

MAYRA SANTOS FEBRES'S *CUALQUIER MIÉRCOLES SOY TUYA*: IN SEARCH OF A LITERARY TRADITION

Resumen

En este artículo Cualquier miércoles soy tuya se instala dentro de la tradición de la novela de artista. En él se estudia las transformaciones que esta novela presenta respecto a los modelos románticos, modernistas y vanguardistas. En este texto de Mayra Santos Febres, la revisión del modelo tradicional de novela de artista se lleva a cabo tanto a través de innovaciones en la estructura de la novela en sí como en el planteamiento filosófico inherente a este tipo de texto, que es dilucidar cuál es el papel del escritor y de su arte en la sociedad en la que vive.

Palabras clave: *novela de artista, literatura puertorriqueña, literatura hispanoamericana, Kunsterroman, Mayra Santos Febres*

Abstract

This article places Cualquier miércoles soy tuya within the tradition of the artist's novel and studies the transformations it introduces in relation to the Romantic, Modernist and Avantgarde models. In Mayra Santos Febres' text, the revision of the traditional form of the artist's novel takes place through the structural innovations but, moreover, is imbedded in the philosophical theme that characterizes this type of narrative, that is, the elucidation of the writer's role and his art in the society he belongs to.

Keywords: *artist's novel, Puertorrican literature, Latin American literature, Kunsterroman, Mayra Santos Febres*

Cualquier miércoles soy tuya (2002), the second novel by Puerto Rican writer Mayra Santos Febres,¹ has been linked, both by the author and by critics, to the genre of the detective story.² It seems natural to consider the novel as part of this literary genre since the plot unfolds from the perspective of Julián Castrodad, the fictional narrator and author of the text we are reading, during his contacts with the outside world in his capacity as night shift receptionist at a motel near San Juan. These contacts include his colleague Tadeo; the middle-aged and enigmatic Dama Solitaria, who gets drunk alone on Wednesdays; and Chino Pereira, a drug dealer in business with Soreno, a prominent

¹ Mayra Santos Febres has published two volumes of short stories, *Pez de vidrio* (awarded the Juan Rulfo Prize in 1996) and *El cuerpo correcto*, as well as two collections of poetry, *Anamú y manigua* and *El orden escapado*, and a novel, *Sirena Selena vestida de pena* (2000).

² Santos Febres, in an interview with Marcia Morgado for *Barcelona Review* said that she was writing a detective story (5) when referring to *Cualquier miércoles soy tuya*. Edgardo Rodríguez Juliá coincides when he includes this novel in the genre of whodunits.

lawyer representing the Board of the Energy Syndicate. They all become the object of Julián's investigation and a part of his own life, Tadeo representing the friend he never had; the mysterious woman, his lover of three nights who turns into his obsession; and Chino Pereira acting like a source of information about a Puerto Rican reality so far unknown to him. The text he writes is the unfolding of a complicated network of relationships and the novel ends as Julián begins to answer several important questions. Julián assumes the role of the detective and presents events in a chronological fashion (the process of writing), imposing his own perspective (the mysteries to solve) on the situation he witnesses or in which he gets passively involved. Classifying this novel as a detective story responds only to the peculiar narrative voice Julián creates for himself as narrator. However, if we keep in mind that he describes himself as a writer lacking any subject matter to write about, the novel describes how and why he found his inspiration, "el oasis deseado. Oasis de tinta" (18), in the Tulán Motel. Taking into account this aspect, *Cualquier miércoles soy tuya* can be considered within the tradition of the artist's novel and, in this article, I will analyze the variations this novel presents in relation to the concept of the artist as literary character that Rafael Gutiérrez Girardot theorizes about in *Modernismo. Supuestos históricos y culturales*. Once the image of Julián is differentiated from the tradition of the romantic, modernist and avant-garde character, I study how the text we are reading dismantles the historical and literary models with which Julián the character tries to write, how this young artist (Julián the narrator) finds, outside the canon, the form of writing that will define him, and how he singles out a tradition he then chooses to betray in order to find his own mode of expression.

At the beginning of his narration, Julián remembers his first meeting with Tadeo when the latter offered him a job as his assistant after he had just been fired as proofreader at a local newspaper. Tadeo is actually the first person in the motel who awakes in him the desire to take out his "notebook" (18), to write. The second person that arouses Julian's curiosity is the Dama Solitaria, who will take advantage of this curiosity to seduce him. The third character, Chino Pereira, also proves fascinating because, like the others, he is hiding a secret which Julián feels compelled to discover, thus luring him and tapping his much desired ability to write. Viewing the plot from the perspective of Julián as a writer in search of a story that will allow him to write leads me to include *Cualquier miércoles...* in the tradition of the artist's novel.³

³ I am using the terms "artist's novel" and "Kunstslerroman" following the difference in terminology marked by Roberta Sert in *Voyage into Creativity: The Modern Kunstslerroman*. "The Artist's Novel, less psychological in its implications and less personal in its perspective than the confession, narrates a story in which the protagonist is already a formed artist. Importance is not placed on the formation of the artist as it is in the Kunstslerroman but on the narration of situations and experiences related to the artist-protagonist" (5). Julián is not an adolescent; he has already decided to be a writer. What he is looking for is the story that would allow him to write. The term "Kunstslerroman" was proposed

The former approach does not preclude the novel's belonging to the genre of the detective story since, following Lee Lemon in *Portraits of the Artist in Contemporary Fiction*, there is no specific type of artist's novel in contemporary literature, but rather transformations of an existing model (213).⁴ Moreover, this type of text requires a generic structure that supersedes all else since the definition is based on the theme rather than on the form or content.⁵ In this respect, Santos Febres' novel is an original transformation of the artist's novel that stems from early German Romanticism and flourishes again during the period of modernismo and vanguardia.⁶ Thus, the traditional forms of expression of the self (confession, journal, letter, etc.) give way in *Cualquier miércoles...* to the different voices and stories that Julián recognizes as the origin of his writing. This creative process isolates him from the psychological probing that characterizes the novels of the self. Julián-character, distinct from Julián writer-narrator,⁷ rejects the confessional writing model because he does not want to

by H. Marcuse in 1922 as Latorre informs as in "Una muestra de «novela de artista» en la literatura española (1864-1915)," "para un tipo de narrativa alemana iniciada en «Strung und Drang» cuyos héroes -y artistas- eran el centro entorno al cual se construía su época" (105). In the same article, Latorre states that he prefers the term "novela de artista" rather than "novela del artista" because the former "realza la tipología genérica" (105).

⁴ According to Lee Lemon, there is a difference between the artist's novels before the Second World War and those that came afterwards. "The storyline of the typical pre-World War II *Kunstlerroman* may be described as the protagonist's gathering strength to enable him to glory in his differences from others, the storyline of the more recent *Kunstlerroman* is more likely to show the protagonist's gathering of sufficient strength to feel compassion for the fellow humans and to endure the pain of that compassion" (xiv).

⁵ For additional information on this aspect see *The Poetics of the Kunstlerinroman and the Aesthetics of the Sublime* by Evy Varsamopoulou. She only studies artist's novels written by women writers linked to romantic discourse (the sublime) but she encompasses the whole genre when she affirms, talking both about the *Kunstlerinroman* and *Kunstlerroman*: "As a modern genre, it is best described as inclusive rather than exclusive. In effect, *Kunstlerinroman* invariably rely on other dominant and popular genres on which the *Kunstlerin* narrative shaped; however, this co-existence is subject to interactive transformations. None of the participating discourses or genres suffers a reduction from this 'generic' reading..." (xxv). Rafael Gutiérrez Girardot emphasizes the same characteristic in *Modernismo: Supuestos históricos y culturales*, when he states that the artist's novels "se caracterizaron de manera formal por la heterogeneidad de los elementos que las componen; diálogo, diario, ensayo, supuesto testimonio, etc." (34). See also *Ivory Towers and Sacred Founts* by Maurice Beebe. This critic believes the *Kunstlerroman* is recognized in the self-portraits of the artist this type of text represents. Besides, all of them develop three major themes: the concept of the artist as a split identity, art as a form of divine inspiration, and the conflict between the ideal (living in the ivory tower) and society. However, Beebe is contemplating only the artist's novel up to James Joyce.

⁶ Gutiérrez Girardot, in "La novela del artista en la época contemporánea" identifies the birth of the genre with 1794 Germany and the release of *Ardinghella o las islas bienaventuradas* by Wilhelm Heinse (14). Evy Varsamopoulou, in the *The poetics of the Kunstlerinroman and the Aesthetics of the Sublime*, the genre's birth takes place also in Germany, but in 1798 with Ludwig Tieck's novel *Franz Sternbald's Wanderings* (x).

⁷ Amparo de Juan Bolufer in *La técnica narrativa en Valle-Inclán* analyzes first-person narrative and says that "el uso del pronombre 'yo' recubre tanto al narrador como al personaje que fue él mismo en el pasado, separado por una distancia temporal que puede ser mayor o menor, pero que siempre existe. Esto produce cambios en la focalización de la perspectiva narrativa, ya que el relato puede

be a part of what he writes and, unlike the romantic/modernist artist, he seems to be a writer who turns outward and is interested in realism (58), one who is the controlling voice and who sees everything because the purpose of his writing is “informar, (hacer) entender, ampliar las mentes críticas de mi país” (127). As a result, he searched for the source of his writing in the news that he proofread at the yellow press bureau where he used to work. His stance before the writing material (not the one he is actually writing) is perfectly defined by the concept that Tadeo uses referring to the perfect hotel employee, “la mirada periferal.” That is “hacerse desaparecer del panorama. Como si uno no fuera el que estuviera allí” yet seeing and reckoning everything (17). But if we distinguish between Julián the character and Julián the narrator we realize that the latter writes the text we are reading in the form of a police story, while its true theme is actually Julián’s transformation from character to narrator. In other words, the story we are reading is the path that Julián (character and narrator) has followed in order to find the story (his story) that has enabled him to turn into reality his wish to become a writer.

Cualquier miércoles... challenges the theoretical framework of the artist’s novel with respect to the role of the writer and the art he produces. The text portrays the changes this genre has undergone especially after World War I. The artist shows the space of art as the place where the artist “labyrinth” materializes in the form of an eternal quest but has no meaningful position in society. Gutiérrez Girardot in “La novela del artista en la época contemporánea” documents this change and bases it on the relationship between the artist and society: “El artista ya no se aparta y rechaza la sociedad burguesa sino que la sociedad burguesa que ha sido inundada por el ‘animal masa’ es sorda a los sueños y las aspiraciones del artista. El artista ya no es una ‘vox clamandis in deserto’ sino una ausencia” (26). This is somehow the social position of Julián but it should be noted that Julián is very conscious of the mistrust a writer awakens in the Puerto Rican society. For instance, he is very careful not to tell the owner of the motel that he is a writer because:

mejor ni mencionarle que esa supuesta investigación que me inventó Tadeo serviría para escribir una novela. No haría más que acrecentar desconfianzas. Porque, a fin de cuentas, ¿qué era un escritor para el señor Tulán, para cualquier señor Tulán que habitara la faz de la tierra? ¿gente decente, trabajadora, que quieren echar pa’lante? Definitivamente no. Excéntricos, vagos medio locos, amorales, eso es lo que la gente piensa de los escritores... (115)

verse desde el punto de vista del sujeto que experimenta el pasado como desde el que narra tiempo después” (50). In *Cualquier miércoles...* the story is narrated by Julian’s voice in the present of the writing act, but the focalization dwells on Julián character, that is, the person from the past. This is evidenced by the use of the tenses since most of the novel is narrated in the past tense. The exception occurs in the last part of the novel in which the narrator and the character are one and the same and therefore the narration turns to the present tense.

Julián also knows that people like Tadeo, Dominican and undocumented belonging to a different social group than Tulán, and espousing different values, equally mistrust artists, since “eso de la literatura es cosa de locos y de pájaros” (19).

According to Gutiérrez Girardot, the romantic-modernist artist “reacciona contra la sociedad, contra sus presiones, contra su moral, contra sus valores antipoéticos, y lo hace de una manera obstinada, es decir, subrayando enérgicamente el valor de lo que esta sociedad ha rebajado de diversas maneras: el arte, el artista” (24). Faced with the rejection of bourgeois society, the artist reflects on the position that art and artist have in that society, and it is at this point where the artist’s novel is born to answer the question of why art exists (33-4). However, the position of the artist in such a society is ambivalent: on one side he rejects it and only participates in a tangential mode through marginal and underpaid jobs (30); on the other, there is a deep desire to be taken into consideration. When this is not accomplished he is frustrated, a state which the artist’s novel partially expresses as an artistic form of social resentment (37). The protagonists recreate this situation over and over in a sort of social exile felt by the writer (43). This is obviously not Julián’s case since, although this character only holds marginal jobs (proofreader in a third-rate newspaper, receptionist in a motel), he is alienated from his family and from his social milieu, while complaining of lack of time to think because he needs to work (20-1). His position, in short, is more a gesture of imitation than a reaction against the moral values of his society. The Julián recreated in the text we are reading—that is, Julián the character—wants to find a place for that society in the middle of his stories and makes it the main force of his characters’ actions.

Julián escapes from his family and isolates himself in the close space of his small office at the newspaper where he watches the world around him (not the one he lives in) from an inner perspective, “mirada interna” (21), and thinks that this marginal position will lead him to creation. In spite of this, Julián’s isolation is far from the “negación del presente y la evasión a otros mundos” associated with the modernist writer (Gutiérrez Girardot 35). Julián does not reject his world but is afraid of it; that is why he always tries to keep a distance, to avoid getting involved with anything or anybody since, as he himself puts it, “quería camuflarme, pero perderme, estar fuera, pero quedarme adentro. Para algo soy puertorriqueño, es decir, isleño hasta cierto punto, negro negado y blanco sin serlo” (171). But the distance he keeps from the world makes it difficult to find the thread of a story, “encontrar el hilo de una historia” (21). He wants to enjoy in life the same position of the voice in his stories: that of a third-person omniscient narrator. That is how he inaugurates his new position as a receptionist, and with that voice he intends to create the stories of Chino Pereira and Tadeo within the space of Paralelo 37, that is, from a neo-realist perspective (literary tradition) based on social determinism. Thus, whatever

happens to them will be inflicted by outside forces: “lo que les pasará será un reflejo de las fuerzas del lugar, de esa cosa que arrastraba a todo aquel que merodeaba por su periferia hacia el centro, un centro que se alimentaba del dolor de la pobreza. La tragedia de probarse hombre...” (58). This is the same voice we find when he tries to make the *Dama Solitaria* a part of his reserve of literary material: “quizás llamaría para su orden acostumbrada de licor, alguna cosa para picar, que yo le serviría invisible, rellenando los huecos de mi memoria con nuevas observaciones sobre su cuerpo y con nuevas preguntas de qué hacía aquella mujer allí” (61).

Julián the character rejects the position of the intellectual who writes while lost in a library of Babel (110),⁸ but he doesn't want to live in absolute darkness: “la intemperie absoluta de la calle con sus tinieblas. Es decir, que yo quería vivir para desde ahí contar mis historias, contrastándolas con el papel y conociéndolas en la carne, pero no a cuenta de que la vida se me quedara con todo. La sangre y la tinta (si acaso) corren paralelas pero no se mezclan” (110). The motel offers him the possibility to stimulate the ink (59), and from his desk Julián is able to watch other peoples' life (blood) and feed his desire to write, thus reconciling his passion for a quest and his fear of life outside that obsession.⁹ Julián's apprehension before the world stems from his fear of being absorbed, of having destroyed his self-created image of the writer in love with an unattainable “object” of writing:

Leía una entrada de mi diario. No quería llamarlo diario, pero lo era. Lo es, igual a esas libretitas melodramáticas y rosadas que guardan las quinceañeras en las gavetas de su tocador, fieros guardianes de sus secretos de anhelantes enamoradas. Mis libretas guardan una misma función. Estoy enamorado, trágicamente enamorado. Pero el objeto de mis deseos no se deja poseer. Describo mi desgracia en estas libretas bobas. De vez en cuando, cuando quiero sentir que no todo está perdido, las leo. (22)

This is an interesting aspect since it seems a variation of the alienation of the modernist artist who sees himself expelled from society and creates in turn a reality which intensifies life, “que al ser llevada a su extremo ocasionaba no solamente gozo sino también angustia, plenitud y duda e incertidumbre, sensualidad y remordimiento, impiedad y nueva fe” (Gutiérrez Girardot 43). Julián is alienated for fear of losing his passion for writing which is, in fact, his life's only meaning.¹⁰ Moreover, Julián tries to find a new formula for what

⁸ Santos Febres, in an interview with Marcia Morgado, admits that “siempre tengo ganas de deleitar (seducir) al lector sin ofender su inteligencia. Sé que mi actitud como escritora se fundamenta en un cierto ‘desparpajo’ ante lo intelectual y literario” (3). It is precisely in this sense that this novel opposes the artist's novel in the Hispanic tradition, that is, among texts as representative as *Rayuela* by Julio Cortázar, *El cuarto de atrás* by Carmen Martín Gaité, *Señas de identidad* by Juan Goytisolo, *Paradiso* by José Lezama Lima and *Los pasos perdidos* by Alejo Carpentier, among others.

⁹ The stories written by Julián have, as a theme, the search for a man's destiny (44).

¹⁰ Julián's alienation pushed his girl friend Daphne to leave:

—Perdona que sea tan sincera pero ¿qué me importan a mí tus novelas? Yo no me acuesto

Gutiérrez Girardot calls “existencia estética” en “La novela del artista en la época contemporánea,” using a term coined by Kierkegaard that describes a world of one’s own constructed entirely on writing and yet conveying the idea that it is depicting reality. Unlike such a tradition, Julián does not construct a world and he does not construct himself within that world, but instead goes outward (rather than inward) in search of his motivation to create.

Nonetheless, this tradition applies to Julián the character and differs from the narrator of the text we are reading. The story he finally writes reveals the process that he went through which led him to transform his passion for writing into the act of writing, to produce a text and, in this process, let life (his and other people’s lives) intermingle with words. In this sense, what Julián the narrator describes is the transformation operated in his self-image as a writer and in the type of novel he wanted to write. Such a transformation can be traced along the connections established by Julián the narrator with five archetypal terms: desire, the labyrinth, the merciless elements, treason and blood. The dialogue with these concepts from his perspective as a narrator in relation to the sense Julián the character gives them, establishes the connections which lead the reader to understand Julián’s transformation. Now both, character and narrator, become one and he can finally write a story. In short, the different connections and permutations Julián the narrator establishes with those terms (symbols) throughout the text we are reading (his shifting position before life and writing) allows us to witness the process that this young writer undergoes in order to be capable of recreating, reshaping and transforming his experiences into an artistic product.

Julián the character wants to be a writer; he lives with this idea in mind and is anguished when he is unable to create a story (21-2). His arrival at the motel and his initial contact with Tadeo add a third element to the terms desire and writing; the labyrinth. Julián the character has always seen the blank page as the space where chaos turns into order (with him playing the role of the master of that order) and now, curiously, Tadeo’s stories diminish his capacity to control but make him write nonetheless (27). This situation transforms the space of the motel into the place where perhaps “al fin encontraría lo que tantos años andaba buscando, lo que me había llevado al periódico y después al desempleo, lo que me había hecho pelear con mi clan completo y hastairme en contra de mí mismo” (20), that is, the coveted story that will allow him to write and that has so far eluded him. Tadeo’s stories in fact make him lose his position as an omniscient narrator, the one he wants to hold within the tradition

con ellas ni les hablo por las mañanas...

—Pero yo sí.

—Conmigo también. Tu dormías conmigo también. No había que suplantar una cosa por otra. No había que cancelar la vida o ir a buscar fuera para poder escribir. La vida está aquí, es esto. Tú eres tus palabras. (136)

of social criticism, and expose him to the chaos and nonsense of real life. Julián's opening up to the lives of others through Tadeo's unmediated voice, so different from the news on the screen at his former job, forces Julián to live and also to relegate the notion of abandonment to the elements ("intemperie") associated with a social group with which he has nothing to do: the underworld or "bajo mundo" of drug pushers and shanty town dwellers (74).

Entering this labyrinth of life enslaved to the elements, characteristic of this sector of society, and the reaction his own body triggers in this group of people, made him realize that he and his physical persona clash in a space such as the Motel Tulán. Tadeo remarks:

Hermano [...] ¿Usted no se ha visto últimamente en el espejo? ¿Miró bien al Chino, vio la gente que estaba allá arriba, me ha tasado bien a mí? Déme un buen recorte y póngame un Rólex en la muñeca o deje sin afeitar al Chino y quítele los trapos de marca, y ¿qué encuentra? A dos seres de la misma calaña. Uno bueno y otro malo, uno con suerte y otro sin ella. Vaya uno a saber cuál. Pero a usted a leguas se le nota la diferencia. Es más, a veces hasta yo me pregunto por qué aceptó venir a trabajar a este motel. (80)

Julian's physical appearance is the first thing the Dama Solitaria remarks. As he becomes this woman's object of desire, he develops a heightened sense of living on the outside of things, exposed to the elements, to life's mercy, to what others think of him. For the first time in his life, it is Julián who arouses interest, and becomes the focus of attention and curiosity of others. This, in turn, allows him to experience unconsciously the process he has used in relation to his potential literary characters.

In Chino Pereira's eyes (90-2), Tadeo's discourse, and the Dama Solitaria's seduction (69), Julian is fixed as a particular kind of body; the perception of this inscription of his body alters his relations with the motel space and the people in it.¹¹ This shifting of positions (voice) is marked in the writing of Julián-narrator, by the change in the name of the seductress from Dama Solitaria to M. Julián, the character, realizes that he can no longer see her as the potential protagonist of a mystery romance in which he, as the narrator (masculine position), would unveil the secret this woman hides. Now Julián has lost the distance that would allow him to recreate her and approach her—and the other possible characters of his story—from an outsider position of control and domination. The omniscient narrator has become one of the characters and, what is more, a person subjected to the judgment and seduction of the others and hence a more feminine character. Now he experiences "(e)l terrible miedo

¹¹ I use the term "inscription" in the sense given by Elizabeth Grosz in *Space, Time and Perversion: Essays on the Politics of the Bodies*, in which she defines inscriptions as "processes by which the subject is marked, scarred, transformed and written upon or constructed by the various regimes of institutional discursive and non-discursive power as a particular kind of body" (33).

a ser mujer, es decir, a ser un ente vulnerable, delicado y abierto a la dureza del otro" (90). This feminine aspect of Julián is heightened in his conversation with M. when he says, "los artistas somos hombres muy sensibles. Nos duele todo," and M. replies, "Como a las mujeres" (95).¹²

The position of the omniscient narrator is taken over by a voice that asks questions about characters and about himself. The tradition of social criticism based on realism has disappeared. His sexual encounter with M. has made him transgress his own norms and, once again, "perdía el sentido de dirección" (100). The more involved he got with people, the more entangled he became and the more he lost control, until he asks "¿Cuál es entonces el lugar de un mentiroso, de un escritor?" (81) in society. At this point, Julián the character has already become the kind of writer Lemon calls "the Wordsworthian artist," who is "primarily a human being trying to live in a world peopled with individuals as important as himself [...]. (He) is also likely to recognize this own fuzziness about the place his work occupies in the grand scheme of things" (xiii).

The second aspect mentioned by Lemon, the function of literary creation and the writer within society, is also modified as we read. The transformation undergone by Julián the character in his capacity as a writer is paralleled by the change in the function he gave to his potential production. If at the beginning he tries to convey the idea that his stories will be "una brújula que nos sirviera a todos, a Tadeo, a mí, a algún posible lector" (27),¹³ he later defines it as an attempt to pass down "la experiencia que cada uno vive de la verdad" which must be represented as a search ("búsqueda"), even if in this process "uno acabe perdiéndose a sí mismo" (202). Julián's change before the kind of writer he wants to be, as well as the function he assigns to his production, stems from the reading of M.'s papers. In those excerpts thrown away the last night at the motel, M. explains her life, her mother's and her grandmother's past and also the reason for coming to the motel Wednesday after Wednesday. Finally, she confesses why she wants to give away her husband's secret: Efraín Soreno's illegal activities involving Chino Pereira. Reading the papers, Julián understands what it is to mix blood and ink, and that is why M.'s text becomes an obsession for him:

Tarde tras tarde me encontré leyéndolas [las páginas], como un adicto, incapaz de zafarme de su brazo, con mis ojos pegados a la piel del papel como si fuera la de la propia M. y envidiándola. Yo siempre quise escribir así, de una manera desnuda, sin

¹² Julián had remarked before that he had proved to be too refined for the environment of the newspaper.

¹³ This definition of the function of art links Julián to the modernist artist. According to Gutiérrez Girardot, in *Modernismo: Supuestos históricos y culturales*, the modernist sees in the artistic production a substitute for the truths that religious dogma used to offer man. Art becomes a new religion and the artist a priest (45-51).

preocuparme quién podía ver mis pestes y mis costras, concentrándome tan sólo en el hecho de transcribirlas en un papel, esperando así liberarme de ellas. (133)

But Julián the character does not want to mix ink with blood. Hence the symbolic act of putting together what he had written with M.'s writing (132). Her pages contain the blood that Julián's projects lack. At the same time, Julián finds in M.'s papers the tradition he wants to break away from; the confessional mode of writing, the writing of the self, that characterizes the novel of the romantic-modernist artist. The following words point in this direction:

Yo me he pasado una vida buscando lo que aspiro a traicionar. Y ahora, estos papeles que nunca aspiraron en convertirse en «verbo» me estaban enseñando cómo. Con sus garabatos de tinta M. invitaba a una traición más viva que la de cualquier libro real. Allí estaba la página viva, latiendo como nunca antes la había visto. (134)

At this point, Julián the narrator adds another link to the chain of words that symbolizes this path: betrayal. What does Julián want to betray? It must be noted that Julián knows he is immersed in a labyrinth of stories (his and the others') and that he cannot protect himself from them, that he is exposed to the elements, with no distance between them and himself. Thus the path of betrayal perceived in M.'s papers is self-betrayal, betrayal of his fear of writing to reveal and to be revealed, his fear of confession. This statement can be supported by Julian's own presentation of the relationship between M.'s writing and the text we are reading:

Es curioso. Un escritor necesita ser marcado por otros escritores, como una página en blanco. Y después traicionar la mano que lo entinta. Sólo entonces tiene derecho a la confesión, perdón, quise decir a la escritura. No, quise decir, las dos cosas, porque hasta cierto punto la escritura es una confesión, la de una traición, la gran traición de un lector rebelde que no se conforma con ser el obediente receptor de las palabras del Padre, de su verbo procreador, sino que quiere acceder a decir esas mismas palabras también, a manchar vírgenes páginas, vírgenes pupilas en blanco. (134)

In M.'s papers Julián finds the confession of a woman who has turned to writing as a way to silence the unending questions and the reproaches that come from her own mouth in a senseless way.¹⁴ This woman feels betrayed by life because one day she believed it was going to resemble the fairy tales that her father would tell her as a girl. What she gets out of life, in turn, is a husband who deserts the marital bed and pays no attention to his wife. One evening, as she was fumbling in her husband's desk, she finds some documents and takes them straight to her grandmother. She discovers Efraín is involved in illegal dealings with Chino Pereira and decides to denounce him to the authorities. This is her revenge and her betrayal of a long-standing women's tradition of

¹⁴ The way Julián recreates M.'s writing makes it appear writing for the sake of survival.

silence: her grandmother's, her mother's and her own.¹⁵ M. has found a way to escape the torment that did not allow her to stop writing. Now, while M.'s pages show Julián the character the path of treason (to the self), he is still unable to mix ink with blood until Tadeo is detained and deported, and has made his confession to him. Blood represents Julian's suffering, seeing Tadeo in jail and being unable to help, of learning that Tadeo, in what was an act of collective madness, participated in the group rape of a woman who had joined them in an attempt to escape to Puerto Rico. The pain of Tadeo's loss, M.'s disappearance and Chino Pereira's flight make him embrace writing as a way to find answers. What he finds instead is the capacity to transform his life's experiences into an artistic creation. Thus, M.'s writing as presented in Julián the narrator's text is a literary elaboration since Julián actually destroys M.'s pages when he succeeds in mixing blood and ink. The betrayal Julián is going to accomplish consists of the inversion of the function he had always assigned to writing. Now it is no longer a search, "no había fin en mi propósito, ni descubrimiento, ni deuda, sólo aquel aliviador desliz. Ser otro en la ausencia del yo que busca, perder el motivo de la búsqueda en el trazo del roce y de tan perdido ni preguntar por dónde se anda" (225), or the space to look for answers. Writing is the space of uncertainty and the function assigned to it now is to hope that his story "sirva para que alguien pueda verse reflejado en sus aguas turbias cualquier noche que ande perdido, buscando cómo rescatarse de la noche de las ciudades" (239).

Taking into account this analysis and the function Julián assigns to his writing, it is obvious that *Cualquier miércoles soy tuya* is an artist's novel that poses theoretical problems about the role of the writer and his art in society. This characteristic is one of the elements Varsamopoulou associated with the *Kunstlerroman* since, in those texts, there is always "a critical awareness of the *métier* of literary art, blurring the boundaries between fiction and criticism, as the novelist becomes critic of his/her own creative process or product" (xiii). But the true transformation of the genre's characteristics within the Hispanic tradition is related, within this novel, to the use given to the traditional genres of the self that inevitably are associated with the *Kunstlerroman*. *Cualquier miércoles...* is structured partly as a confession, but in Tadeo's voice. Biography is also present, but again it is not Julián's own life but M.'s that the reader

¹⁵ M.'s stance on divorce, like her mother's and grandmother's, exemplifies what Mary Louise Pratt theorizes about in "La heterogeneidad y el paraíso de la teoría." "El concepto de igualdad ante la ley, por ejemplo, presupone relaciones de igualdad e identidad entre sujetos, como las que se obtienen entre los ciudadanos, pero falla en no tomar en cuenta las estructuras de desigualdad que determinan las acciones y el sentido de las acciones de diversos sujetos" (23) since, as M.'s mother puts it: "Yo no sé si el mundo habrá cambiado mucho y ya es otro, pero en el mío, una mujer sola no vale nada, las feministas que se dejen de hablar mierda. Habrá una ley que otra que nos proteja, una puerta que otra que se nos abra. Pero en el día a día una mujer sigue valiendo lo que siempre ha valido una mujer" (107). As a result, the attitude of these women obeys the conscience they have of their own need to lie, to accept the unacceptable, to feign and to be silent. They can be the equal of men before the law but they are not their equal at a social level.

finds. The contribution of this novel to the subgenre of the artist's novel is that, although it includes the traditional genres associated with it, in this case they are found in relation to other characters, but not to the artist-character himself. As a result, the center of the story is not the artist and his creative process, which is displaced, but a series of stories.

Unlike most of the artist's novels, this text by Santos Febres has a great variety of narrative voices and shows different lexical registers that converge in Julián's ultimate ability to write. Other differences from the romantic, modernist and avant-garde traditions lie in the fact that this novel does not seek to find answers to universal questions and, as a result, the image of the poet as prophet, from the romantic and modernist tradition, disappears. Moreover, social alienation is implicitly criticized. At the end of the novel, Julián goes back to the daily rhythm of the city and realizes he is just one more person amid the thousands that live there, thus, once again, modifying the position of the avant-garde artist. In Julián's ideology, the city is not "el lugar de la acumulación anónima" (12) or the ambivalent space conceived by Hispanic writers from the turn of the 19th century (Gutiérrez Girardot 75-8), but rather the place that allows not only the cohabitation of different voices (such as those in this text) but also their intermingling. Day and night, the city represents life; the complexity of voices that inhabit Julián's novel are in fact a celebration of the urban phenomenon.¹⁶

The modernist novel, as José Luis Calvo Carilla points out in *La cara oculta del 98*, "se acentúa la conciencia de sí de la literatura, de la capacidad reflexiva y crítica de los creadores" and "la intelectualización progresiva del proceso artístico abre el campo para la experimentación" (186) blown up by the avant-garde. *Cualquier miércoles...*, however, reshapes the cultural horizons of the artist's novel since it is not only the personal account of the creator/protagonist, but also those of other characters, broadening the thematic scope of this type of narrative. The sort of experimentation found in this novel allows for an oppositional dialogue with the tradition of the artist's novel. In the artist's novel of the modernist variety, the artist "proclamaba [el artista personaje] su voluntad de sacrificar la vida al sacerdocio del arte y daba cuenta de su vía crucis de rechazo e incompreensión social y de su agónica lucha por la consecución de la belleza bajo la incesante tortura de la insatisfacción creadora" (Calvo Carilla 187); in the avant-garde model the artist alienates himself from the real world and creates for himself an alternative universe. In contrast with the former models, Julián here reaffirms his belonging to the society in which he lives and, far from staying in exile and in isolation from his creative universe, he celebrates the real world. In this sense, it can be stated that Julián departs

¹⁶ Santos Febres, in her interview with Morgado, states that what her books have in common is "una preocupación por la experiencia urbana caribeña. Me obsesiona cómo se vive en las ciudades del Caribe. Ese pegote de infraestructura primermundista" (2).

from the idea of the artist as seen in the modernist and avant-garde tradition, thereby revising and transforming such a tradition. That evolution is possible, in part, due to the fact that the structure of *Cualquier miércoles...* is open and flexible enough not only to incorporate the structure of the detective novel, but also to resist the traditional symbiosis of character and author in the artist's novel.

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