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Memories of Love: Ana María Moix and Esther Tusquets Remember

Catalan writers Ana María Moix and Esther Tusquets have each described their mutual relationship in autobiographical novels. Perhaps their most direct fictionalized descriptions of their relationship occur in each author's first novel: Moix's *Julia*—written in 1968 when Moix was just twenty-one—and, ten years later, Tusquets's *El mismo mar de todos los veranos*—written when the author was forty-two¹. While both authors vary or disguise significant details about themselves and the other woman (e.g., names, nationalities, physical descriptions), it remains true—as Moix has confirmed in an interview with me—that in broad strokes, these characters represent the two authors. Referencing the same real-life events, the novels have general plot similarities: the younger woman (Moix), a student at the university, takes a literature class from the older woman (Tusquets). The student, a vulnerable adolescent girl/woman, initiates the relationship and commits herself more fully to it. At the end of both novels, the professor ends the relationship.

Not surprisingly, each author makes her own corresponding character the protagonist of her novel, although not—as we shall see—necessarily the more positive of the two characters. In Moix's novel, the reader is distanced from the autobiographical title character, Julia² through the imposition of a third-person narrator who does not permit any direct dialogue. Geraldine Cleary Nichols believes that this point of view is problematic: “El lector atento se pregunta el porqué del empleo de un narrador que no sabe más que la protagonista. ¿Por qué no narra Julia su propia historia?” (“*Julia*” 115-16). By failing to tell her own story, Julia “unconsciously defines herself as an absence” (Soufas 159).

The narrative present of *Julia* takes place during one sleepless night when the 20-year old protagonist relives significant events from her past. Frightened of the dark, Julia wished that Eva would come and protect her from the monsters with which her imagination populated the room: “[s]e esforzaba en imaginar que Eva abría la puerta y corría hacia la cama. Ella, Julia, alzaba los brazos hacia Eva, escondía el rostro en su pecho y le contaba lo sucedido” (Moix 11). Julia felt an “extraña pasión [. . .] por Eva” (Moix 24) and, although Eva was far away, “[s]ólo deseaba permanecer junto a Eva, deseaba su presencia y nada más” (Moix 13).

While Eva is mentioned throughout the novel, the nature of her relationship with Julia remains shrouded in mystery until the last thirty-five pages. Prior to this point, the reader only knows that Eva was Julia's father's girlfriend before his marriage and that Julia's grandfather believes his son chose to marry the wrong girl. Julia clearly loves the older woman, but their relationship remains vague enough to suggest the possibility that the immature girl is simply suffering from an unrequited crush on an admired professor³. Moix has applauded the critics' "sensitivity" in not mentioning the novel's homosexual overtones (Levine, "Censored" 305), but one reason for their reticence can be found in Linda Gould Levine's claim that on the first reading, "neither the rape [. . .] nor the lesbian theme is apparent" ("Censored" 304). It is important to remember that this novel was published in 1968 when, in spite of the "apertura" achieved by Manuel Fraga's 1966 Ley de Prensa, Spanish authors could still be prosecuted for material that the censors considered inappropriate.

In contrast, Tusquets's *El mismo mar de todos los veranos* was published three years after Franco's death, the year censorship was abolished and homosexuality decriminalized in Spain⁴. It is, in both style and substance, a much more audacious text than Moix's. Utilizing a complex, circular, stream of consciousness narrative, Tusquets's unnamed first-person narrator—called E by the critics—offers a direct celebration of a mutually passionate lesbian love affair, a relationship that is central to the novel. Catherine G. Bellver states that "by defining female sexuality from a feminine point of view, [Tusquets] broadens the usual conception of eroticism in Spanish literature. Female sexuality emerges in her works as a positive, beautiful, and enjoyable force" (14). Tusquets's text is overtly lesbian, in contrast with Moix's, which is coded⁵.

Unlike Moix, Tusquets allows her protagonist to narrate her life story. In this way E "reclama el derecho a entender su vida y su personalidad desde una percepción individual, sin necesidad de confirmación externa" (Ballesteros 30). But Tusquets's novel is similar to Moix's in that the narrator maintains absolute control; with only one exception (which we will consider later), "the narrator's oppressive, solipsistic monologues banish the give and take of interlocution" (Servodidio 171).

The novels correspond in representing the Moix character as painfully shy and withdrawn while the Tusquets character is older, scholarly, more jaded and severe. In *Julia*, the depressed and antisocial university student is initially somewhat frightened of her almost excessively self-confident literature professor: “[l]a personalidad de Eva la atraía y la atemorizaba al mismo tiempo. Julia admiraba la seguridad de Eva, el tono severo y rígido que imponía en la clase, la frialdad con que trataba a los alumnos, quienes no se atrevían a abrir la boca durante las clases [. . .]” (Moix 160-61).

In *El mismo mar de todos los veranos*, the professor is in some ways more human, less imposing; she is depressed and lonely since her husband has once again left her to pursue one of his many affairs with young actresses. E’s interest in young Clara is sparked by a friend’s intentionally salacious gossip about a Columbian student who she describes as “una aristócrata salvaje y solitaria [. . .] una muchacha inteligente, sensible y exquisita” (Tusquets 49). Encouraged by her friend’s exaggerations, the literature professor, suffering from the profession’s weakness for such myths, is induced to create her own fictional images of this mysterious student. She imagines an exotic being with “ojos de noche, cabellera al viento, montando a pelo caballos salvajes; labios finísimos y pálidos, sienes azuladas, breves senos y largas piernas [. . .]” (Tusquets 59). E understands that her myth-making necessarily consists of untruths; she imagines an “indómita princesa azteca” (Tusquets 59) although she admits that “no, nunca hubo aztecas en Colombia” (Tusquets 59). But she continues to be fascinated by the game of inventing an image of an intriguing young “princess.” When she finally meets Clara, E is attracted to her in spite of the fact that “la presencia real y desmitificadora de este rostro pálido” (Tusquets 60) does not correspond in any way to E’s fantasy. Clara is “sorprendentemente flaca, sorprendentemente joven [. . .] sorprendentemente desvalida e insignificante, un poco ruborizada [. . .] y con un leve, ligerísimo temblor en la mano” (Tusquets 60).

In both novels, the professor waits with confident self-assurance, knowing that her student will be unable to resist phoning her. In Moix’s novel, Julia struggles to justify her phone call: “[l]a excusa podía ser cualquier tema referente a las clases [. . .] descolgaba el auricular y lo colgaba de nuevo antes de marcar. No se atrevía” (Moix 161). When Julia finally summons the courage to call, Eva invites her over and explains that she was certain of the girl’s eventual approach: “Sabía que vendrías, dijo Eva sonriendo. La verdad, esperaba que lo hicieras desde que empezó el curso” (Moix 174).

Similarly, in *El mismo mar de todos los veranos*, the professor waits expectantly for her young student to call, knowing that “era inevitable esta llamada, que en un momento u otro ella tendría que deponer en parte sus defensas y acabar de marcar los números [. . .]” (Tusquets 77). But in Tusquets’s novel, E is colder, playing with the sensation of power that she achieves from waiting for the poor girl to make the first move: “es su maullido⁶ lo primero que he oído esta mañana al otro lado del teléfono: Soy Clara. Y luego un silencio largo, que se ha prolongado tenso y casi doloroso [. . .] porque me ha divertido no intervenir en seguida, callarme yo también [. . .]” (Tusquets 77).

In *Julia*, Eva hires the girl as her personal office assistant. Julia considers the job the highlight of her life and dreams of spending all her time with Eva: “[a] acostarse, pretendía no estar en su casa, sino en la de Eva; por la mañana no la despertaría [la criada], sino Eva [. . .] por la tarde trabajaría con Eva, y, después de cenar, dormiría bajo su mismo techo” (Moix 178). But she understands that the older woman does not necessarily share her dreams: “¿Por qué debía Eva permanecer a su lado? Eva tenía su vida, sus problemas, su trabajo, sus amigos; ella, Julia, no era más que una alumna entre doscientas [. . .]” (Moix 160).

In Tusquets’s novel, the relationship between the two women is never disguised as a mere professional relationship; it is clearly personal⁷. In spite of Clara’s youth and timidity, she gains some amount of control in the relationship through her single-minded devotion to the narrator⁸. Tusquets explains that “in Clara there is always the ideal of total love [. . .]. She is the one who feels so generous and gives love completely” (Mazquiarán, “Narrative” 177).

But E insists on playing games with Clara—games which maintain her sense of power over the girl and allow her to “temporarily escape the boredom and meaninglessness” (Ichiishi 53) of her life. E feels superior since she imagines that Clara is caught up in their relationship and that “yo soy apenas un espectador tal vez curioso, tal vez ligeramente interesado, pero en modo alguno comprometido [. . .]” (Tusquets 84). But in spite of her desire for detachment, it quickly becomes clear that E is as emotionally involved in the relationship as Clara. After their first kiss, she temporarily admits to the depth of her feelings: “yo sé que aunque sus manos me soltaran ahora, yo ya no me levantaría de su lado, y que estos besos agrios y rasposos, tan torpes o tan sabios, cualquiera sabe, me encuentran extrañamente vulnerable [. . .]” (Tusquets 115).

In fact, she is so intrigued by Clara, that—like a feminine Adam

in a temporary paradise—E attempts to claim dominion over her student by naming and renaming her. As a literature professor, E appropriates myths and fairy tales in her attempt to capture Clara's essence: "la Bella de mi historia" (Tusquets 84), "Clara Ariadna [. . .] Clara diosa azteca [. . .] Clara Angélica" (Tusquets 87); "Clara gato" (Tusquets 89); "[m]i princesa guisante de piel sensible [. . .] la más princesa de todas las princesas" (Tusquets 96); "mi patito feo hoy casi princesa cisne blanco" (Tusquets 107).

While in *Julia* the women's relationship remains ambiguously asexual, the women make love twice in *El mismo mar de todos los veranos*; both descriptions are passionate and direct. The women's bodies, movements and pleasure are fluid, like the sea of every summer. "[A]caricio sin prisas las piernas de seda, me demoro en la parte tiernísima, turbadora, del interior de los muslos, para buscar al fin el hueco tibio [. . .] he llegado al fondo mismo de los mares [. . .] y me adentro despacio, apartando las algas con cuidado, por la húmeda boca de la gruta" (Tusquets 139).

But the relationship between the two women is short-lived; in both novels, it is the professor who precipitates the end, like Eve bringing about the expulsion from Paradise. At the end of *Julia*, when Julia's mother discovers that her daughter is working for Eva (the mother's former rival for the father's affections), she forbids Julia to continue seeing her. Julia desperately phones Eva, but the professor is too busy or preoccupied to listen to her: "[l]a voz de Eva, por teléfono, fue seca, cortante. Hola, Julia. Ahora no puedo atenderte, tengo una cena con unos amigos. Llámame mañana. Y colgó" (Moix 182). Immediately attempting a second call, Julia is once again greeted by "la voz fría, casi antipática: Te he dicho que tengo trabajo, ¿sucede algo grave? No seas pesada. Te llamaré mañana. Buenas noches" (Moix 182). Eva is so abrupt that she effectively hangs up on the girl and her differing excuses—she first claims a dinner with friends and then work—suggest that she is not truly interested in Julia and is simply trying to escape her excessive attention.

Julia, frantic with grief and feeling betrayed by both her mother and Eva, swallows handfuls of pills belonging to her mother and grandmother while "[t]odo su cuerpo gritaba el nombre de Eva en un ahogado gemido que se esforzaba por retener" (Moix 182-83). The unhappy Julia is discovered and resuscitated in the hospital, but in the eternal present of the sleepless night which frames the novel, Julia continues to be tormented by the failure of her relationship with Eva. "Pensar en Eva le producía un dolor insoportable. Desesperaba. Sentía

deseos de rasgar las sábanas, destrozar las mantas, agarrar un hacha y destruir los muebles de la habitación [. . .]. Anhelaba la presencia de Eva más que nada en el mundo; oír su voz, ver cómo movía las manos al hablar" (Moix 159-60). Finally, the minimal hope that remains for the protagonist's recuperation at the end of *Julia* is eliminated in Moix's subsequent novel, *Walter, ¿por qué te fuiste?* (1973), when Julia starves herself to death. Eva's suggested future is happier; she will likely continue to be a successful professional, although she may remain alone, with no partner or immediate family.

In Moix's novel, the failure of the relationship with Eva is the final straw for Julia who chooses suicide over a life without her. But Eva's rejection of Julia's love is less disturbing than E's betrayal of Clara in *El mismo mar de todos los veranos*. While E wants to stay with Clara and "repetir un millón de veces el mismo recorrido suave de su cuerpo con mis manos" (Tusquets 159), she also resents the strength of her reaction to the girl, feeling "desvalida y desnuda como nunca lo estuve en el pasado" (Tusquets 158). E is frightened by the all-encompassing nature of Clara's love, startled that Clara is "tan absolutamente mía" (Tusquets 162). She understands that Clara "ha derrumbado de golpe todas sus defensas y ha renunciado lúcidamente—locamente lúcida—a cualquier intento de juego" (Tusquets 162). Clara's serious commitment to their relationship unsettles E and reminds her of the one time when she loved completely and was cruelly abandoned.

E tells Clara this story shortly before she abandons her. As a young woman, E fell in love with Jorge who—as a foreigner (like Clara)—seemed to offer the possibility of escape from the limitations imposed by E's family and social class. The relationship with Jorge seemed ideal, until he inexplicably committed suicide, abandoning the narrator without so much as a note of explanation. Crushed, E allowed her mother to marry her off to Julio—a man she could never love.

E reenacts this story with Clara, although she is now the betrayer, the one who abandons the innocent young woman, without explanation⁹. When E's husband Julio—a hatefully triumphant don Juan, reeking of money, success, cologne, tobacco and sex—returns from his latest affair, E agrees to see him, but reassures Clara that she will be home in time for dinner. The narrator understands that her philandering husband's display of remorse is merely another "representación barata—que Julio está montando" (Tusquets 204) and she admits that "hace millones de millones de años [. . . Julio] dejó de interesarme [. . .]" (Tusquets 207). Still, she remains incapable of asserting her will so as to free herself from his grasp. She passively lets him drag her to

dinner and get her drunk, even though she is aware that Clara is waiting for her. “[T]al vez tú, Clara, pasarás la noche entera sola en el patio de las buganvillas, esperándome—¿hasta qué hora? ¿en qué instante nacerá la sospecha, en qué instante se afirmará la certeza de que te he, de que me he, traicionado? [. . .]” (Tusquets 213)¹⁰.

Finally, accepting that she does not have the strength to resist playing the role that Julio has scripted for her, E simply lets him drag her to bed. Their sexual intercourse contrasts with the liquid fluidity of the love between the two women; here sex is fire, violence, pain. The narrator is captured and pinned down like “una pobre mariposa agonizante” (215) in Julio’s collection. “[E]l hombre coleccionista me manipula, me maneja, me dispone en posturas distintas [. . .] y entonces, en una embestida brutal, su sexo me traspasa como un alfiler al rojo vivo, no, como una bola de fuego que atraviesa certera el aro, como la flecha que se clava en el centro preciso de la diana [. . .]” (Tusquets 214).

The narrator passively allows her husband to possess her, but her final betrayal of Clara is her enjoyment of the sexual brutality. She maintains “los labios apretados y la garganta contraída para no gritar, para no gritar de dolor, pero sobre todo, ante todo, para no gritar de placer, este torpe placer que ha de llegar al fin, histérico y crispado, inevitable y odioso como la misma muerte [. . .] la que me penetra en acometidas sucesivas y brutales, cada vez más brutales [. . .]” (Tusquets 215). The narrator loves Clara but betrays her by feeling pleasure in this quasi-rape¹¹.

El mismo mar de todos los veranos concludes with Clara’s departure. While the narrator admits that “las dos sabemos que nos queremos todavía [. . .]” (Tusquets 227), she also believes that Clara must leave because if she remained, “siempre, una y otra vez, yo volvería a traicionarla para traicionarme, volvería a herirla para herirme, volvería a asesinar en ella la esperanza para anular una vez más en mí toda posible esperanza [. . .]” (Tusquets 227). By betraying Clara, E is “on the deepest level, betraying herself” (Ichiishi 60). Still, E maintains the hope that Clara will now be strong enough to go out and conquer the world in a way that she herself cannot: “haciendo—espero—la guerrilla y el amor y la literatura con otros en sus selvas colombianas o donde quiera y pueda [. . .]” (Tusquets 228).

But any possible hope for Clara’s future is refuted by the novel’s concluding words, spoken by Clara—the only time the narrator allows any direct dialogue in the novel; Clara says, “<<...Y Wendy creció>>”

(Tusquets 229). Just as the mature Wendy lost her ability to fly to Neverland with Peter Pan, the grown-up Clara will lose her childlike idealism, her capacity to love fully, without reserve, without fear. As this quote is also the epigraph to the novel, the novel ends as it began, a bittersweet circularity which suggests that the cycle of love, betrayal and abandonment will continue¹². Young E loved deeply and was betrayed; the older E betrayed young Clara in turn. The troubling likelihood is that Clara, too, will lose her capacity for pure love and will inevitably betray her future partners¹³.

So while Moix and Tusquets both novelize their common autobiographical experiences, the authors differ particularly in their vision of the future for their respective characters. Each author allows an uncertain glimmer of hope for the other woman while condemning her own character to nearly complete defeat. Moix's Julia attempts (and in her second novel, succeeds) at committing suicide while Tusquets's E betrays herself by returning to her false, brutal husband. In these novels, lesbian love appears as a briefly liberating, but in the long run, unsustainable option.

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Notes

¹ Barbara F. Ichiishi notes the "intense relationship" (18) between Esther Tusquets and Ana María Moix and claims that "an intense dialogue is sustained throughout their works. [. . .] In Tusquets' opus, Moix appears in each work of the trilogy as the protagonist's adolescent lover, Clara. In Moix's books, Tusquets appears in various but easily recognizable forms, the most obvious of which is perhaps the character Eva in her first novel, *Julia*" (18). Ichiishi goes on to note that Moix dedicated *Julia* to Tusquets and that one of Moix's short stories, "Dedicatoria," "constitutes an extended love poem to the older woman" (18).

² Moix uses the name Julia for herself and Eva for Tusquets. Tusquets uses Clara for Moix while her narrator remains nameless (although the reader knows that her name has two syllables and starts with an E). Each author gives the other woman a positive, symbolic name: Eva and Clara.

³ Sara E. Schyfter, for example, claims that Julia's attachment to Eva was "frustrated by the indifference of her teacher" (27).

⁴ As Margaret E. W. Jones points out, "[a]lthough no censorship laws would cause problems [. . .], some of the material in the novel was still controversial in 1978. The explicitly erotic nature of the text and, particularly, the feminine perspective on sexual matters were new to Spanish fiction" (187).

⁵ These terms come from Bonnie Zimmerman.

⁶ Both Moix and Tusquets describe the Moix character as a cat throughout these novels. It is significant that, in Catalan (the first language of both authors), "Moix" means cat.

⁷ Furthermore, in *El mismo mar de todos los veranos*, the women's relationship is not instigated by a prior love affair, such as Eva's relationship with Julia's father in Moix's novel. Andrew Bush considers male intervention an "inevitable mediation between women" (154) in Moix's novels.

⁸ Catherine Davies notes that Clara "is far from passive. She is the interlocutor, the therapist, the curious listener, who draws out the narrator's repertoire of stories to effect a talking cure. Although it is the protagonist who narrates and weaves the text, it is Clara who is silently spinning the cocoon around the chrysalis-narrator which—once completed—will allow the narrator to effect a metamorphosis" (265). Geraldine Cleary Nichols, on the other hand, describes Clara as "the archetypal woman-as-victim" ("Minding" 165) since, in the end, she passively allows E's betrayal.

⁹ Geraldine Cleary Nichols notes that E "take[s] on other male-identified behavior patterns [. . .] she plays a victimizer in the traditional boy-leaves-girl stories" ("Minding" 164).

¹⁰ The narrator speaks her thoughts as if she were speaking to Clara directly. Her use of the future tense shows that, even while she is still with her husband, she is capable of imagining how Clara will spend the night helplessly waiting for her.

¹¹ Linda Gould Levine objects to this ending, believing it a "betrayal of the narrator to herself, Clara and her own sexuality, and more significantly, betrayal of Tusquets, author, to her character and reader [. . .]" ("Reading" 207). She believes that Tusquets "has dubiously projected a male mentality onto her female character. In this sense, she ultimately misreads not just her narrator, but in a more global sense, woman's sexuality, and the passage is noticeably jarring for a feminist reader wary of the image of woman masochistically enjoying violent

sex" ("Reading" 208).

¹² In fact, Tusquets has stated that "al principio la novela se iba a llamar 'Y Wendy creció'" (Mazquiarán, "Conversación" 110).

¹³ Some critics have found hope in this ending. For example, Elizabeth J. Ordóñez remembers that "Wendy's coming of age allows her to cease playing mother to little boys and pirates [. . .]" (45). Margaret E. W. Jones notes "the hopeful note associated with Clara's departure, which, if not triumphal, at least is not in defeat. Clara is left with choices which imply that the closed patterns of the Old World may not follow her to the New" (193). But Jones also notes that the novel's continuous references to myths and fairy tales with allusions of betrayal "suggest that escape from—or even modification of—the pattern will be impossible" (189). Geraldine Cleary Nichols, while originally positing a hopeful interpretation of the ending, "now suspect[s] such optimism was unfounded" ("Minding" 165). Tusquets herself defines the tone of the novel as "resignation" (Mazquiarán, "Talking" 180).

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