

CONTEMPORARY NARRATIVE TECHNIQUES IN JUAN VICENTE MELO'S *FIN DE SEMANA*

The works of the Mexican writer Juan Vicente Melo chronologically coincide with the period of the "Boom" in Latin American narrative. His fiction includes *La noche alucinada* (1956), *Los muros enemigos* (1962), *Fin de semana* (1964), and *La obediencia nocturna* (1969). Although Melo effectively uses the innovative narrative techniques that made many of his contemporaries famous, his works have received comparatively little critical attention¹ and lack the international popularity and acclaim earned by such authors as Carlos Fuentes, Gabriel García Márquez and Julio Cortázar. Nonetheless, Melo expertly employs many of the same techniques for which these other Boom authors are famous: fantastic elements, temporal play, stream-of-consciousness, textual voice,² and intertextuality. The focus of this study is an analysis of how these narrative techniques are developed in the collection of short stories *Fin de semana*, as well as their implications with regard to the work's interpretation. *Fin de semana*, frequently considered Melo's most well-constructed book (Ruffinelli 22), consists of three short stories: "Viernes: La hora inmóvil," "Sábado: El verano de la mariposa," and "Domingo: El día de reposo."

In order to examine Melo's use of fantastic elements, we must first indicate what we mean by "fantastic," since the definition varies from critic to critic. Tzvetan Todorov defines the genre of the fantastic as a hesitation or uncertainty on the reader's (and sometimes also the character's) part, as to whether an event is real or a product of the imagination because it does not obey the laws of our world (Todorov, *The Fantastic*, 25, 31).

The title itself of the first story of Melo's collection suggests its relationship with the fantastic. "La hora inmóvil" posits a stationary or unchanging temporal

¹ I was able to find only the following bibliography on Melo: Luis Méndez and Esther Hernández, "La obediencia nocturna, un desafío intangible," *Texto Crítico*, 29 (1984): 29-34; Alfredo Pavón, "Galindo, Castellanos, Melo: el presente insoportable," *La Palabra y el Hombre: Revista de la Universidad Veracruzana* 59-60 (1986): 29-31; Renato Prada Oropeza, "En torno a la obediencia nocturna," *Texto Crítico*, 29 (1984): 35-40; Luis Arturo Ramos, "El vicario del otro: *Fin de semana*," *La Palabra y el Hombre: Revista de la Universidad Veracruzana* 73 (1990): 83-97 (listed as a chapter of a forthcoming book on Melo); and Jorge Ruffinelli, "Juan Vicente Melo: Entre la elegía y el arcano," *Texto Crítico*, 29 (1984): 20-28. This issue of *Texto Crítico* also includes a discussion of Melo's works by the author himself entitled "En el banquillo de los acusados" on pages 5-19. Ruffinelli points out (p. 21) that Melo has written an autobiographical account of his works as part of a series called "Nuevos escritores mexicanos del siglo XX" (México: Empresas Editoriales, S.A., 1966).

² I am borrowing this term (which will be discussed in more detail in the appropriate section) from Stephen Ross, "'Voice' in Narrative Texts: The Example of *As I Lay Dying*" *PMLA* 94 (1979): 300-310.

framework, which contradicts the very nature of the concept of time, defined as something which always advances. In "La hora inmóvil," the protagonist, Roberto Gálvez, returns to his home town on a mission of vengeance. The narrator informs us that when Gálvez arrived, "Sonaron seis campanadas: un día antes, a esa misma hora, habían enterrado a Crescencio el mulato" (Melo, *Fin*, 9). Several pages later, after a lengthy conversation between Gálvez and the narrator during which the former escorted Gálvez to his house, the narrator again indicates: "Todavía sonaban las seis campanadas del reloj de la iglesia" (Melo, *Fin*, 13). At this point the reader begins to question how it can still be six o'clock when a portion of time appears to have elapsed between Gálvez's arrival and entrance in the house. The third reference to the clock striking six confirms the reader's impression that time has in fact stopped in the story. After Gálvez and the narrator have been inside the house quite awhile, we are told: "Alguien cantaba en el muelle otra vez, la misma canción. Todavía las seis en el reloj de la iglesia" (Melo, *Fin*, 16). The reader vacillates between interpreting this time stoppage as a dream or part of reality.

This initial play with time is used to help merge two different epochs in the story: what happened twenty-five years ago between Gabriel Gálvez, Roberto's grandfather, and the mulatto servant Crescencio, and what is happening now between Roberto Gálvez and Crescencio's son. Maricel, Gabriel's daughter, fell in love with Crescencio, became pregnant with his child, and subsequently lost her mind. She died giving birth to their son, Roberto Gálvez. Shortly thereafter, Gabriel Gálvez died, and it was rumored that Crescencio had killed him. In order to avenge the deaths of his mother and grandfather, Roberto Gálvez returns to kill Crescencio's son by another woman. However, just as Roberto's grandfather is said to have been murdered by Crescencio, so does Roberto die by the hand of Crescencio's son, thus repeating in essence the events of twenty-five years ago. This repetition of what happened in the past points to a cyclical time that also creates the effect of a stationary or unchanging time. The element of cyclical time is further underscored in the story's conclusion, when the narrator indicates that Roberto Gálvez has a son who will return to avenge his death: "Espero con secreta alegría la tarde que aparezca el hijo que tuvo Roberto Gálvez mientras vivió fuera de la casa del abuelo" (Melo, *Fin*, 35). Moreover, the story ends by repeating the same words with which it began: "Esto fue lo que vi" (Melo, *Fin*, 9, 35).

This cyclical and thus immobile time produces the same effect of hesitation between the imagined and the real that characterizes Todorov's definition of the fantastic. According to Luis Arturo Ramos, who discusses in detail the concept of time in *Fin de semana*, this cyclical time is indicative of a ritualistic time that reflects the character of the vengeance achieved by the protagonist (84). Ramos states: "El intento vengativo se cumple . . . como sacrificio para la restitución de la armonía y no de la revancha. La venganza, o su intento, resulta más una forma de comunión que de hostilidad" (85). It is interesting to note the irony implicit in the supposed vengeance or repetition of the act of murder, since portions of "La

hora inmóvil" suggest that Crescencio was not responsible for Gabriel Gálvez's death; that Roberto's grandfather in fact may have died of a heart attack.

Some symbolic elements reinforce the reader's impression that the story's frozen time is a product of the characters' imagination. The most notable is the constant reference to the presence of the fishermen. According to Juan Cirlot, "El acto de pescar equivale a la extracción del inconsciente de los contenidos profundos . . . El pescador es el hombre capaz como el médico, de actuar sobre las mismas fuentes de la vida, por el conocimiento que posee de las mismas" (Cirlot 360). Note the constant repetition of the presence of the fishermen in the following montage of citations:

Roberto Gálvez . . . empezó a cantar, a repetir las palabras que decía el pescador, allá en el muelle. (Melo, *Fin* 28).

Nada que termine con el sordo lejano rumor del río y con la canción del pescador. (Melo, *Fin*, 29).

siguió [Roberto] inmóvil . . . hasta que se dejó de oír la canción del pescador. (Melo *Fin*, 32). Se celebraron los funerales de Roberto Gálvez. Nadie asistió, salvo yo y los cuatro pescadores que cargaron su ataúd. (34).

The second story, "El verano de la mariposa," also creates this hesitation between dream and reality in the reader's mind. The reader is never sure whether certain situations (both the ordinary and the extraordinary) actually occur in the story, or are solely the product of the imagination of the protagonist, Titina. Titina is a lonely spinster seamstress who is making a special anniversary dress for another woman. She puts on the dress and goes to the beach during the siesta hour where she prays that God endow her with supernatural powers. She then encounters a gentleman tourist who spends the afternoon with her before bringing her home to her dull routine. In the course of this encounter, the anniversary dress is ruined by the rainstorm that brings Titina and the tourist together.

The reader's hesitation begins during the scene at the beach. Although it seems fairly clear that Titina only imagines that God is giving her special powers, the reader is never actually told this in explicit terms. Her prayers are described thus:

Se levantó . . . Titina igual a Dios, dueña de la otra orilla, sabedora del secreto. Asistió alegre . . . a la muerte callada de los hombres de torso delgado. Reía . . . con la certeza de que era ella la que favorecía la destrucción, la que terminaba con el mundo. . . . Estaba segura de haber visto a una espada cruzar por el cielo y derrumbar árboles . . . (Melo, *Fin*, 51).

The reader is inclined to interpret this passage as indicative of the protagonist's flight of fancy, because the laws of nature would make it highly unlikely that Titina would suddenly be capable of destroying the world. The problem is that the story never clearly delineates when this fantasy ends and reality begins again. One possibility is to assume that reality commences once more with the rainstorm that begins on page 53. Such an interpretation would mean that Titina's encounter with

the stranger (during this storm) was a real event and not a dream. The passage from the godlike fantasy to the storm is very abrupt, as can be seen in the following quotation:

Y vio todo lo que había hecho. Y vio que era bueno y hermoso. Era la tarde del día sexto.

Sintió la primera gota, el repiquetear contra el asfalto y su cabeza, el mojarse de su vestido. La ciudad renació a su paso, la ciudad y sus habitantes que corrían a refugiarse de la lluvia. (Melo, *Fin*, 53).

The phrase “la ciudad renació a su paso” suggests a possible transition from dream back to reality as does the potential rousing effect of the raindrops. However, since the transition is so slight and there are many other elements in the text that suggest the protagonist’s imagination, the reader might just as easily assume that Titina’s fantasy continues throughout the story, and that her encounter with the stranger is merely a dream.

The first element that suggests that the encounter with the tourist is imaginary, is the symbolic repetition of the phrase “la otra orilla” (“the other shore”). In the passage cited before about God giving special powers to Titina, she was described as “dueña de la otra orilla”. “La otra orilla” is thus associated both with the type of life Titina has never led (a life of love and adventure)³ as well as with the extraordinary or supernatural, so that when this element reappears during her encounter with the stranger, the reader is inclined to interpret the episode as an imaginary occurrence. Their walk to the restaurant is described in the following manner: “Nunca tan largo (pero tan corto) el atravesar el parque y llegar a la otra orilla, el caer extenuada en una silla” (57). Moreover, when the encounter is drawing to a close, the narrator indicates that “La señorita Titina ya no pudo descubrir la otra orilla” (Melo, “*Fin*,” 58). If “the other shore” is interpreted as the plane of imagination, then the episode with the tourist never really occurred.

The second element that supports the imaginary is the repetition once again of the fishermen motif. Just as in “La hora inmóvil,” their presence may be interpreted as symbolic of the protagonist’s unconscious or imagination:

Pensó en los pescadores que dormían la siesta en malecón, en rojos corales y rápidas embarcaciones (Melo, *Fin*, 39).

Pero la miraban los pescadores acostados en la arena (Melo, *Fin*, 48-49).

Había dicho, en voz alta: Quiero, quiero. El pescador la miraba fijamente (Melo, *Fin*, 50).

Similarly, the text uses the symbols of birds, wings, and butterflies to suggest the imaginative dimension. Cirlot states the following about the first two elements:

³ The first mention of the “other shore” (Melo, *Fin*, 49) suggests this connection with the type of life Titina wishes she had lived: “Dijo: sería bonito vivir allá, sería como nacer de nuevo y vivir de otra manera. Tirarse al río, nadar hasta la otra orilla, seguida, perseguida y alcanzada por los hombres que duermen en la arena . . .”

En general, aves y pájaros . . . son símbolos del pensamiento, de la imaginación, y de la rapidez de las relaciones con el espíritu (Cirlot 91).

Las alas son espiritualidad, imaginación, pensamiento (Cirlot 60).

Thus, when the reader comes across the following description, once again associated with “la otra orilla,” he is inclined to interpret both the shore and the birds as representative of Titina’s fantasy:

Uno de los pescadores comenzó a cantar. Titina hubiera preferido no escuchar la melodía lenta y triste . . . Una gaviota levantó el vuelo: en el cielo, a mitad del río, las alas quietas y extendidas, anunciaba, descubría, iluminaba la otra orilla. (Melo, *Fin*, 49).

The butterfly symbolism is even more pronounced, since the title of the story is “El verano de la mariposa”. This symbolism is not made explicit until the final pages of the story when Titina is described thus:

Con los ojos abiertos, agitando las manos, aleteando levemente, disuelta la envoltura penetrable, permeable y gelatinosa, nada más que la forma de su cuerpo, mutable, cerrado y a la vez abierto, realizando en un minuto todos los cambios posibles e imposibles . . . Y trató de aletear, ya sin fuerzas (Melo, *Fin* 60-61).

Cirlot registers the symbolic value of the butterfly as follows:

Entre los antiguos, emblema del alma y de la atracción inconsciente hacia lo luminoso.

. . . Esto explica que el psicoanálisis conceptúe la mariposa como símbolo del renacer. En China aparece con el sentido secundario de alegría y felicidad conyugal (Cirlot 298).

This symbol, more than connecting the text to the imagination, emphasizes Titina’s desire for a new life filled with love and happiness, although the mention of “la atracción inconsciente” might be considered an element supportive of the interpretation of the events of the story as a dream.

The last story, “El día de reposo,” presents an interesting fusion of the planes of dream and reality. The story begins with the unusual reaction of the waiters and management in a restaurant when an earthquake causes the protagonist’s dessert to spill on his lap and the table. Their exaggerated reaction, if not technically fantastic, is extremely absurd, as the following passage evidences:

—Usted comprenderá, caballero, que la policía puede enterarse. La policía ronda siempre, de día y de noche, todos los restaurantes. . . . Espera, pacientemente, a que sucedan cosas como ésta. Luego, detienen a los clientes, los interroga, los tortura hasta que confiesan y al fin cierran el local. . . .

—No deseamos retenerlo aquí, ¿no es verdad? No insinuamos que usted suponga que queremos comprar su silencio, ¿no es verdad? Simplemente mis compañeros y yo le advertimos que esperamos contar con su discreción. Si usted habla, entonces nos veremos precisados a tomar las medidas convenientes (Melo, *Fin*, 69).

However, this exaggerated reaction is explained about two pages later (71), when the reader is told that Antonio, the protagonist, was sleeping; one thus infers that this strange encounter in the restaurant was a dream.

On pages 85-92 of the story, another event occurs that is even more unusual than the first one. Antonio appears to realize his dream of becoming his friend Ricardo and living his life. Suddenly the narration picks up where Antonio's first dream left off (when Antonio, having assumed Ricardo's identity, was calling Ricardo's girlfriend, Carola). The reader is uncertain as to whether the ensuing string of events (the encounter with the girl in the café and with a friend of Ricardo's referred to as "Alguien," the meeting with Carola) actually take place, or merely occur in Antonio's imagination. The latter seems more likely, but the reader must make a subtle connection in order to confirm this interpretation. After Antonio/Ricardo's amorous encounter in Carola's apartment, the reader is told: "Cuando salió eran las doce de la noche" (Melo, *Fin*, 92). One's first reaction is to assume that Antonio/Ricardo has left Carola's apartment. However, the reader is in fact being told here that Antonio has just left the movies where he probably dreamt the entire adventure with Carola and Ricardo's other friends. In order to arrive at this conclusion, the reader must associate "cuando salió eran las doce de la noche" with the fact that it is Sunday, and that some ten pages before Antonio had indicated "Ya había gente frente al cine formando cola para entrar a la función de la tarde. Dos horas de espera. Pero no hay otra cosa que hacer. El domingo es para ir al cine, para formar cola dos horas y luego comer palomitas en la oscuridad" (Melo, *Fin*, 83). The assumption that Antonio imagined these episodes while he was in the movie theater seems reasonable until the end of the story, when the absurd events intrude upon reality. After his exit from the movie theater (and thus during his waking moments or reality), Antonio is accosted by the police and the men from the restaurant who appeared at the very beginning of the story:

Trató de esconderse pero estaba seguro de que lo habían reconocido. Supo que no existía ninguna probabilidad de huida. No tuvo miedo, solo sintió un poco de tristeza. No mucha.

. . . Se acercó a los policías, le ataron las manos, cerraron su boca con un pañuelo. . .
 . . . Lo condujeron a la comisaría en silencio. . . .

Aún no amanecía cuando dictaron su sentencia y comenzaron los preparativos de su ejecución. No había defensa posible: el muchacho del restorán había mostrado la prueba definitiva de que Antonio era culpable. En una bandeja de plata, el durazno bailaba incansablemente; el rasguño había crecido de tal manera que ahora la pulpa era como una enorme herida (Melo, *Fin*, 93-94).

The reader is certainly free to interpret this as a daydream, but there are no clues (as in the previous examples) that suggest that this is the case. Once again, the reader vacillates between reality and imagination, as in Todorov's definition of the fantastic genre, although, technically speaking, these events do not contradict the laws of nature.

The somewhat magical role of "the other" in Melo's stories may be considered a subcategory of their fantastic dimension. Both Ruffinelli (23) and Ramos (87-89) discuss the role of the other in *Fin de semana*; the former, with regard to Borges's influence on the author, the latter, as an index of the narrator's unreliability in the story "La hora inmóvil" and as a thematic element in the last two stories of Melo's collection. The power of "the other" in both "La hora inmóvil" and "El día de reposo" is very similar to the development of this theme in José Donoso's *El obscuro pájaro de la noche*, as discussed by Cedomil Goic in *Historia de la novela hispanoamericana*. According to Goic:

En cuanto testigo, define el narrador su condición esencial como "voyeur". . . . La mirada . . . hace participar de su potencia a quien carece esencialmente de ella y necesita del testigo para recibir de él el poder de que carece . . . (Goic 264)

In other words, one person's identity relies on the gaze of another; the so-called "other" becomes a powerful governing force in one's life without which the individual cannot exist.

This explains why the narrator emphasizes his role as observer or witness in "La hora inmóvil": "Ayer llegó al pueblo Roberto Gálvez. Yo estaba sentado en la piedra que señala el final del muelle, en esa incómoda altura desde la cual puede verse perfectamente lo que pasa en el río" (Melo, *Fin*, 9). The narrator constantly repeats the word "vi" ("I saw"), thus insisting on his control of events through his look or gaze.

The control exercised through the act of watching clearly coincides with the narrator's constant prompting of Roberto Gálvez's thoughts, actions and words in "La hora inmóvil." Such phrases as "dígame eso," "te hice pensar," etc. are frequently repeated (Ramos 90).⁴

"El día de reposo" also presents the theme of another's gaze. Here, the protagonist Antonio constantly expresses the idea that his friend Ricardo's identity depends on him, on his role as observer. The following quotation establishes Antonio's function as witness:

Antonio despertó y vio que no había nadie. . . . Permaneció así, largo tiempo, en el suelo, mirando como se besaban Ricardo y la muchacha. Decidió esconderse, seguir mirando, imaginar que ella estaba en sus brazos. . . . Pensó que tal vez, ellos sabían que él los observaba, que repetía sus movimientos, los duplicaba, los volvía intolerables (Melo, *Fin*, 79).

Other quotations expressly indicate that Antonio considers himself responsible for Ricardo's existence or identity:

Creyó que, gracias a él [Antonio], a querer ser Ricardo, Ricardo era como era, hablaba como hablaba, tenía la suerte que tenía. . . . Antonio sintió miedo, el miedo que debió de

⁴ See pages 15-16, 25, 26, 28, and 30-31 of *Fin de semana* for specific examples.

sentir Ricardo cuando pensaba [Antonio] en él, imaginaba ser él, y lo formaba, lo modelaba, lo preparaba para el triunfo (Melo, *Fin*, 76).

The second new narrative technique that may be observed in *Fin de Semana* is temporal play. We have already discussed the development of stationary and cyclical time in “La hora inmóvil.” This story also creates the fusion of two temporal planes (yesterday and the remote past) using the narrative technique that Gérard Genette refers to as analepsis. Genette defines this as “any evocation after the fact of an event that took place earlier than the point in the story where we are at any given moment” (40). In “La hora inmóvil” the narrator recounts the entire adventure of Roberto’s return to the village as what happened “yesterday”:

Ayer llegó al pueblo Roberto Gálvez. . . . [Yo] fumaba, distraído, contando de vez en cuando los jacintos que se quedaban enredados en la orilla, ahuyentando los mosquitos con el humo del cigarro —tal vez, pero no lo recuerdo ahora, imaginaba el tránsito de majestuosas embarcaciones . . . cuando escuché el ruido de un motor. (Melo, *Fin*, 9).

The comment “no lo recuerdo ahora” clearly establishes the narrative departure point (the point in the story where the reader initially finds himself) as “now” or “today” (the day following “yesterday”). This reference further establishes the narration of Roberto’s arrival as an analepsis. Consequently, there are three basic times in the story: the “now” or “today” in which the narrator speaks, the yesterday of Roberto’s arrival, and the remote events of some twenty-five years ago (prior to Roberto’s birth as well as the period of Roberto’s youth). These last two categories are “analepses” because they are events that occurred prior to the point in the story at which the reader begins.

The technique can best be observed by examining the extensive narrative sequence in which Roberto simultaneously recalls his flight from his home at age ten while taking a walk following the same path of flight some twenty-five years later (“yesterday”). The present story time is implicit, having been established, as we already observed, on the first page of the narrative. The sequence thus moves back and forth between yesterday and the remote past. This remote past serves as an analepsis with respect to both yesterday and the “now” or “today” of the narration, as does what happened yesterday with respect to the narrator’s present. In order to emphasize and clarify this temporal play, which has the ultimate effect of blending the two temporal dimensions (yesterday and remote past), the portions of the text that refer to yesterday will appear in regular print, while the portions that refer to the remote past will appear in bold lettering. Passages where the two planes appear to fuse will appear underscored:

Roberto caminó hacia la barda, como la noche de su huida, y trató de repetir lo que entonces hizo y pensó: Un pie arriba, el otro más arriba de la barda, hasta que la calle apareció ante sus ojos, primero las casas de enfrente y después las piedras, otras calles y otras casas, la placita y el palacio municipal pintado de blanco y azul. Si volviera a llover, pensando, diciendo si volviera a llover, permitiendo que las palabras salgan una a una con su voz de

entonces, con la misma torpeza con que pronunciaba las eses, con la leve mueca tonta que acompañaba a las eses. Pero no lloverá más. No hay nada que rompa el silencio, nada que termine con el sordo lejano rumor del río y con la canción del pescador. . . . Puertas cerradas, grandes aldabones quietos, ventanas con cristales y cortinas de cretona, portales y mosquiteros, un farol en la esquina, piedras, hierba mala en lugar de asfalto. Oyó el reloj de la iglesia: Las seis. Recordó el salto a la calle.⁵

Another important characteristic that *Fin de semana* shares with contemporary works is that it may be classified as stream-of-consciousness fiction. According to Robert Humphrey, stream-of-consciousness is a type of narrative that employs various techniques (it is not in itself a technique); he defines this type of fiction as that which focuses on the "prespeech" level of consciousness, which is the uncensored, illogical flow of words that registers sensations, memories, and imagined events (3-7).

Humphrey goes on to distinguish four basic techniques used in the presentation of stream-of-consciousness: direct interior monologue, indirect interior monologue, omniscient description, and soliloquy (Humphrey 23). The two techniques that are used with most frequency in *Fin de semana* are direct and indirect interior monologue, which Humphrey defines as:

the technique used in fiction for representing the psychic content and processes of character, partly or entirely unuttered, just as these processes exist at various levels of conscious control before they are formulated for deliberate speech (24).

Direct interior monologue is characterized by the virtual disappearance of the third-person narrator (only the first-person is used), whereas indirect interior monologue is distinguished by the narrator's interference, usually with comments such as "he said" or "she thought" (Humphrey, 25-29).⁶ Some other techniques or characteristics of stream-of-consciousness fiction that Humphrey mentions and Melo uses in *Fin de semana* are: psychological free association, mechanical devices (e.g., unusual typography or punctuation, such as run-on sentences with many commas, to indicate the flow of consciousness),⁷ rhetorical devices that indicate discontinuity (such as ellipsis, anaphora, dislocated parentheses), images and symbols (Humphrey 43-78).

The use of the techniques described by Humphrey can best be observed in "El verano de la mariposa." In this story, Melo primarily uses indirect interior

⁵ I have marked this passage according to knowledge gained by a second reading of the text; the reader discovers on page 32 that Roberto, in the "present" (yesterday), never jumps over the wall: ". . . siguió inmóvil, asomado a la barda, contemplando la calle y la noche, hasta que se dejó de oír la canción del pescador (32)." This statement clarifies somewhat the temporal references in the passage cited here. Otherwise, many of the sentences attributed to the remote past might appear to simultaneously belong to the time frame of "yesterday" (i.e., one might think that Roberto repeats the walk through the city) and the fusion of the two temporal planes would appear to be greater.

⁶ Humphrey uses the word "author" to refer to the text's narrator.

⁷ These devices are also mentioned by Ross, pages 307-310.

monologue to capture the psychic content of the protagonist, Titina. The following passage employs unusual punctuation (commas, run-on sentences) and typography (italics), free association (especially toward the end of the paragraph), as well as the rhetorical device of anaphora, to suggest the prespeech level:

... y decir *Uf, hace más calor que el año pasado* aunque esté segura de haber dicho lo mismo el año pasado, y volver a renegar del verano, del sol, del sueño, que le entra a uno a esa hora, de tener que terminar el vestido, de la mala suerte que tiene uno de haber nacido en esta ciudad y en este país en vez de esa otra ciudad y de ese otro país —*en Argentina, por ejemplo, ahora es invierno mientras aquí nos asamos, qué chistoso*, según le dijeron un día, no sé quién, y sentir ardiendo la frente, los ojos, el pecho, sentir rojas las mejillas . . . por el calor que hace; ver cielo primero, calle después. Sábado. Sí, el agua de tamarindo sabe a otra cosa (Melo, *Fin*, 40-41).

In the above example, the narrator's presence is clear in both the use of the third-person and the presence of phrases such as "y decir"; thus, it is an indirect interior monologue. Examples of direct interior monologue can also be found in "El verano de la mariposa," although with less frequency. Note the following passage in which Titina contemplates the departure of her new friend, the tourist in first-person narration:

Eso es todo lo que he oído. Mañana. Se va mañana. Si se quedara, si no se fuera le pediría que me contara cómo son los cines de México, el edificio de la Latinoamericana, la iluminación de la Navidad. Si se quedara, le preguntaría esas cosas y así no me moriría sin saberlas (Melo, *Fin*, 55).⁸

Stephen Ross defines a useful concept for analyzing *Fin de semana*, that of "textual voice" (Ross 306). According to Ross, textual voice is any part of the printed text that creates signification in a visual manner, by breaking with traditional conventions of the printed page. For example, textual voice includes italics, section headings, the work's title, quotation marks, parentheses, and unusual punctuation, capitalization, spacing and paragraphing (Ross 307-10).

We have already discussed (under the topic of stream of-consciousness) some of the elements that constitute textual voice, such as italics and unusual punctuation. However, the most salient form of textual voice in *Fin de semana* is the constant use of parentheses, as indicated by both Ruffinelli (21, 23, who refers to it as a "stylistic tic") and Ramos (91, 96). Ramos suggests that parentheses serve two functions in "El verano de la mariposa": they are the narrator's comments that either emphasize the fact that the narrated actions are in the past or ironically judge the protagonist's (Titina's) actions (Ramos 91, 96). As shown below, parentheses serve many other functions as well in *Fin de semana*.

The tendency to use parentheses suggests the possible influence of Jorge Luis

⁸ For examples of indirect and direct interior monologue in "El día de reposo" see pages 74 and 77-78, respectively.

Borges, who frequently employs parentheses in his short stories. Ana María Barrenechea has studied the role of parentheses in the famous Argentine author's works; her conclusions can also be applied to Melo's use of this technique. According to Barrenechea:

una aclaración parentética . . . puede encerrar varios valores. En general se siente como si Borges estuviera expresando una línea de pensamiento y al mismo tiempo quisiera manifestar paralelamente a ella una acotación, una corrección, un subrayado, un desarrollo de sus elementos, es decir como si se doblase en dos individuos, uno que narra y otro —siempre vigilante y lúcido— que comenta la obra del primero (197).

In addition to clarifying, correcting, underscoring, and developing an idea, Barrenechea mentions the following uses of parentheses: they may reveal other motives for an action, show the path of thought processes, or present a contradiction (Barrenechea 197-201).

In "La hora inmóvil," most parentheses are used to illustrate the mind control that the narrator exercises over Roberto Gálvez. This use may also be seen as developmental because these parenthetical references delve into the protagonist's consciousness as well. Note the following example:

Pudo volver [Roberto] a ver (me basta pensarlo para transmitir ese deseo, para producirlo en la mente de otro) aquella noche, la primera que Roberto Gálvez durmió en este cuarto, hace veinticinco años. La lluvia golpeaba entonces los cristales y el niño Roberto vio la puerta que empezó a abrirse, muy despacio (el infeliz tuvo que volver a respirar otra vez de aquella manera, tuvo que volver a temblar, a cubrirse la cara con la sábana, a formar con ella una pequeña hendidura para sacar la nariz y los ojos; lo obligué a repetir el esfuerzo del grito, a que la garganta se le cerrara, a sentir un nudo que impide la salida de la voz), la puerta ya casi abierta . . . (Melo, *Fin*, 23).

In the following excerpt from "El verano de la mariposa," the parentheses both clarify the situation and help characterize the protagonist as somewhat strange or eccentric: "La señorita Titina miró el cielo, lo siguió asombrada de que estuviese tan azul (pero así está todas las tardes, a esa hora)" [39]. Another instance illustrates how parentheses indicate the character's thought processes (first set) and clarify situations (second set):

descubriendo que las sábanas colgadas en las azoteas de enfrente parecían alas de ángeles iniciando un vuelo imposible (*porque no hubo viento suficiente, eso dirá, porque estaban amarradas*) pero de todas maneras *era bonito* simular el lanzarse hacia arriba y sentir ganas de librarse de las ataduras, de ser contempladas (hasta donde la miopía de la señora Titina lo permite) flotando en el azul silencioso . . . (Melo, *Fin*, 42).

Parentheses serve a variety of other purposes in "El verano de la mariposa," including an emphatic function: ". . . porque sabía (estaba segura) de que en ese momento, a esa hora, ese sábado, podía esperar todo de Dios" (Melo, *Fin*, 44), and establishing a contradiction: "Respondió [Titina] (sin decirle nada): tomar algo

contigo” (Melo, *Fin*, 56); “Nunca tan largo (pero tan corto) el atravesar el parque . . .” (Melo, *Fin*, 57).

The last story, “El día de reposo,” exhibits all of the parenthetical functions found in “El verano de la mariposa” (to develop, clarify, indicate thought processes, and present a contradiction). The most frequent of these uses is the developmental function, as can be seen in the following citation:

Otro mesero —debía ser el superior porque vestía de manera diferente (solapas rojas, una especie de insignia colocada abajo de las hombreras, pantalones negros) y porque miraba a los demás con altanería . . . El pianista, todavía pálido (más aún: oscurecido por el terror, deslumbrado pero no-partícipe de la radiante luminosidad que ahora embellecía al restorán), volvió a tocar la misma canción . . . (Melo, *Fin*, 66).⁹

The final characteristic of contemporary fiction that *Fin de semana* illustrates is intertextuality. There are many possible definitions of this concept. Although undoubtedly several theories of intertextuality could be successfully applied to a discussion of Melo’s work, the one that seems most fitting is Tzvetan Todorov’s, as developed in *Symbolism and Interpretation*. According to Todorov, a reference to one text within another is symbolic when the meanings of the two passages or texts are identical. When the two meanings are not exactly the same, but the prior text is used to help construct the sense of the second text, the relationship between the two is said to be figural (69).

Figural intertextuality is present in the last story of Melo’s collection, “El día de reposo”. The tale begins with an epigraph from Julio Cortázar’s “Las armas secretas”: “El durazno cae en el plato y los pedazos de piel vuelven a pegarse a la pulpa.” Melo explicitly provides us with the source; when we refer to Cortázar’s work we find the following passage:

cuántas veces Michele habrá mencionado a Enghien en las charlas de café, esas frases que parecen insignificantes y olvidables, hasta que después resultan el tema central de un sueño o un fantaseo. Un durazno, sí, pero pelado. Ah, lo lamenta mucho pero las mujeres siempre le han pelado los duraznos y Michèle no tiene por qué ser una excepción. . .

El durazno cae en el plato y los pedazos de piel vuelven a pegarse a la pulpa. Michele limpia el durazno con un cuchillo y Pierre siente otra vez asco (286).

This paragraph means little if we do not relate it to the context of Cortázar’s entire story; “Las armas secretas” is about a man named Pierre with a dual identity: he is simultaneously Michèle’s boyfriend and the man who raped her during World War II and was killed by her two best friends. Michèle is peeling a peach for Pierre while he thinks about her references to Enghien, the place where the rape occurred.

⁹ For examples of the other uses of parentheses in “El día de reposo” see pages 66 (clarifying function), 75 (indication of thought processes), and 76 (presentation of a contradiction).

The relationship between "Las armas secretas" and "El día de reposo" is thus readily apparent in terms of the similarity of their plots. Melo cites Cortázar to help develop and emphasize the theme of dual identity; just as Pierre is the two men mentioned above, in "El día de reposo," Antonio is simultaneously both himself and his friend Ricardo, the man he most admires and wants to be. As we have already noted, it is never perfectly clear in the story whether Antonio's transformation is real or a dream. The second possibility, the more likely or plausible of the two, is signalled by the reference in Cortázar's story to "un sueño o un fantaseo" right before mentioning the peeling of the peach. Thus, an intertextual reading favors the interpretation of this conversion as a product of Antonio's imagination, as opposed to a fantastic element. In any case, since the meaning of the two stories is not precisely identical (they share the same theme of dual identity and possible fantastic dimension but these themes serve different purposes in each—to emphasize Antonio's identity crisis in "El día de reposo; to create sensations of suspense, shock and horror in "Las armas secretas"), the relationship between text and intertext may be called figural, according to Todorov's terminology.

In sum, Juan Vicente Melo skillfully employs the most common and important techniques of contemporary narrative in *Fin de semana*: fantastic elements, temporal play, stream of-consciousness, textual voice, and intertextuality. At the same time that his work exhibits originality, he has successfully assimilated the influence of some of Latin America's foremost writers, including Borges and Cortázar. His work is of great value and interest to anyone concerned with the development of contemporary Latin American narrative.

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