

Between 'in longer' and 'not yet': woman's space in MISIA SEÑORA

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In her fourth novel, *Misia Señora* (1982), Albalucía Angel mimes a familiar repertoire, specifically, certain educational, sexual, and economic conventions that determine woman's role in society.¹ The norms selected are recognized as those which have predominated in the western world, and in particular in Colombia, during the mid-twentieth century. The setting is Pereira -the author's birthplace, and several other Colombian cities are named as well: Cali, Cartago, Manizales, Cartagena, and Barranquilla. References to historical events confirm the approximate time period of the story: for example, the mention of World War II as an event of the recent past and an observation by the protagonist's mother that in her youth airline travel did not exist. Specificity of time and place reinforces the impression of a mimetic presentation of norms and conventions, but at the same time that Angel presents familiar patterns of behavior, she strips them of their validity.

Attention is drawn to the deficiencies of the traditional system to deal with the multifariousness of woman's being. For example, the church with its doctrines of virginity, marriage and fidelity, its method of enforcement through guilt and passivity, comes under strong attack. A call for self-determination to replace the rule of fa-

ther and husband, for the elimination of the double standard, and for a halt to the sexual and physical abuse of women is heard, and the issues of divorce, abortion, economic exploitation also surface. The novelist's greatest concern, however, lies with the inequality of educational, professional and intellectual opportunities for women, especially with respect to access to language. The protagonist's intellectual capacity, studious habits, and career aspirations are constantly belittled. Her brother Elmis' grades are a matter of great concern to her parents, but they do not even take notice of her straight-A report card (46). Gradually, Mariana learns that academic pursuits are inappropriate for a girl. Her grandmother admonishes: "una mujer hablatinosa con humos de la misia sabelotodo," will never catch a man (53). The voices of the town women echo the condemnation of learned females, a trait betitting men only: "Dizque es sabihonda y está aprendiendo inglés... Pobre Mariana. La considero, ¿qué desgracia...! Salirle a uno una hija con ganas de ser hombre debe ser horrible" (262).

The novelist negates numerous conventions and norms but she formulates no others to replace them. For such an act would transform the ambiguity of the literary text into something very close to the explicitness of philosophical or ideological discourse. The readers find themselves, in the words of Wolfgang Iser, "halfway between a 'no long' and a 'not yet.'"² The act

1. Albalucía Angel has published five novels: *Los girasoles en invierno* (Bogotá: Linotipia Bolívar, 1970), *Dos veces Alicia* (Barcelona: Barral, 1972), *Estaba la pájara pinta sentada en el verde limón* (Bogotá: Plaza y Janés, 1981), *Misia Señora* (Madrid: Argos Vegara, 1982), y *Los andariegos* (Madrid: Argos Vegara, 1984). Further references to *Misia Señora* will be noted in the text.

2. Wolfgang Iser, *The Act of Reading. A Theory of Aesthetic Response* (Baltimore and London: John Hopkins University Press, 1978), p. 213. Iser, pp. 212-

of reading leaves the impression that familiar norms are strangely archaic and yet there is still no clearly articulated alternative system to fill the blank left by the negation. A structure of tension between *nascient* values and the *persistencia* of the familiar characterizes the reader's aesthetic experience and also serves as the *hypogram* of the text, determining not only the story but the ordering of events: and multiple contrasting patterns of structures and language.³ Our study examines various actualizations of the *hypogram* in an attempt to reveal the poetic unity of the text.

The story of the protagonist reveals entrapment between two world views. Mariana grows up in a traditional, landed family in the coffee-growing region of Colombia, gradually learning of the boundaries imposed by society on women's behavior. Although she conforms to expected patterns - marriage and motherhood - she has become aware of the possibility of a more meaningful existence - especially through her friendships with Yasmina and Anais, and this knowledge leads to an identity crisis. The story of Mariana's life is ordered along chronological lines, from early childhood through old age. This lineality is underscored through the division of the text into three *Imágenes*. The first, "Tengo una muñeca vestida de azul," focuses on the protagonist's childhood and adolescence, the second, "Antigua sin sombra," on her courtship - marriage, the birth of her two children an extramarital affair, and a psychological crisis which necessitates a stay in a mental institution. The final *Imagen*, "Los sueños del silencio," focuses almost exclusively on the subconscious wanderings of the protagonist, anguished and growing old: "Tienes patas de gallo y se te ve papada, ni con gimnasia ya... te encaneciste, ¿a qué horas...?" (308). Embedded in the dream-like visions are descriptions of the life of Mariana's grandmother and especially of her mother.

231, explains the concept of negativity by which an author presents a familiar repertoire - values, orientations, etc. - only to negate it, leaving the reader in the precarious situation of constructing new systems.

3. Michael Riffaterre, *Semiotics of Poetry* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1978), p. 23, proposes that the poeticity of a text depends on hypogrammatic derivation: "a word or phrase is poeticized when it refers to (and, if a phrase, patterns itself upon) a preexistent word group" (the hypogram).

Not only *chronology*, but also an archetypal dramatic plot orders the text. The novel can be likened to a tragedy of innocence, which resembles the first phases of the archetypal hero/heroine who senses a call and begins his/her adventures, delving into primordial subconscious chaos in search of a new vision, but who becomes trapped and unable to return to the world.⁴ Tension specifically, conflict, is the essential characteristic of drama: and it becomes apparent that the selection of this pattern is a means of developing the text's hypogram. Drama portrays a person striving toward a goal which comes into conflict with contrary forces, whatever they may be.⁵ In the case of Mariana, two inner forces clash - the limiting value system imposed by society conflicts with new possibilities that offer the freedom to reach higher levels of self-fulfillment. Each of the *Imágenes*, in addition to reflecting the chronological stages of Mariana's life, corresponds to one of the three basic parts of the dramatic plot. The first presents the heroine's goal, self-realization, and the obstacle, the determinants which restrict a woman's behavior. In

4. Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1971), p. 220, uses the term 'tragedy of innocence' to describe that archetypal phase of tragedy in which the hero suffers a loss of innocence, and remains baffled by his first contact with an adult world. Mariana's situation because, it reflects an entire life, is also similar to what Frye, p. 222, calls the fifth phase: "the tragedy of lost direction and lack of knowledge, not unlike the second phase except that the context is the world of adult situation." Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1968), pp. 58-59, labels the departure phase of the heroic adventure, "call to adventure" and describes it as follows: "destiny has summoned the hero and transferred his spiritual center of gravity from within the pale of his society to a zone unknown. This fateful region of both treasure and danger may be variously represented: as a distant land, a forest, a kingdom underground, beneath the waves, or above the sky, a secret island, lofty mountaintop, or profound dream state; but it is always a place of strangely fluid and polymorphous beings, unimaginable torments, superhuman deeds, and impossible delight." Perhaps Mariana's situation most resembles "refusal to call," one possibility of the departure phase in which the hero's, "flowering world becomes a wasteland of dry stones and his life feels meaningless."

5. See Gustav Frytag, "The Techniques of Drama," Ferdinand Brunetière, "The Law of Drama," and William Archer, "Brunetière's Law," in *European Theories of the Drama*, ed. Barret H. Clark (Cincinnati: Stewart and Kidd, 1918), pp. 345, 403, 407.

the second, conflict between the goal and the obstacle force the protagonist to alter her behavior. Mariana is psychologically unable to accept traditional roles which leave her in the midst of an absurd existence, yet guilt does not permit an embracement of the alternatives, and she falls into a state of mental depression. The resolution of the conflict, making clear whether or not the character reaches her goal, characterizes the third *Imagen*. Mariana fails to move into a new space: a painful process of rebirth is initiated, but tragically, not brought to closure.

The complexity of the textual fabric begins to become apparent upon discovering that the archetypal plot not only generates an abundance of tragedy-of-innocence intertexts, but also forms part of a pattern of contrasting structures.⁶ The dramatic plot together with chronology organizes the selected materials into a recognizable linear pattern, but the simultaneous use of the stream-of-consciousness technique jumbles them into an irrational disarray, thus conveying a feeling of tension between order and chaos. Although these textual patterns form a sharp contrast, they are tightly interwoven because it is through the stream-of-consciousness technique that Angel expresses with great intensity the protagonist's inner dramatic struggle. The technique is characterized by free association, triggered by memory, the senses, and imagination. It ignores chronological order, permits movement through space, and conveys a sense of incoherence and discontinuity characteristic of a highly private vision from within.⁷

Large portions of the novel are evocations; Mariana remembers events of her adolescence and early childhood, and in this sense the text is with respect to the 'first narrative' (Mariana in old age), a complex network of analepses, which disrupts the chronology that the division into *Imágenes* attempts to establish.⁸ In the fol-

lowing example, the protagonist recalls an unpleasant event — an attempt when she was a little girl to jump off the balcony and poke out her dolls eyes — and the stream-of-consciousness technique permits the author to follow the disjunctive path of Mariana's thoughts. The result is the seemingly incoherent juxtaposition of two temporal planes and the simultaneous presentation of three dialogues: Mariana talking with Yasmina, with her mother, and with herself:

Las niñas nunca se tiran del balcón, ¿por qué querías tirarte...? Pegajosa, grasienta, le mordisquea los labios.

¿Me estás oyendo, o no...? Te pregunté si vas a Cali con tu abuela.

Le sacaste los ojos con un clavo.

¿A Cali...? Tal vez sí. (108).

The *desdoblamiento* of the protagonist, a dialogue between Mariana and her alter-ego, found in this example, is an important device in the indepth exploration of the conflict from a deeply personal perspective. Often Mariana's 'no yet' accuses her 'no longer,' "Tú estás muriendo" and hears in rebuttle, "Y tú loca perdida" (§ 3,303).

The stream-of-consciousness technique not only facilitates evocation and *desdoblamiento*, but also the expression of the irrational level of existence. Sometimes Mariana is dreaming, hallucinating from a fever, marijuana, or drink, and in other instances she is close to insanity. Albalucía Angel is very successful in recreating these nonrational states, achieved to a large degree through the fluidity and multiplicity of textual sings. The fluidity of *Misía Señora* is most noticeable in the abundance of abrupt, unmarked transitions in narrative point of view and in the use of pronouns and proper names with more than one referent. Irrationality is also achieved through playful enumerations whose metonymic pattern is not based on logical meaning, but on the nonsensical repetition of sounds: "Almendrosa, almendrina, almendrosita" (32), "tranquilidad tranquila tranquilina" (47), "acuestas panderetas" (76). Both fluidity and nonsensical language can be interpreted as an effort on part of the author to avoid — or at least modify — the rationality and logic masculine culture. The feminist critic Luce Irigaray, for example, suggests that *écriture feminine* — an alternative to repressed language — should be characterized precisely by such traits.⁹

6. See Frye, pp. 221-223, for lists of possible intertexts of tragedy.

7. See, for example, Robert Homphrey, *Stream of Consciousness in the Modern Novel* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1954), and Melvin Freeman, *Stream of Consciousness: A Study of Literary Method* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1955).

8. Gérard Genette, *Narrative Discourse. An Essay in Method*, trans. Jane E. Lewin (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1980), pp. 48-67, in his chapter on order in a text, defines "first narrative": "the temporal level of narrative with respect to which anachrony is defined." He continues by describing different types of analepses.

Albalucía Angel is so effective in creating the protagonist's inner world that the reader in spite of the chronology and plot framework would become lost were it not for the presence of two constellations of leitmotifs. These sets of re-occurring images, symbols, and phrases with their static associations serve as signs of textual unity, because the contrast between the two constellations is one more actualization of the hypogram of tension between opposing forces.

One set of leitmotifs expresses a world which centers around the sensorial and movement, the realm of Mariana's 'not yet,' that elsewhere, the other space filled with a swirl of (im)possibility, new life, erotic pleasure, and imagination. It is a telluric space of light and color, especially greens and yellows — shades which carry intertextual connotations of hope and joy — and of the movement of river waters. It is a realm of flight, and the metaphorical use of *volar* is central to the author's portrayal of Mariana's potential transformation. The *volar* paradigm is a traditional poetic symbol of transcendence, and more recently is found in feminist literature as an expression of the possibility of a liberated existence.¹⁰ In *Misía Señora* the paradigm includes enumerations of different types of birds and the frequent mention of dragonflies and butterflies: "Volar. Volar muy alto. Atravesar el cielo y las montañas enredada en el viento que te arrastra haciéndote flotar como un barquito de vela por el aire, donde viven también los ruiseñores. y oyes silbar los tominejos, las torcazas, golondrina, gorrión, carpincho, alondra, petirrojo" (59). Flowers, plants and fragrance also populate the free space, and one of the most powerful images in the constellation is that of the sunflower which combines light, color and movement: "Un campo de girasoles, una girándula amarilla, un sol girante, giraldilla" (25).

The opposing constellation expresses Mariana's 'no longer,' a static force dominated by fear, sadness and guilt, and linked to the past and to women's traditional roles indoctrinated in childhood. The cold, rigid? flat, grey characteristics of this existence contrast sharply with those of the

bright flight of the imaginative space. This world is associated with the security of childhood, for the protagonist a stronger force than the risk of the unknown. For this reason, Mariana in her sailor dress (*marinerita*, 58, 119, 190), lullabies (*rurru*), children's songs (63, 260), curling up under the covers (*acurrucarse*, 62, 118), and her doll Lilita, all function as symbols of the 'no longer'.¹¹ The *mujeres grises* who inhabit this realm are always ready to criticize and condemn, and their typical dress, *batolas de etamina*, becomes a sign of the frozen, empty life of women.

To express the closed, suffocating space of a traditional existence, Angel describes Mariana as needing air ("el aire le falta," 62) or as seeing herself and other children as imprisoned ("los niños de Kinder prisioneros," 63). At the level of story the prison motif appears as a mental institution where Mariana is temporarily committed. The closed-space image has been studied as a sign of the lack of power and thus serves to reiterate in *Misía Señora* the expression of the oppression of women.¹² Moving and living in a totally unthinking automatic fashion, puppets ("Marionetas, maquetas, maniqués," 66) and ants also belong to the negative constellation: "hormiguitas mecánicas, sin voces, todo de cuerda rechinante y entonces fue el terror, porque de pronto el patio se fue volviendo inmenso inmenso y las barras azules servían de cárcel a las niñas, ¡yo tengo miedo!" (66). Circus and carnival motifs have a similar function, ridiculing the absurd roles one plays in life (89, 93). The constellation is expanded in the last chapter: including more frequent reference to death and a new emphasis on hell. For example, Mariana feels like she is a prisoner in hell: "Mariana, ¿dónde es- &...? En tránsito. Prisionera del tártaro, errante en el desierto donde las flores son de piedra y la arena me cobija, como un manto" (252). She also believes that Perséfone, the queen of hell is waiting for her (271).

9. See Luce Irigaray, "Pouvoir du discours, subordination du féminin," ce *sexe qui n'en est pas un* (Paris: Minuit, 1977), pp. 72-77.

10. Helene Cixous, "The Laugh of the Medusa," trans. Keith Cohen and Paula Cohen, *Signs* I, 4 (Summer 1976), p. 887, affirms, for example, "Flying is woman's gesture."

11. See Gabriela Mora, "Narradoras hispanoamericanas: vieja y nueva problemática en renovadas elaboraciones," *Theory and Practice of Feminist Literary Criticism*, eds. Gabriela Mora and Karen S. Van Hooft (Ypsilanti, Michigan: Bilingual Press/Editorial Bilingüe, 1982), p. 163, for a brief summary of the doll as a symbol in the works.

12. See Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic. The Woman Writer and Nineteenth Century Literary Imagination* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1979), pp. 86-91, for a discussion of closed-space images.

One of the most important images of the negatively marked set is **Mariana** looking at herself in a mirror. In a sense, she exists only as an empty, lifeless reflection, the image of what society has determined she will be. The actual placing of the protagonist in front of a mirror enhances the presentation of her inner conflict by joining the action of the story and the *desdoblamiento* device: "Per0 tú ya no sientes porque vas en camino hacia la imagen del espejo; y es el reflujó en rotación, la muerte que palpita, y algo se mueve en tí Mariana, resucita, Mariana, gritas, resucita, pero tu imagen no se gira, sigue tirada allí, gris mate, neblinosa, niña bonita, niña rurru" (22). Often when Mariana swirls toward the realm of light and color, her own voice, or that of some member of the family, beckons her back. This call is expressed throughout the text by the protagonist's name phonetically represented as if being shouted aloud at a distance, similar to when a mother calls her child back to the house, "¡Mariaaanaa!" Moments of intense struggle in the protagonist's efforts to resolve her inner conflict are enhanced by the juxtaposition of the opposing constellations. Frequently, as in the following example, flight begins only to be truncated by the security of the binding forces: "Quieres volar y ya no puedes, vagarosa, vagan-te, mariposa, volar, volar como Nils Olgerson, te miras vacilar, y allí la ves, marinerita desolada, los cachumbos deshechos, y en puntillas, niña sin sombra y gris, volviendo del espejo" (117). The interaction between the competing domains is also communicated through mixed images, the 'país iluminado' becomes the land "que no tiene ayer ni espejos," and the grey domain is the place of the "mariposa clavada" and of "no volar."

The expression of the protagonist's conflict through the juxtaposition of the two sets of leitmotifs is intensified by the elaboration of another opposition: Mariana's inability to liberate herself from the past contrasts sharply with the vision of three other female characters in the novel. In each chapter Angel develops the characterization of a particular female friend of the protagonist: Yasmina plays a major role in *Primera imagen*, Anaís in *Segunda imagen*, and Idania in *Tercera imagen*. These three women share certain traits. They all realize that the established patterns of behavior for women are inadequate. Both Yasmina and Anaís have moved into the new space, a step Mariana learns she will

never take, "no lograré jamás cruzar la cordillera, como tú, a punta de ala... no cruzaré los Andes, Anaís, ni soy la estinge alada, como tú, qué más quisiera" (148). Idania, on the other hand, dies bearing the pain of her unfulfilled insight. All three are criticized by society. Mariana's family frowns upon her friendship with them and the gossiping *mujeres grises* comment, for example, "Esa Yasmina es un peligro" (269), and 'La Idania siempre como un caldo de carretas de simplota, yo creo que es boba. Pelichócolo, y como una sanguijuela, pegada a ella todo el santo día, ni que estuviera enamorada...' (263). Uncle Max resents Idania's independence, "Te prohibo la junta con esa pelichócolo, se atrevió mi tío Max, como si fuera una ordalía y yo una oveja más de su rebaño" (272). Similarly, all three try to guide Mariana, to locate her in that other space. This role is symbolized in the text by the questions, "¿Dónde estás?" (105) or "¿Dónde andas?" (171) during conversations in which Mariana's mind wanders.

Throughout *Misía Señora* the tension of the character's struggle with herself is expressed primarily through the patterns which contrast the order of chronology and plot with the confusion of the stream-of-consciousness discourse, through the juxtaposition of the two discordant constellations and through the contrast between the protagonist and the female-guide figures. The tragic resolution of the conflict however, is most effectively conveyed through the dynamic process of mythification-demythification. The myth of prince marries girl, the much anticipated arrival of the knight on a white horse is developed principally in the final *Imagen*, although it appears previously when Mariana dreams of being taken off to a luxurious palace and in the description of her wedding preparations. The *Tercera imagen*, the most dream-like, almost surrealistic, of the novel, takes place at a time when the main character's sanity is in question. The knight figure appears as an irresistibly attractive uninvited guest at a dance. Perhaps he is a ghost, maybe a Mr. Aranque de Rionegro, he could be a gentleman from the Quimbaya plantation, he is also Alveriano, Mariana's father, and briefly, even her grandfather, and also her husband Arlén, and most notably, he is Amadís, a name which brings to mind the sixteenth-century novels of chivalry: "¡Amadís...! ¡Amadís...!. lo llamas, porque es él, jinete en su caba-

110 y todo en blanco, como un copito de nieve” (233) ¹³

The multiple nature of this male figure is also characteristic of Mariana de Ontaneda y Alvarez de Pino, who embodies successive generations of women in the protagonist's family: her grandmother, her mother and herself. The woman dangles from Amadís' every word and she does not breathe until hearing: “¡Mariana...! vengo a casarme con usted” (245). Near the end of the novel, the male archetypal figure — both a sign of domination and of woman's repressed desire — becomes Amadís de Ontaneda, a name which synthesizes the symbiotic relationship between the myth and Mariana's belief in it. Almost until the end she holds fast to the apparition of her prince as her last possible hope for salvation. But the myth explodes in violence when Amadís shoots his daughter, Oriana, and his son, and then commits suicide. Caught in the space between with no false dreams to sustain her, and unable to reach the other side of the mirror, the protagonist deteriorates into a state of anguish likened to that described by Neruda, whose verses she remembers: “de oscuros cauces donde la sed etema sigue y la fatiga sigue y el dolor infinito” (69).

The underlying structure of *Misía Señora* generates paradigms of opposed leitmotifs — bright colors movement, flowers butterflies, and hope confront the grey, static? enthesticizing past of dolls and sailor dresses — the structure also generates the clash between the beauty of the prince myth and its hidden falsity, and a contrast

between characters and between the linear ordering of events and the irrational succession of the protagonist's inner thoughts. The intricate interweaving of these and other actualizations of the hypogram create a text whose meaning also reflects tension between two opposing forces. On the one hand, the outcome of the story, the protagonist's anguished entrapment, conveys a sense of tragic defeat. But, on the other, the artistry of the text, the original and successful manipulation of discourse and language! shout of triumph in response to female silence and confirm arrival to that elsewhere so long glimpsed only from afar. The reader is left to innovate, to paint a portrait of woman to replace the familiar one which the novel negates, and the significance stage of comprehension — the active taking over of the text by the reader — is reached precisely when the reader participates in the process of discovery, in the formulation of the not yet' of woman's identity.¹⁴

13. The version of *Amadís de Gaula* which has been preserved appears to have been written in 1492 and published in Zaragoza in 1508. See Juan Luis Alborg, *Historia de la literatura española*, Vol. I, (Madrid :Gredos, 1966) pp. 254-261. In the novel Oriana is the hero's beloved and in the end his wife.

14. Iser, p. 149, following Paul Ricoeur's line of thought identifies the two distinct stages of comprehension: “the stage of ‘meaning... and the stage of ‘significance,’ which represents the active taking-over of the meaning by the reader-i.e. the meaning taking effect in existence”.