilizations (both for and against), on July 15 this new was made public. In another work on a gay magazine called *Amor*, I attributed to this event the character of Bakhtinian cronotope. The concept of chronotope is defined as “the essential correlation of spatio-temporal relationships” (Bakhtin, 1978a, p. 37, in Arnoux, 2008, p. 63). Although Bakhtin coined this notion for the analysis of literature, it can be understood for other discourses, since it defines a representation of the world (Arnoux, 2008). Equal marriage operates as a watershed in recent Argentine history and its chronotopic character is also found in the stories analyzed here. In *Farsantes* it is established when Guillermo and Pedro must attend a divorce between two males. In *Viudas...*, with the marriage of Segundo and Tony. Meccia (2006, 2011) recognizes the centrality that the media acquired to naturalize the erotic links between people of the same sex, helping the visibility and acceptance of homosexual couples. That is why recovering cultural studies acquires meaning, since with them it is possible to observe that, both culturally and socially, processes have different ways of materializing (Cevasco, 2013).

The novelty of these two daily fictions is that the love story between males is central to the plot⁴. Due to my research question about how love relationships between men are structured, an analysis about the reception of these fictions remains for future investigations. However, I can reconstruct some indications that tell us about the degree of acceptance and fanaticism that they generated. Guillermo tells Pedro, during a dinner in which they talk about love, that all couples end the same (where ‘the same’ works as a synonym for ‘bad’). When *Farsantes* fans learned that Pedro would die, they began a series of public campaigns asking the authors not to kill Pedro, to revive him or to do a second part of the soap opera in which Guillermo and Pedro could live together and happy. The phrase that accompanied those campaigns was *Not all couples end the same*. They even held a protest outside the production company to ask for Pedro’s life. One of the series scriptwriters, Carolina Aguirre, wrote a letter – two years after the chapter in which Pedro Beggio dies – in which she recounted the how sad she was to

have killed the character and told that she received critical messages of fans, both in the anniversaries of the death of Pedro as in the end of *Farsantes* (Aguirre, 2015). The scriptwriter also mentions the fan-fiction created around these two characters.

The love story between Segundo and Tony reached success, although without much repercussion. The love of the public towards this couple can be seen on the *Telefé* website. In it, there are dozens of outstanding scenes of the sitcom. As it progressed, more scenes were devoted to their love story. On the channel’s website, there are three bonus tracks with small scenes of some characters, for which Segundo and Tony made a hot photo session. However, and recognizing the limitations of not addressing its reception, the work from the text allows to recognize dilemmas about the love stories between men.

METHODOLOGICAL NOTES: LOVE FROM SCENES

My first contact with both fictions was as a spectator of all the chapters when the soap operas were aired on their respective channels. Then, I decided to incorporate them into the corpus of the material of my master’s thesis, to analyze them. Due to the large number of chapters and that my corpus for the thesis contains other stories, I work with the highlights of both fictions, available on the websites of the channels. When it was necessary, for fundamental issues of the love plot, I analyzed scenes from chapters that were not among the highlights. Due to spatial limitations, this work uses the scenes that best show the points of analysis that I developed throughout the text.

The work began with the transcription of the scenes, in a kind of dense description (Geertz, 2003), with summaries, notes, comments, which took me from one chapter to another. Then, I reconstructed the scenes of each one of the stories, based on scenes methodology (Paiva, 2006). I entitled each of these scenes with a text that condensed its spirit in the love story between men.

As my unit of analysis are the love stories, and not the totality of the fictions, I concentrate on the elements that help to understand these stories in the reproduction-response cleavage of the heteronorm. The focus on the content of the stories allows us to see how, from the same stories, critical aspects of heteronormativity are traced from the recovery of a narrative of homosexuality. While these elements do not exhaust the analyzed cleavage, they do contribute –from an analysis centered on love

stories— questions when thinking about how gay love is incorporated into fictions.

Based on theoretical postulates, I focus on three axes. The first has to do with how each story processes the subject of sexuality. As Illouz (2012) argues, sexuality is one of the central points of the way in which the romantic imagination is organized and institutionalized. In this vein, the way in which gay sexuality appears in each of the stories allows us to see that, when it is hidden, it becomes a topic that does not need to be talked about, since it corresponds to the private sphere. This silence coincides with the conservative policies of recognition of homosexuality analyzed by Meccia (2011).

The second axis has to do with the end of the story. Due to the tragic character that has accompanied love between men throughout history, both in biographies and in literary fictions (Melo, 2005), the happy marriage ending acquires a different, even disruptive, nuance for the gay stories. Thus, equal marriage is updated, allowing us to leave behind, as we will see, heterocentrism in the way in which sexual diversity has been processed in cultural productions throughout history.

Finally, the third axis is related to one of the limits of freedom of the beloved subject in the matrix of romantic love: the difference of classes. As shown by the studies focused on the socioeconomic origins of heterosexual couples (Bericat, 2014; Gómez Rojas, 2007; Illouz, 2012), people couple with their social class peers. The romantic utopia (Illouz, 2009) tends to exploit this ideology of freedom by allowing people to couple with a partner from a very different social class. When it is recognized that the stigma of homosexuality has served to unite people from very diverse socio-economic sectors (Pecheny, 2003), the love between a farm patron and his rural employee reactivates elements of the history of that homosexuality. Let us start, then, with the first of the axes.

TALK ABOUT GAY SEXUALITY BETWEEN COMPLETE SILENCE AND HUMOR

A fundamental aspect in television romantic fictions is the intimate contact between the protagonists. That is why the first kiss is so long awaited when the story revitalizes the romantic matrix between two lovers who should not love each other. The kiss, seen as one of the most explicit forms of sexuality (Le Breton, 1999), is kind of a point of no return: the affective relationship derives in another type of bond. That is what happens to Guillermo and Pedro the day the first one goes to

take care of the latter because he got sick the rainy night before, when he ran to his partner's house. Guillermo, reclined next to a sleeping Pedro, reads the file of the case that they must prepare. Pedro sits on the bed, turning around, as if anticipating his awakening. Before, he rests his head on Guillermo's arm, who stares at him after feeling him move. Pedro opens his eyes and sees that his partner is still reading the file. He barely looks up, and his partner looks back at him, bending slightly. Guillermo remains motionless, waiting for Pedro to advance. He incorporates into the bed and reaches the height of his partner. Pedro begins to kiss him and Guillermo responds, it is their first kiss. In a tender gesture, the eldest of the lawyers rests his hand on the cheek of the youngest, before moving a little backwards. With a loving smile, Guillermo caresses Pedro's head who, with a lost gaze, holds his hand and rests on his chest. The young lawyer then holds his head and worries about his wife and son, while the other says that nothing happened. For Pedro, the kiss is a mistake. A few days later, when a lawyer from another firm gallants with Guillermo, Pedro bursts into jealousy and neglects his tasks. The discussion reaches its peak when Pedro asks his partner not to be basic and not to mix things. An angry Guillermo responds, shouting, that he is not basic and that things are already mixed.

With several encounters in the meantime, Guillermo and Pedro have their sex scene. Pedro resides momentarily in a cabin in the Paraná River Delta⁵, where he is being held and hidden from justice that wants him for the murder of his father-in-law. Surrounded by candles, since there is no electric light, he is lying down. Someone knocks on the door and when he opens it, he finds a surprise: Guillermo went to visit him. After complaining about how difficult it was to get there, already inside the house, they begin to kiss passionately. Between kisses, hugs and caresses, Guillermo takes off Pedro's shirt. The night illuminates the house with love and when we see the next scene, it is already the morning. What happened is elliptically reconstructed from certain signs that indicate that there was sex: the reunion, the candles, the night and the nakedness of the torsos. Throughout the soap opera, this is one of the few sexual contacts between Pedro and Guillermo, in a scene of elliptical sex. There are also no mentions or sexual comments about it. Is this due only to the fact that *Farsantes* is being related to melodrama? On this question, I will soon return to the subject.

In *Viudas*... Segundo and Tony have their first kiss shortly after the sitcom starts. Inside a room, in an

armchair next to a window, Tony comforts Segundo, who mourns the death of his mare. The employer, between cries, tells him that he will miss her, while the *petisero* tries to calm him down. Segundo begins to grab his neck, to face him and talk to him. He continues disconsolate as he caresses Tony's cheeks, who remains next to his employer. Segundo and Tony kiss for three or four seconds. While it seems that the *petisero* had wanted to kiss him, then he pushes his employer away, grabbing him by the waist. They look at each other for a second, Tony gets up and runs away. Absorbed by the whole situation, Segundo remains seated in the armchair with a lost look.

A new kiss between the two occurs a few months later. When Segundo confirms to the *petisero* that he spoke with his brother and his sister-in-law so they would not fire him from the farm, Tony throws himself into Segundo's arms, full of joy, and begins to kiss him. The other responds in the same way and continues kissing him, approaching a tree. After this demonstration of love, the *petisero* confesses to his employer that he did not want "this". Segundo responds that he does not want it either. "It's not right, Don Segundo. This is not OK. You have your family. There's Mrs. Miranda, who has always been so good to me. I appreciate her very much". Segundo replies: "No, no, let's not mix things, Tony. Do not mix things". And Tony adds looking at his employer: "It seems to me that they are already mixed, right? I think". A dismayed Segundo asks Tony, but as a rhetorical question, "What do we do with this?" (Ortega & Cullel, 2014-2015).

In addition to these kisses, the entire relationship between Tony and Segundo is marked by an explicit sexual desire. In fact, the day they met, Segundo has the first of several failed acts and tells him that he is looking for a *pipe*, when in fact what he is looking for a *bathroom*⁶. Or when Tony asks Segundo to teach him how to dance, he promises him that he will teach him the *Teto*⁷: "you bend over and I'll explain later", Segundo says. At a time when Segundo's father is pointing at him with a shotgun and Tony is standing behind him, Segundo asks both his father and the *petisero* to lower the iron⁸ (Ortega & Cullel, 2014-2015).

In the spa of a hotel where they spend the day, Tony tells his employer that there is something else he wants: to sleep and wake up together. Segundo begins to ask questions as Tony nods: "At the hotel? You mean in a bed? Spooning? You in the back? Yes, spooning?". Tony responds complacently that he wants it where it is most convenient. Segundo, shocked and startled, slaps Tony,

telling him to stop, to convince himself that it is not real (Ortega & Cullel, 2014-2015). Slaps and gentle punching are a kind of affective euphemism, that is, the way to express an intimate contact and to approach the body of the other, disguising the true intention: to establish an erotic-affective bond. Because demonstrations of physical contact between males are associated with a lack of virility, some gestures of camaraderie between males, marked by violent contacts, are often the way in which other interests are transmitted.

Returning to the question that was raised lines above, why is the sexuality in *Farsantes* silenced while in *Viudas...* it is more ridiculed? As Aprea and Soto (1998) argue, the soap opera tends to be more conservative and refractory with controversial issues, and sitcoms take advantage of the humor to stage those taboo themes. If so, it would turn out that the answer is related to generic requirements. As one of the scriptwriters of the soap opera argued, "*Farsantes* is, above all, a love story. And second, it is a gay story" (Sousa Dias, 2013), so the love component in this telenovela would weigh more than the gay one. Now, this explanation must be articulated with that elaborated by McRobbie (1998) about the women's magazines of the nineties, in which humor was the way of talking more openly about sex. Humor would be the key to explaining the higher risk took in *Viudas...* over the one took in *Farsantes*. While these explanations are necessary, I do not consider them sufficient to understand why one fiction incorporates more elements that challenge the heteronorm while the other does not. As the coauthor of *Farsantes* affirmed, love would weigh more than the gay issue. Returning to gay life, there are positions on the greater sexualization of male bonds. One of these debates is related to the statement by Giddens (2004) about the greater promiscuity of gays. Illouz (2012) maintains –indirectly about gay men– that part of why love hurts is that women, in recent times, began to live a sexuality similar to that of men, which prioritize the number of encounters and separates them from the affective sphere. I believe that hyper-sexualization is one of the characteristics of the gay world, very present –mediated by humor– in the link between Segundo and Tony. Therefore, prioritizing the romantic over the gay, added to the generic soap opera matrix in which it is written, allows a better understanding of how *Farsantes* reproduces heteronormativity. The silence surrounding the sexuality of the protagonists of the love story is congruent with the conservative way of processing homosexuality: it is a subject of the intimacy of people (Sullivan, 1996;

Meccia, 2011). Even when humor is invoked to talk about sex, *Viudas*' love story revives elements of the gay experience, such as hyper-sexualization, that promote the acceptance of homosexuality without renouncing to one of its specific characteristics. Does this translate from beginning to end in love stories? The next section focuses on the endings.

THE REBELLIOUS HAPPY ENDING

Pedro is wanted by the police for the murder of his father-in-law, a trap set for Guillermo by his half-brother. The young lawyer hides a few days in a house in the Delta until he must return to the city because his hiding place was discovered. He goes to his house to grab some clothes and to say goodbye to Camila, his wife, who murders him with a gun. This soap opera does not have the happy ending that marks these speeches in their current form, but a tragic end⁹. A devastated and angry Camila, who begs Pedro's love, ends up killing him when he confirms that he will choose Guillermo.

The story between Segundo and Tony has the happy ending expected in the love stories of television fiction: marriage. On the day of the wedding, when he arrives at the room where the ceremony will take place, Segundo finds that Tony is still in work clothes. After hurrying him, he asks him to cover his eyes: "You cannot see me. The boyfriend does not have to see the other boyfriend". Tony removes his hands from his face and spies on him, and Segundo slaps him. "Really, Tony. Really. It is important. It is important. I am very superstitious. Touch yourself. Touch yourself. Touch everything". As Tony does not understand why he has to touch himself, Segundo takes advantage and touches the genital area of the *petisero*, explaining that he does it for good luck (Ortega & Cullel, 2014-2015).

At the time of the ceremony in front of the judge, Segundo gives a speech in which he does not admit having been in the closet, since his previous life with Miranda, his ex-wife, was always very happy. "Where I came out was from my head, which did not allow me to enjoy this, to live this, freely. But now, I'm free to eat this *chongazo*¹⁰", Segundo concludes, before the applause and the laughter of the assistants. A shy Tony can only say "I love him". The wedding is momentarily interrupted by the appearance of Segundo's parents, who were not invited to the celebration due to their homophobic behavior. After some of the guests kick them out, the ceremony resumes. The double sexual sense continues to operate even when they exchange

rings: Segundo, alluding to the size of Tony's fingers; Tony, confessing in an accomplice way to the assistants that the ring finally fitted Segundo. Then, they ride together, to start their honeymoon (Ortega & Cullel, 2014-2015).

Beyond the difference in the endings, to which I will return, it is necessary to highlight some similar characters in both stories, which are inscribed in the melodramatic matrix (Mazziotti, 1993), of which the soap opera and the sitcom take a lot. The women of the protagonists: Ana (Guillermo), Camila (Pedro) and Miranda (Segundo). Ana is an alcoholic who accepts her husband's homosexual wanderings and endures his double life. Camila, who discovers Pedro's sexuality at the same time as him, does not tolerate it and, after offering him a double life pact, ends up killing him. On the other hand, when Segundo finally confesses to Miranda, she accompanies him as a friend and godmother of his marriage to Tony. The drama marks the women of the protagonists of *Farsantes*, while the freedom and acceptance mark those of the sitcom.

Another similar character in this story is Guillermo's male brother (Miguel) and one of Segundo's brothers (Nacho). Miguel is angry with his half-brother not only for his homosexuality, but also because he blames him for the death of his son. Nacho, who constantly harasses his brother for being gay and accuses him of not attending the sexual needs of his wife, presses Segundo because he does not help to resolve the bad financial situation that Nacho's mismanagement caused. In both stories, it is the brothers who first recognize the erotic interests of Guillermo and Segundo for Pedro and Tony, respectively. By sharing a code of common manhood, they recognize that their family members are in danger. Is that why the brothers are the villains of these stories?

In televised romantic fictions, third parties constantly appear as a source of conflict and often the story is based on a love triangle. A real threat to Pedro is the appearance of Matías, another lawyer who flirts with Guillermo. A lawyer is also the one who brings jealousy into the story of Segundo and Tony: the *petisero* feels momentarily displaced by Segundo's lawyer, who makes him change and begins to act differently that the men he fell in love with. Two representatives of liberal professions are third parties in discord and those who threaten the love core of the protagonists, a premise of romantic love (Illouz, 2009).

The characters that I pointed out –ex-wives that suffer or friends and companions, villain brothers and lawyers in conflict– are entangled in such a way in the

plot that they orient its sense in one way or the other. In *Farsantes*, the drama is unquestionable when a spiteful ex-wife does not accept her husband's love for another man. This tragic ending contrasts with the happy one of *Viudas...*, in which the double-meaning joke is part of the story until the wedding is consummate. Could the first end, in terms of television fiction, be conceived as the most novel and breaking, while the other is more naive and reproductive? To see them in these terms implies falling, using the proposal of Grignon and Passeron (1989), in heterocentrism. These authors are critical of Bourdieu, since he fails to see the positivity of popular sectors' taste and characterizes it as a taste of necessity. Grignon and Passeron argue that, in order to see the specificity and the willingness in the less favored classes, it is necessary to overthrow dominocentrism, that is, to stop using the reality of the dominant sectors as the way to measure reality. Here, I try to do the same, but changing the source of domination: in line with Connell (2005), homosexuality subordinated to heterosexuality.

To continue with the proposal of Bourdieu's critics, I propose to think about the experience of homosexual histories in their own historical specificity, so as not to fall into heterocentrism: to judge with criteria used mostly to evaluate heterosexual love stories in television fictions when the couple is between two males. Melo (2005), in his book on literature and homosexuality, devotes a good first part to tragedy as a way of telling love stories between men. This not only as a representation formula of several epochs, but also because this type of experiences has been the ones to which the homosexuals who wrote their love stories were exposed, to such a point that Forster (2003) decides to give a happy ending to *Maurice*, a love story between men, so that at least on the fictional level that romance ends well. Hence, the tragic matrix of *Farsantes* serves more as a reproducer of an order that excludes same-sex couples, since the story ends up reproducing the tragic outcome that has characterized "the love of boys" (Melo, 2005, p. 14). Instead, when we recover the experiences of the narrative of homosexuality, the happy ending marked by the marriage between Segundo and Tony, which could be judged as naiver and normalizing, can be understood as a rupture with heterocentrism. As argued by Fassín (2011), marriages between people of the same sex are always contestants in political terms. But what happens when class logic prevails over gender logic? That will be the subject of the next section.

LOVE AND SOCIAL CLASSES: CRITICIZING NORMATIVE HOMOGAMY

Despite the free choice of the beloved subject that romantic love supposes, in response to courteous love, couples tend to conform homogamically in terms of classes (Illouz, 2009). Many soap operas have tended to question that premise based on the typical story of a young woman from popular sectors who falls, *reciprocally*, in love with a high-class gallant, such as, for example, some of the soap operas starring Mexican singer Thalía. However, the history of homosexuality provides clues to criticize these assumptions.

Both Guillermo and Pedro are professionals from a well-positioned socioeconomic sector: they are lawyers. Representatives of the upper-middle classes, both for their educational level and their lifestyle, from the beginning their bond is marked by equality. Significant in this type of bond is that several times throughout the soap opera they shook their hands as partners, as when Guillermo decides that Pedro will return to work in the firm. This gesture is a symbol of the relationship they maintain, between equals in terms of classes. Of course, this equality is relative, due to Guillermo's extensive career in the criminal field, which is one of the reasons that leads Pedro to join the firm, *to learn from the best*. However, his entry is as a partner, with a distribution in equal parts of the criminal cases.

Segundo and Tony also begin to get involved affectively at work, but unlike the previous couple, the class gap is marked, reinforced and ridiculed throughout history. Segundo comes from an aristocratic family, Arostegui, which conserves vast social and cultural capitals, rather than economic ones. In fact, to save the finances of the family, which was squandered by both Segundo's father and his brother Nacho, the Arostegui want Segundo to recompose his relationship with Miranda, heiress of a rock radio. The members of this family are well-known polo players, a typical sport of the Argentine aristocracy. Segundo hires Tony as a *petisero* when he learns that he was only making a replacement in the previous job, which consisted of bringing a horse to his farm, so he would not return. Tony is a rural pawn, shy and very grateful, and he does not seem to care too much about his erotic capitals. When they share a spa day in a luxury hotel, the *petisero* thanks his employer, because he had never been in such a place.

The fact that their relationship is circumscribed to an employment bond does not exempt it from being based on an asymmetry of class positions. Tony's continuity

in the farm is in danger several times, especially at the request of Segundo's brother. Unlike Guillermo and Pedro, their bond is not between partners, but a salary relationship, still marked by remnants of a lordly bond. Throughout the series, Tony calls Segundo by the nickname *patron*. This paternalistic imprint in the labor relationship is also translated into the love field. While going through his separation with Miranda, who left the house and took their children, Segundo explains to Tony that the only thing that makes him smile lately are the photos that they took in a booth in the amusement park, where they had a lot of fun. Grabbing Tony's chin and speaking to him in a fatherly tone, Segundo tells him he acted like a child. Class paternalism implies, at least in this case, the infantilization of the other character.

The inequality between both also has a correlate in the way of speaking. Segundo, because of his class position, speaks English perfectly, a language that he uses on a daily basis, which is why Tony is sometimes confused. Such is the identification with that language that many call him *Second*. Tony, on the other hand, does not know some of the terms used by Segundo, both in English and in Spanish. His way of speaking is marked by the incorrect pronunciation of some phonemes: he did not *take* Segundo as a husband, but he "*tak him*".

Having established the class positions of the protagonists of these love stories, which one could we think that contains more critical elements to heteronorm? Following the premise of recovering the experience from practice, it is necessary to trace in the history of homosexuality the connection with classes. Melo (2005) recovers many of the stories of bourgeois men who fell in love with others from popular sectors. Pecheny (2003), when analyzing discrete identities, argues that, due to the discretion in the exercise of clandestinity, the relations between classes in gay sociability were frequent. In fact, many of the interviewees from Meccia (2011) agree that in some prostitution venues, typical of the eighties and, to a lesser extent, of the nineties, where the bathrooms served as *teteras*¹¹, representatives of different social classes interacted intimately. Meccia (2011) argues that the passage to the regime of gayhood implies a greater opening of spaces of sociability and encounter between gay men, accompanied by greater tolerance. In this new scenario, the places that distinguish between social classes proliferate, given that there are venues for gay men of different socioeconomic strata, with

different tastes and lifestyles, while friendly places emerge, producing a kind of *de-ghettization*. It seems, according to this author, that the new millennium finds gays more socially accepted, that there is a change in gay sociability. Namely, if previously the experience of homosexuality helped to overcome socioeconomic inequalities, now within the gay environment those inequities are reinforced, and sexual diversity is relegated to the background.

That is why the relationship between Guillermo and Pedro is inscribed more in the gay scene, in which at times the gay experience is relegated to the background, as if it did not matter anymore. As pointed out by the scriptwriter of *Farsantes*, it was first a love story and then a gay story. Or in the words of Hall (2004), this is the way in which the sign intersects with the structures of culture into an ideological dimension: the reproduction of heterocentrism. Although the class difference between Segundo and Tony can be thought of as more classical in terms of the soap opera narrative, it must also be inscribed in a narrative of homosexuality, in which the contact and conformation of heterogamic couples in terms of social classes, suppose a questioning of the heteronormativity that assimilated homosexuality to its image. Therefore, that two men from such disparate socioeconomic strata end up married cannot be understood as the simple reproduction of romantic utopia (Illouz, 2009), as it happens with heterosexual couples. On the contrary, it must be inscribed in the experience of male couples who, because they stand outside the heteronormous regime, challenge the boundaries of classes in the formation of erotic-affective bonds.

CONCLUSION: "THINGS ARE ALREADY MIXED"

Throughout the work, I tried to demonstrate how *Farsantes*, according to its pretensions, relegated the homoerotic component to the background, managing to be, first of all, a love story. The love story of *Viudas...*, instead, incorporated into its humorous tone elements critical to the heteronormative order, recovering recurrent topics in gay narrative. I do not intend to argue that this answer is revolutionary, but at least it is more critical, both in form and content, to the acceptance of love between men that implies the vanishing of the gay experience in three axes.

The first axis is related to the explicit mentions about sexuality. According to some visions that try to situate sexual orientation as a mere question that concerns

the privacy and intimacy of those involved (Meccia, 2011), the love story between Pedro and Guillermo in *Farsantes* chooses to silence sex, which –ultimately– is the source of gay stigma (Goffman, 2006; Meccia, 2006). In *Viudas...* Tony and Segundo, through jokes, not only make comments that allude to their sexuality, but also recover with humor one of the points of the experience of homosexuality: its hyper-sexualization.

How the stories end is another axis of analysis. While the tragedy marks the end of the love story of *Farsantes*, the one of *Viudas...* concludes with a wedding. As it was stated, the murdered boyfriend is a more original resource for contemporary soap operas; however, it ends up updating one of the premises of heteronormativity: two men who love each other cannot finish either together or well. The tragedy has been one of the marks of love stories between men, both in literature and in biographies, so the happy ending marked by the wedding—the tritest resource for heterosexual couples in soap operas—should be understood in said specificity.

The class difference between the protagonists of the love stories is the third axis that I analyze. The individual freedom to choose with whom to form a couple finds limits in terms of social classes. Therefore, the story of Guillermo and Pedro in *Farsantes* is more in the line with a new way of processing sexual diversity: subsuming it in the inequality of classes. In the history of homosexuality, and until not long ago, sexual diversity prevailed over class differences, generating contacts between people of very diverse socioeconomic strata (Meccia, 2006; Melo, 2005; Pecheny, 2003). Hence, the union between a *petisero* and a patron, stylized by the television, continues to bring an element of resistance

to the way heteronormativity currently processes sexual diversity, namely, eliminating what is specifically gay. That is why, all things considered, the melodrama *Farsantes* applies, applying to this context the concept of McRobbie (2010), a sort of post-egalitarian masquerade, in which the difference of homosexuality is denied.

The British cultural studies where a source of inspiration due to one of their original questions: the one about change. The transformations in society regarding the greater acceptance of homosexuality allow us to think about its dialogues with cultural production, like the two soap operas analyzed here, helping to modify the ecology of choice (Illouz, 2012) and giving visibility to love between males (Meccia, 2006). Recovering, through Williams (2009), Voloshinov's premise about the sign, cultural productions not only reflect, but also refract, society.

“Things are already mixed” is the phrase of the protagonists of the love stories when they refer to their romances. Finally, I would like to recover that phrase, but in another sense. Love between people of the same sex is not a prerogative of these soap operas, but there have already been hundreds of fictions that speak about them, more or less spontaneously. The novelty here consisted in the leading role of these romances, in daily fictions in open channels. However, as it has been occurring, it is possible that love between men coexists without so many disadvantages next to the love between men and women, but other forms of love (as between two women, among transvestites, transgenders and transsexuals, polyamorous bonds, among others) continue without much appearance in the different fiction plots.

FOOTNOTES

1. This way of seeing love is consistent with the literature that sees in the media only the reproduction of gender roles based on the codification of certain stereotypes (Wood, 1994). An opposite reading is suggested by Weitman (1999), who analyzes eroticism in magazines, since there it would appear in a pure state, without contamination.
2. For a critique of these arguments, see Hiller (2012, 2013) and Jones and Hiller (2015).
3. These terms designate more masculinized and more feminized lesbians, respectively.
4. In *Los Roldán*, an Argentine daily fiction broadcasted between 2004 and 2005, the relationship between Laisa, a transvestite, and Emilio Uriarte, a bisexual man, had great prominence, acquiring a lot of importance in the story. The difference is that Emilio Uriarte seemed unaware that his beloved was a transvestite.
5. The Delta area is composed of a set of islands, quite close to the city of Buenos Aires. Due to its topography, some islands are less accessible than others, which makes this place a perfect hideaway.
6. Translator's note: In Spanish, *caño* (pipe) and *baño* (bathroom) have a very similar sound. In this context, *caño* has a sexual connotation, as it can be understood as the masculine reproductive organ.
7. Playing *Teto* is a vulgar joke in which the interlocutor asks how to play, and who proposed it responds with "Bend over and I'll put it on".
8. *Fierro* is a colloquial way of naming arms in some parts of Argentina. It also has a sexual connotation, as it is used to vulgarly refer to male sexual organs.
9. The death of Pedro was related to the fact that the actor, Benjamín Vicuña, already had other work commitments planned for that date, due to the fact that the soap opera had originally been conceived as a miniseries. The writers argued that it was the best way to give Pedro a way out, more than a trip or a new love.
10. *Chongazo* derives from *chongo*, a common way of calling virile males. In the homosexual jargon, *chongo*, linked to the active male, is opposed to the passive effeminate queen (Sivori, 2005).
11. From English tea-room, *tetera* makes reference to public baths in which men have casual.

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