Remembering the Future: Confession and Queer Temporality in Esther Tusquets

Elizabeth S. Gunn
Morgan State University

Abstract: In the context of modernity and postmodernity, Esther Tusquets'ss (born Barcelona, 1936) works lean pointedly toward their consciously metatextual, intertextual and seeming confessional meanderings. Tusquets, a Catalan author, arrives late to fiction, beginning this facet of her career in the 1970's with the novel under review here: *El mismo mar de todos los veranos* (*The Same Sea As Every Summer*), in 1978. Tusquets'ss work probes the limits of sexual subjectivity via the protagonist's and the narrator's confrontations with remembrance and the limits of lesbianism under the Francoist regime.

Keywords: Esther Tusquets – Queer – Gender – Spain – Twentieth Century

In the context of modernity and postmodernity, Esther Tusquets'ss (1936-2012) work leans pointedly toward the latter in its consciously metatextual, intertextual, and seeming confessional meanderings. Tusquets, a Catalan author, reportedly arrives late to fiction, beginning this facet of her career in the late 1970s with the novel under review here: *El mismo mar de todos los veranos*, in 1978. Her first fictional work garnered critical acclaim. When this work was published, Spain, of course, was transitioning between forty years of dictatorial rule into democracy: "thus, to understand Tusquets'ss criticism of Spanish society and the innovative nature of some of her material, one must be aware of the cultural premise of Franco's Spain – the Spain in which Tusquets grew up" (Jones186). The context is an oppressive one, burgeoning on an overt aperture after 1975. Tusquets belongs to a time between officially labeled "generations:" that of the "children of the war generation," those born during the mid to late 1930s, and that of the "Generation of '68," noted for its social realism (Sanz Villanueva 24-6). Recall that during Franco's reign, "divorce was illegal, homosexuality was a crime, and adultery illegal – for women. Women's rights, which had begun to receive attention under the previous government, suffered considerable setbacks; work restrictions emphasized that a woman's place was in the home" (Jones 186). Furthermore, females were passed from fathers to husbands; thus, the legal status of women was controlled by patriarchal law.

Divorce was not made legal until 1982, abortion several years later. According to Jones, while the censorship disbanded in 1978, "the explicatory erotic nature of the text, and, particularly, the feminine perspective on sexual matters were new to Spanish

fiction" (187). It would be easy to slip into labeling Tusquets's work "feminine writing" as Sanz Villanueva does (37), but that is too easy and problematic of a label. Further, Tusquets's work, while not "feminine," does probe the limits of sexual subjectivity via the protagonist's and the narrator's confrontations with remembrance and the limits of lesbianism as it relates to the a non normative, queer temporal framework.

This is the setting of *El mismo mar de todos los veranos*. The unnamed[1] female protagonist is a university literature professor. Her unfaithful husband, Julio, is a film director, often playing the leading male role. He travels often. The protagonist, with much time alone, concentrates on work and reflects on relationships with her husband, her daughter, Guiomar, and her mother. These latter two, the narrator communicates, possess contrary personalities to her own in that her mother is a well put together world traveling, self-assured and traditional person. Her daughter is more like her mother than herself. The protagonist, in brief, displeases her mother and daughter in that she always seems to them to be on the brink of losing mental control. Further, the narrator reportedly lets these three people almost physically place her in new apartments (her mother and husband like to change living venues frequently). Their physical proximity seems to be a stronger link than their emotional or sexual ties. The narrator does not succumb to their insistences to order, to "positive" change or to focused normative behavior (sexual, work, family duties); rather, she apparently allows them to maintain their notion of order, all the while engaging in her own life and in her own texts and in important, new relationships beyond the apparent confines of traditional family setting. According to Lonsdale in her chapter, "The Space of Politics: Nation, Gender, Language and Class in Esther Tusquets'ss Narrative," the concept of the "feminine" in Tusquets's works should give way to a more profound reading of the intersections of class, race, gender and space (245-7). To this argument, I would add the category of time. For the very title of Tusquets's novel, *El mismo mar de todos los veranos*, summons an inquiry into the temporal: is this really the same sea as every summer? I argue that the answer is much more complex than yes or no; instead, the novel brings forth a queer temporality through remembrance, a remembrance specific to lesbian subjectivity and its deferred desire.

The protagonist's story centers on a summer in which she meets a female student, Clara, from Colombia, in her class. The first weeks go without event until Clara gains the professor's attention:

> La tengo aquí, por fin, delante de mí, tendiéndome un papel. El cabello castaño, muy largo, muy suave, caído a la espalda, los ojos color miel, los pómulos salientes, y una gabardine gris ceñida a la cintura: hoy está

[1] The protagonist is named once toward the end of the novel. Her name is Elia; however, is is commonly accepted that this novel has an unnamed protagonists. On the occasion in which it is mentioned, the narrator is recalling Clara asking her not to leave (*El mismo* 202).

> lloviendo tras las altas ventanas conventuales y griseas el verde tierno de las ramas. Durante estos últimos días de clase he estado revisando involuntariamente, casi sin darme cuenta, las hileras de rostros serios en los bancos e intentando hacer coincidir alguno con la descripción delirante de Maite: indómita princesa azteca – no hubo aztecas en Colombia – ojos de noche, cabellera al viento, montando a pelo caballos salvajes; labios fínisimos y pálidos, sienes azuladas, breves senos y largas piernas, subiendo de tres en tres los peldaños de la escalinata del palacio – ¿un palacio entre selvas tropicales? (*El mismo* 102)[2]

The protagonist's attention will further turn to Clara when the latter phones one day. The two take a drive along Catalonia's Costa Brava. They will spend several weeks together near the water in the protagonist's grandmother's home on the coast after the grandmother passes away. The protagonist's husband, Julio, will interrupt their interlude when he learns that her grandmother has died. He goes to the house, and takes her back to Barcelona. Clara stays behind waiting, believing that the protagonist will return after a brief dinner with her husband. Of course, she does not return; rather, she allows Jorge once again to direct her actions in a sense. The novel concludes with Clara's departure to Colombia. She and the protagonist share a few final minutes in Clara's hotel room before she leaves.

Many critics have framed this work as a "feminine" novel due to its plot and lesbianism. While it is always necessary to question the categorical, in this case of "feminine perspective" and "women's pleasure," Jones' sketch provides a resourceful backdrop with which to engage Tusquets's work:

> The novel recognizes and validates women's pleasure (clearly differentiating it from male pleasure), deals frankly with female sexuality, depicts homosexuality (particularly between women, another taboo) in a positive light, and reinforces these themes with the erotization of the text itself, through the use of female sexual imagery. (187)

[2] Translation here and elsewhere by Margaret E. W. Jones: "At last, here she is, before me, holding out a piece of paper. Long, soft, chestnut-colored hair falling down her back, honey-colored eyes, prominent cheekbones, and a gray raincoat belted at the waist: today it is raining behind the tall monastic windows and the tender green of branches turn gray. During these last days of class, almost without realizing it, I have been involuntarily checking the rows of serious faces on the benches and trying to make one correspond to Maite's delirious description: indomitable Aztec princess – no, there were never Aztecs in Colombia – night-dark eyes, hair blowing in the wind, riding wild horses bareback; thin, pale lips, bluish temples, small breasts, and long legs, climbing the palace staircase by the three – a palace in a tropical jungle? (*Same* 44)."

Jones' position merits probing, but for now, her assessment serves to frame Tusquets's s work in the context of Transition: a rich context of political, cultural, and sexual boundary exploration not unlinked from the tension between modernity's and postmodernity's version of fulfilled versus unfulfilled subjectivity. Indeed, the concept of queer temporality at work in this novel is in sync with the notion of transition whereby transition speaks to an intertextuality of timing among present, past and future.[3] The traditional definition of a transition is the process of changing from one state or condition to another, thereby being in a state of temporal flux. In *Foucault, Feminism and Power,* Molinaro details the role of interextuality as power in *El mismo mar de todos los veranos*. Her argument is quite useful in decoding the importance of intertextuality and lack of linearity: "Intertext dispels unity and linearity because they afford neither beginning nor end; such theological notions are themselves places where intertexuality intersects to reveal that *text* exceeds the boundaries of aperture and closure" (28). At the level of content, form and historical moment, Tusquets's work pushes the limits of conventional notions of desire as it relates to time. Nothing about the novel is contained by a linear narrative: its narrative frame (Wendy and Peter Pan), its wandering narrative voice, its numerous literary allusions and its conscription in nor resistance to normative notions and expressions of sexual desire and lesbian subjectivity. Moreover, unfulfilled desire in Tusquets's works reflects lesbianism's knowledge of lack of complete sexual subjectivity in late twentieth century Spanish narrative.

The confession is the ground for much of the contradiction and conflict. Of course, Michel Foucault has made the imperative links between enlightenment, sexuality, and the confession. Via an analysis of Judith Butler's reading of Foucault's theories of confession and repression, I will show that lesbian subjectivity in Tusquets's works move beyond confession as a site of origin. Further, lesbian subjectivity as proposed in her novel is the site of a consciously understood lack of origin, specifically, lack of complete sexual subjectivity as it relates to anti-linearity or queer temporality.

According to Molinaro, "[Tusquets's] fiction suggests an inquiry into a potential 'aesthetics of power' as it is manifested in the relational apparatus of self-conscious narrative, and it offers a place to begin investigating the applicability of Foucault's theories for the study of literature" (24). Foucault poses answers to the questions of how sexual subjectivity relates to other forms of social assignments and institutions, and how these in turn relate to knowledge and power.

[3] Another example contemporary to Tusquets and on par with the notion of queer temporarily in the time of Transition would be (among many others) Eduardo Mendicutti's *Una mala noche la tiene cualquiera* (1982) in which the central character, an Andalusian transvestite, experiences a kind of a temporal crisis while Transition to Democracy meets with potential disaster as an attempted military coup takes place in the Spanish Congress. The queer relationship and understanding of time is decried by La Maledón who represents those who have lived clandestine subjectivities during the Francoist regime.

Sexuality came under new classifications, and the much cited date of the classification of homosexuality is 1892.[4] The drive to classify sex, Foucault argues, in part stems from a new industrial age work force in that sex is seen as at once counter productive, yet also reproductive (*History* 6). The discourse on modern sexuality is inextricably linked to repression. Foucault continues with his discussion of the repressive hypothesis, questioning if sex really has been repressed since the seventeenth century in the way that is so seemingly prevalent and promulgated. He argues that sex has perhaps been seen as repressed, and this has been a rhetorical maneuver precisely to allow for the abundant discourse on and around sex and sexuality. Further, his thesis centers on the ways in which sexuality is inextricably linked to the production of knowledge, thus on the production and wielding of power. In this way, he elects to bypass the repressive hypothesis and instead focus on the way knowledge has come to mean sexual knowledge and how this knowledge also means power (13).

Foucault will point to the Counter Reformation to account in part for the convergence of thought, sex, and confession in that the confession allowed for an "enlightened" avenue for discussing the very thing that became relegated to the perverse: sex. But it was not because it was necessarily perverse; rather, nations needed people to increase productivity and wealth. This created a need for knowledge about sexual practices and a mechanism to control them. Herein lays the much cited Foucauldian discourse on the rise of institutions (hospitals, schools, prisons, etcetera) created precisely to monitor and regulate sexual practices. The confession remains "the general standard governing the production of the true discourse on sex" (63). By consequence, as Foucault argues, society takes on the task of listening to others' sexual pleasures.

Returning to the repressive hypothesis, Foucault argues that sexuality becomes the ultimate definition of truth of self; yet, that which is repressed is not necessarily "a movement bent on pushing rude sex into some obscure and inaccessible region" (72). Rather, he holds that the repression and confession, that is new discourses on sexuality, are actually about the proliferation of sex and talk of sex. Foucault's position on the repressive hypothesis and the proliferation and pleasure of sexuality and power merit discussion in that feminists have routinely critiqued his views as sexist. According to Molinaro, "Tusquets interrogates feminist and Foucauldian analyses of power, and her

[4] David Halperin's *One Hundred Years of Sexuality* (New York: Routledge, 1990) probes the false assumptions in linking ancient sexual behavior to contemporary categories: "the study of sexual life in antiquity reveals homosexuality, heterosexuality, and even sexuality itself to be relatively recent and highly culture-specific forms of erotic life – not the basic building-blocks of sexual identity for all human beings in all times and places, but peculiar and indeed exceptional ways of conceptualizing as well as *experiencing* sexual desire. I appeal to the Greek documentary record for evidence that sexual experiences and forms of erotic life are culturally specific, that they are not universal but historical, and I contend that it maybe possible to recover some of the indigenous meanings attached to sexual experience in ancient Greek if only we do not insist on viewing the ancient documents through the prism of modern social and sexual categories" (9).

principal site is narrative itself-narrative as procedure and strategy for power relations, as a process of subjectivization, as a mechanism of exclusion and resistance" (24). The feminist critiques of Foucault serve as a valuable theoretical lens through which to read Tusquets's works.

It has been argued that Foucault's debt to psychoanalysis precludes him from post structuralism in that he is indebted to the Freudian notion of origin. Of course, Foucault speaks of the opposite of repression: production. That which is not repressed for Foucault is produced. That is, a proliferation of sexual pleasures not necessarily in conflict with the production of power. According to Judith Butler, Foucault misreads Freud when he bypasses the repressive hypothesis. She argues that Foucault's misreading involves an elimination of other drives or desires that are produced, perhaps, on an individual level rather than at the moment of Enlightenment: "the ideal of transforming all excluded identifications into inclusive features – of appropriating all difference into unity – would mark the return to a Hegelian synthesis...a figure that installs itself by way of a romantic, insidious, and all consuming humanism" (*Bodies* 116). Butler's argument suggests that which is produced as repressed from history is fundamental in understanding the abject. Whereas for Foucault the repressed is a site of proliferation of sexualities, Butler conceives of the repressed as sexual otherness. More importantly, her implied critique of Foucault suggests that he forgets about gender. Foucault's work routinely points to sadomasochistic scenes as sites of multiple pleasures. He reads these as a resistance or a challenge to hetero-normative concepts of sex and sexuality. For Butler, as for many feminists, Foucault's detachment of sexuality from gender is highly problematic.

Butler argues throughout *Bodies That Matter* that the incoherencies in the heterosexual narrative (as in all narratives) allow for slippages. Gender performance, and indeed the performance of sex and sexuality, allow for these slippages. However, whereas Foucault has maintained more "hope" about sexual power, understanding that sexism roots heterosexism, Butler argues that the processes of signficication and resignificaiton are not the invested "with a kind of vitalism;" but rather, neither "power nor discourse are rendered anew at every moment; they are not as weightless as the utopics of radical resignification might imply" (*Bodies* 224). She continues to argue and question that the processes of resignification is injurious in that it presents itself as weighted, normalized and static. Of course, it presents itself as such, but the chain of signficiation through language and subjectivity, while constraining, allow for difference. The process of resignification is not as easy as Foucault hopes, certainly not for female and lesbian subjectivities. Tusquets's works understand lesbian subjectivity in a performative fashion. Performance allows for slippages, moments in which subjectivity shows itself incomplete and often incoherent. However, as with ending of *El mismo mar de todos los veranos*, the inevitability of performativity does not necessarily mean democratic advances. Rather, such changes are better understood as a process, a process best understood by lesbian subjectivity as exemplified by Tusquets's works.

In *El mismo mar de todos los veranos*, what has been interpreted as the confession is not a sight of proliferating pleasure unattached from sexism. It is significantly linked to gender. Lesbianism in this novel best understands the arduous process of resignification in that it is a subjectivity already doubly removed from the idea of complete sexual subjectivity.

El mismo mar de todos los veranos centers on an extended metaphor of the betrayal myth between Theseus and Ariadne. In this earlier work of Tusquets, it would be easy for the narrator to slip into a simple dichotomy of feminine versus masculine sexuality based on this myth. The novel resists this in part by resisting confessions between the mythical characters, and in turn, between protagonists and antagonists. This move evades a discourse of "true" sexual subjectivity. Indeed, the novel seems to poke fun at the possibility of a fairy tale uniting of sameness via the confession. Another reading of the confession in this novel will suggest that it is precisely about the impossibility of complete sexual subjectivity. Lesbian subjectivity could be understood as an engagement with confession in that the confession is not about finding an original kernel of subjectivity; rather, it is a site retelling of desires through intertexualities, that is, through queer temporality.

At least two versions exist to the myth of Theseus and Ariadne. The tale begins with Theseus' desire to slay the Minotaur who requires an annual sacrifice in exchange for not destroying Theseus' kingdom. Tired of these sacrifices, Theseus decides to challenge the Minotaur. Entering into the labyrinth in which the Minotaur lives, Theseus encounters Adriadne who falls in love with him immediately. She thus helps Theseus by giving him a string to tie to the entrance so he will be able to find his way out. He does this, and after a successfully killing the Minotaur, he finds Ariadne waiting for him at the entrance. Some versions of the story end with Theseus deserting Ariadne on the island of Nexos; others end with Ariadne on the shore recovering from sea sickness while Theseus' ship is carried to sea. In the second version, Ariadne has died when Theseus is finally able to return.

In the novel, Theseus at first seems to be Julio, the protagonist's husband. However, through a slow revelation not unlike a confession, the protagonist reveals that Theseus is probably Jorge, the protagonist's first love who committed suicide without leaving a note. Further, according to the protagonist, he left without taking her with him. Closer scrutiny reveals that perhaps Clara is Theseus, or perhaps, complete sexuality itself is that which has always been lost. In any case, something is lost, and the novel understands this loss as lesbian subjectivity understands loss. That is, lesbian subjectivity understands that complete and sustained presence in discourse is a fallacy. To speak of complete or incomplete subjectivity is to speak of language, of discourse:

> The subject is, as a result, never coherent and never self-identical precisely because it is founded, and indeed, continually refounded, through a set of defining foreclosures and repressions that constitute the discontinuity and incomplete subject. (*Bodies* 190)

In this way, it understands, as exemplified in this novel, that language is a tool of distancing more often than not. The protagonist's relationship to language, to (lack of) confession, works as lesbian subjectivity works: it understands that subjectivity is a process of signification, of reiteration of that which never was. In other words, the knowledge of the desire of narrating desire (because there is no original to return to), is consciously in play.

Further, desire works in a way that is somewhat, if not completely, in conflict with Foucault's understandings of confession. If confession is about the ways in which either a true core sexual identity may be revealed, or if it is about a proliferation of pleasures, it still remains in conflict with Butler's notions of subjectivity's slippages. The problem becomes how to speak about lesbian subjectivity as a self consciously incomplete process while maintaining a distance from confession as truth, and from confession as a play of pleasure.

The novel's protagonist is highly engaged with language through her myth telling and through her profession, yet she remains at a seemingly self consciously placed distance from it to avoid slipping into confession. However if the whole novel may be read as a confession, a long thought piece on love and loss, it simultaneously resists confession because she hesitates confirming any one sexuality or any one moment in time. Rather than confess how this lesbian relationship will unfold, and rather than confessing what it means to her identity, the protagonist opens the novel by contemplating the workings of desire itself:

> Mayos sofocantes y lascivos, con el pecho oprimido y un sabor especial entre los labios – quizá sólo el deseo de ser azotada con ramos de mimosa en una alcoba nupcial, en una alcoba mortal, atestada de nardos-, y desde estos balcones, ver cómo hace verde y nuevo, en breve embestidas juguetonas, el mismo mar de todos los veranos. (63)[5]

Her description is suggestive of the way desire works, of the changing mechanisms at play in it. Desire, like the sea, fluctuates. Sexuality does as well. According to Molinaro, "Tusquets's first novel sets forth another, nonhierarchical and dispersed version of

[5] "Stifling and lascivious Mays, with a tightness in our chests and a special taste on our lips – perhaps the only desire to be whipped with mimosa boughs in a bridal chamber, in a death chamber filled with tuberoses – and watching from these balcony windows the same sea as every summer being born green an new, in short, playful charges" (*Same* 13).

power as extended and concretized, as *moved* through the effects of intertextuality, which, in turn, produces power and its accompanying discourse, organized around domination and submission" (27). The text and its desire cannot be located in any one moment, in any one temporal or societal plateau. Moreover, any confessional act would be instantaneously displaced by the next innuendo made. The chain of signification works in this way. For example, "Mayos" are both "sofocantes" and "lascivos." It is also not just one May, but the series, the compilation of Mays gone by and the anticipation of the months to come. She is anticipating what might be different; difference is guaranteed. The same sea as every summer is precisely the point of contention. It cannot be the same sea, the same summer, the same May, the same desire. From the beginning, the protagonist considers difference as extrojected or allowed over time and through language.

This association with shifting desire and with the violence against it vis-à-vis heterosexual and sexist imagery corresponds to my argument that lesbian subjectivity knows more about the limits of sexual subjectivity than do other categories at this time. The quote also associates "el pecho oprimido" and "un sabor especial" with desire. The desire is whipped in "una alcoba nupcial" and in "una alcoba mortal." It could be read that desire is associated with violence, a sort of fetishist incarnation. It is better understood here, as temporal. Heterosexuality conventionally reconstitutes itself by officering and adhering to a narrative with prescribed, socially acceptable moments and tangible relics of its own institutionalization: courtship rituals, engagements, weddings, rings, marriage contracts, photo albums and children. These are conventional rituals and tokens that have been traditionally disallowed to queer identities. Butler further explains the connection between the temporal, the body and a conventionally hetero-normative moment: "If the tomb is a bridal chamber, and the tomb is chosen over marriage, then the term 'bridal chamber'…represents precisely the negation of its own possibility" (*Antigone* 76). The bridal chamber as metaphorical tomb leaves little room for difference, for maneuverability. Further, it prefabricates very concrete and ascertainable ways in which desire should be played out. The protagonist writes that this narrative in fact truncates desire: it does violence to desire by trying to fixate it in a preconceived story or moment in time.

In the aforementioned quotation, desire is about the following: "desde estos balcones, ver cómo hace verde y nuevo, en breve embestidas juguetonas, el mismo mar de todos los veranos." She watches more than she participates at this moment. While watching is a problematic action in and of itself, she takes pleasure in watching the sea change. The sea is never the same: it cannot be bottled, confined, stopped. Thus the novel opens with the suggestion that it will be more about a distanced awareness, ("desde estos balcones, ver"), than about a convergence of any narrative such as that offered by hetero-normativity.

Again, hetero-normativity is in large part about the preconceived narratives of courtship rituals and marriage. The story is already produced. For the lesbian encounter, the ritual is not necessarily pre-produced.

Thus, when the protagonist says, "en breve embestidas juguetonas, el mismo mar de todos los veranos," She is challenging the notion of hetero-normativity. This is accurate, considering her understanding of the way desire functions, the sea cannot be the same every summer. Importantly, she adds, "en breve embestidas juguetonas." Hetero-normativity is not about short, playful charges. Its conventional narrative is one of a plotted course. Her relationship with her husband is not full of such short and playful charges. Contrarily, her relationship with Clara is.

The protagonist's relationship with Clara centers on such stops and starts. And if the stops and starts seem to approach a confession, the protagonist remains conscious of this. She resists this simplistic identity narration. For example, when Clara finally decides to call her professor, the latter describes her own reaction as such:

> Y ella tenía que telefonear antes o después, aunque no podia ser mucho después, y tenía que decir en un maullido agónico: Soy Clara, y yo tenía que dejar que se prolongara un silencio angustioso, más angustioso para ella que para mí, porque a mí me divierte callar. Como me ha divertido estos tres días dar las clases sin apenas mirarla, llegando con el tiempo justísimo –casi tarde- y precipitándome a mi tarima, ya con las palabras en la boca, para escabullirme al terminar, con tantas prisas como si hubieran prendido fuego al mapa de España en relieve justo a mis espaldas o hubiera estallado un petardo debajo de la mesa. (121)[6]

The protagonist is resisting a typically unfolding courtship narrative. She is playing precisely with the stops and starts, consciously so. She is aware of the implied confessional tone that Clara's phone conversation might take. The professor is amused: "porque a mí me divierte callar." Here, silence is an overt tactic to delay a narrative, an overt tactic to delay desire. She already knows that the desire is for desire, not for the end result or end plot itself. Thus, she delays contact: "llegando con el tiempo justísimo –casi tarde."

Curiously, she is almost late. As argued, queer temporality resists normative notions of punctuality: is about not being on time. That is, in the heterosexist narrative,

[6] "She had to telephone sooner or later, although it couldn't be much later, and she had to say it in an anguished meow, 'It's Clara,' and I had to prolong a painful silence, more painful for her than for me, because it amuses me not to speak. As it had also amused me hardly ever to look at her when I taught class these last three days, arriving exactly on time – almost late – and hurrying to my platform, with the words already on my lips, to rush out when I finished as hurriedly as if the relief map of Spain right at my back had caught fire or a firecracker had exploded under the desk" (*Same* 60).

there are conventional moments of convergence in which time makes sense and is plotted along an expected and predetermined chronology: marriage, children, etc.
With the lack of conventional mainstream narratives predicting queer relationships, timing is different. Foucault offers:

> But in western Christian culture homosexuality was banished and therefore had to concentrate all its energy on the act of sex itself. Homosexuals were not allowed to elaborate a system of courtship because the cultural expression necessary for such an elaboration was denied to them. The wink on the street, the split-second decision to get it on, the speed with which homosexual relations are consummated: all these are products of an interdiction. (*Michel* 296-7).

In the context of the Spanish Transition, this makes sense. The professor's being "almost late," and Clara's call not being able to be "too much later," coincides with Foucault's concept that queer timing is coincidental. It cannot be planned in the way that heterosexism has been planned, especially after fifty years of a repressive regime.[7] Again, it amuses the protagonist not to speak, to allow the possibility for desire to become even more desirable. Here, lesbian subjectivity is overtly conscious of its process of deferral in time and in language. The novel as a narration of lesbian subjectivity also works to defer its own finality.

Additionally, in the aforementioned description of Clara's first phone call, the protagonist's explicit reference to the map of Spain – a recurrent image throughout the novel – fixes the novel in its historical referent. While an exploding Civil War Spain, a violent post war Spain still holds on to some notion of sameness, that is an understanding of modernity, the protagonist challenges with her markedly humorous desire. Indeed, the oppressive system on which the repressive regime rests meets with danger when faced with the ensuing relationship between the protagonist and Clara.

The whole house of cards, in effect, is threatened by the novel's understanding of the way in which this relationship (does not) work. While the system of signification is not overtly shaken by a mere play between binaries, the protagonist's and the narrator's understanding of sexual subjectivity critiques the fundamental underpinnings of Francoist modernity:

> es precisamente lo que anhelamos en nuestra infancia lo que hemos venido buscando a lo largo de la vida y lo único que tal vez podría satisfacernos, porque hay una diferencia ofensiva e insultante entre las realidades y el deseo, porque ha tenido siempre el éxito un precio

[7] Importantly, Spain became the third country in the world to legalize same-sex marriage in 2005.

> exorbinante y loco o porque nos ha sido regalado por nada y no vale en consecuencias nada, un éxito risible.... (82)[8]

The laughable success in part refers to the regime's promotion of a self-contained autarky. It also refers to the relationship between such a sexist, homophobic regime and its insistence on rigid femininity through the Sección Femenina. It also refers to her marriage with Julio and the exorbitant and crazy price it has been. This reveals an understanding that the heterosexist narrative relies on fabrications of convergence; contrarily, her relationship with Clara will challenge what she is criticizing because it happens self-consciously as a process of incomplete subjectivity.

The relationship and the novel accomplish this by resisting the aforementioned notions of sameness brought about by confession and heterosexist end plots. The protagonist will hold Clara at bay only so long, yet she continues to preempt any confessional moment with her own literary allusions and well placed verbal wanderings. These self-conscious verbal wanderings chart the desire for telling, the desire for holding the instance at bay and for remembering the instance afterward. If the instance is a sexual encounter out of time with the heterosexual narrative, this novel is in and of itself a remembering and not a confession. That is, the novel works as a remembering tool, not as a confession of true sexual identity. The narrative as novel is in and of itself the narrative of remembering, of deferring desire yet again and of enjoying that precise deferral. Barbara F. Ichishi, in *The Apple of Earthly Love. Female Development in Esther Tusquets's Fiction*, argues that "the idealistic lover must come to terms with the inherent sadness in love, a sadness borne of the impossibility of attaining the total, permanent fulfillment" (88). In the protagonist's case, she is not yearning for the "permanent fulfillment," quite the contrary. She is quite aware of its impossibility actually, and holds the thing at bay precisely to defer its inevitable departure, its inevitable revelation as incomplete. Further, because she knows it will be incomplete, she enjoys the process of deferral. Again, desire for desire.

As the protagonist and Clara begin their time together after the death of the protagonist's grandmother, the protagonist seems to anticipate the end. This time means that her family, namely her husband, will come for her. The protagonist wants to enjoy the desire of deferral:

> debo hacer que Clara pague de algún modo el hecho de que sea yo la quehoy la haya llamado, debe compensarme en algún modo por el temblor de mis dedos

[8] "[W]hat we have longed for in our childhood is exactly what we have been searching for our whole life and the only thing that perhaps could satisfy us, because there is an offensive and insulting difference between reality and desire, because success has always had an exorbitant and crazy price or because it has been given to us for nothing and consequently is worth nothing; it only manages to give us laughable success… (*Same* 30)."

> en el teléfono, por mi voz ahogada que pide auxilio, por esta necesidad imperiosa y desvalida de tenerla junto a mí, o quizá sea sobre todo –y tercero- el gusto de la espera, el placer de dejar que Clara y yo y el aire se vayan cargando lentamente hasta que la tension estalle libre de controles, capaz de transgredir todos los límites. (196)[9]

Her relationship with Clara, specifically lesbian in its subjectivity, is a desire for what happens while she is waiting. The novel as recollection is about the very same thing. In this way, it is consciously aware of its own process of deferral and incompleteness.

The novel ends with Clara's inevitable departure, further revealing the novel as a remembering/deferral mechanism through time. The scene in which Clara packs her bags speaks to the Foucauldian notion of homoerotic relationships[10] making sense, knowingly, after the fact:

> esta posibilidad tan loca y tan maravillosa que se ha llamado Clara, y que está todavía aquí, al alcance de mis manos y de mis palabras, de mis besos y mis "no te vayas", pero que es como si se hubiera marchado ya, porque, a la inversa de lo que ocurre con el dolor, la verdadera ausencia empieza realmente un poco antes de que se produzca el vacío material de la ausencia, empieza en el instante mismo en que comprendemos de verdad que el otro va a marchase y nosotros vamos a quedar sin él.... Y solo en el último instante, cuando el mozo ha subido al taxi el equipaje, y ella ha pagado la cuenta, y distribuido las propinas.... (271)[11]

[9] "I must make Clara pay in some way for the fact that I am the one who called her today, she must compensate me in some way for the trembling of my fingers on the dial, for my drowning-person's voice calling for help, for this imperious, helpless need to have her near me, and perhaps it may be above all – and third – the pleasure of waiting, the pleasure of letting Clara and me and the air become slowly charged until the tension explodes, free of controls, capable of transgressing all limits" (*Same* 119).

[10] ". . . for a homosexual, the best moment of love is likely to be when the lover leaves in the taxi. It is when the act is over and the boy is gone that one begins to dream about the warmth of his body, the quality of his smile, the tone of his voice. It is the recollection rather than the anticipation of the act that assumes a primary importance in homosexual relations" (*Michel* 297).

[11] "[T]his crazy, wonderful possibility called Clara, who is still here, within reach of my hands and my words, of my kisses and my "Don't go," but who acts as if she has already gone, because, contrary to what happens with pain, true absence really begins a little before the material emptiness of absence takes place, it begins at the very moment in which we really understand that the other one is going to go away and that we are going to remain without her…. And only at the last moment, when the boy has already put the luggage in the taxi, and she has paid the bill, and given out the tips…" (*Same* 181).

Interestingly, the novel ends a few lines after this with Clara whispering, ". . . Y Wendy ceció," as she gets into the taxi (272).[12]

This is an indication of more queer resistance to heterosexuality and of an awareness of how heterosexuality is infused with futurity. In Lee Edelman's "The Future is Kid Stuff: Queer Theory, Disidentification, and the Death Drive," he argues that heterosexuality is so infused with futurity it focuses intently on reproduction and securing a "safe" and "happy" environment for children.

Wendy's growing up may be read in an Edelman sense as a resistance to futurity. If the relationship is only understood after the fact, not beforehand as with a heterosexist plot involving marriage, children and their future, Wendy's growing up is understood as her disassociation with this heterosexist futurity. She has learned, as the protagonist and narrator have always known in the novel, that the future is not theirs. Edelman concludes his essay: "we know the deception of the societal lie that endlessly looks toward a future whose promise is always a day away" (29). Later he adds:

> If the fate of the queer is to figure the fate that cuts the thread of futurity, if the jouissance, the excess enjoyment, by which we are defined would destroy their other, fetishistic, identity-confirming jouissance through which the social order congeals around the rituals of its own reproduction…then we do not intend new politics, a better society, a brighter future, since all of these fantasies reproduce the past, through displacement, in the form of the future by construing futurity itself as merely a form of reproduction. Instead we choose not to see it as a child, as an image of the imaginary past or as identificatory link to the symbolic future; we would bury the subject in the tomb that waits in the hollow of the signifier and pronounce at last the words we are condemned from the outset for having said anyway…that futurity stops here" (30).

So Wendy's growing up is an indication of a queer notion of here and now. A move from futurity infused with children and reproduction to an understanding that the future, as Edelman argues, is already about reproduction. The protagonist and narrator have known this – thus the novel that is the retelling from the moment Clara/Wendy gets into the taxi – and now Clara is learning that her future, her future as lesbian subjectivity, her queer future, is barred from that which Edelman describes as ritualistic fantasies.

It may seem too unattached from history to position this work as I have done. It would be easy to read it as a sad reality of Francoist legislation that Clara and the protagonist remain apart. It would be easy to say the sea is the same every summer, or

[12] ". . . And Wendy grew up." (183).

will be the same again, because the relationship is excluded and forbidden. And this might very well be an accurate and important reading. In*The Sea of Becoming. Approaches to the Fiction of Esther Tusquets*, Kathleen M. Glenn contributes an interesting reading of this novel by underscoring the relationship between its intertextuality and difference: the intertextuality "serve[s] as a means of characterization, highlight the differences between individuals, allows for often ironic juxtapositions, and are a source of humor" ("Mismo" 30). Glenn's article accurately assesses the work's allowance for difference, and she insists on the artifice of a notion of reality beneath the protagonist's literary allusions:

> A series of events and entertainments – a masquerade party, a boat outing, a trip to the opera, and a casino party – vividly dramatize the role playing that typifies the members of her social class…. The function of disguise is to hide one's true nature, but it is implied that the guests here have no true self to hide, that beneath their party masks lie the masks of every day life. (38)

Indeed, the allusions and intertexuality serve to highlight the very thing the protagonist and narrator wish to convey: there is no core identity, no crystalized moment in time; but rather, masks. And as I have argued, the lesbian subjectivity at work here is best aware of such "masks," or better, of such incoherencies that define incomplete sexual subjectivity.

From the same edited volume, Roberta Johnson contributes "On the Waves of Time: Memory in *El mismo mar de todos los veranos*." Her argument centers on the sea as a symbol for the movement of memories. She refers to Heidegger's interpretation of the sea as, "'the movement required to transcend the present and recall that moment in the past which is to be remembered" (66). The sea does serve as a symbol of movement. Just as it is in constant flux, memory adjusts along a chain of signification. And as I have argued, queer memory works in time differently from that of the heterosexual narrative. In the novel, the sea as movement is understood as a metaphor for what I read as incomplete sexual subjectivity: in that memory is a nostalgia for a whole for that which never was, the protagonist and narrator employ sea/movement/memory to show this. The sea as an incomplete process, forever in flux, works well with the intertexuality of the novel in that the waves and signifiers topple over on one another, forever deferred. In Heidegger's sea imagery, as Johnson suggest, there remains a "reason for remembering" (72), yet, of course, the reason itself has to be transitory as well.

Additionally, several critiques have read the protagonist's relationship with Clara as truncated desire, or "a magical interlude, a temporary respite from her self-estrangement, bound as she is by invisible chains to her mother who denied her the emotional nourishment she needed growing up" (Ichiishi 90). Quite problematic, this quotation not only essentializes the protagonist's mother's duties (not unlike the Sección

Feminina or sexism in general), it also reads the lesbian relationship as a psychosexual infantilism.

However, to read Tusquets's first novel as a more subtle commentary on the way confession, desire, and sexual subjectivity works is to understand a process through which lesbian subjectivity in late twentieth-century Spanish narrative is working itself out through queer notions of the temporal. To read it in this way provides a form of ethical resistance, allowing for agency. Lesbian subjectivity in this novel understands the process of removal, temporal deferral and remembrance: it is accurately read as an understanding and a critique of the fallacy of complete sexual subjectivity as promulgated by the Francoist regime, and by (hetero)sexism in general. It is not the same sea every summer, as it cannot be. In this way, the sea serves not as some idyllic female referent as other critiques have argued;[13] instead, it is a metaphor for the pleasure of deferred desire that the novel consciously puts on display. Desire slips through time, slips through the summer: Tusquets's novel may be read as a temporal experience in which lesbian desire and subjectivity are deferred. It, like normative sexual subjectivities, cannot be nailed down. While normative subjectivities purport to do so, lesbian sexual subjectivity reveals the inherent deferral in the process of becoming through language, through society and through time. Indeed, according to Lonsdale, "the lack of either chronological progress or a sense of forward progression towards narrative conclusion" creates a sense of the atemporal (256). Accordingly, Tusquets's "characters' inability to resolve conflictive terms of collaborative resistence, or . . . to advance temporarily and spatially towards new beginnings, is significant...in the relationship of her characters to their class, language, and nationality" (257). *El mismo mar de todos los veranos*, then, is a supplanting of words, contexts, and meanings that knowingly points to the lack of complete sexual subjectivity and the role of queer temporal desire in lesbianism in late twentieth-century Spanish narrative. Tusquets's work finds a way to offer forth desire through remembrance within the limits of lesbianism as it relates to a non-normative, queer temporal framework at the time of the Transition in Spain.

[13] Jones describes the sea, the lush greenness of the summer, and related symbols as evidence of a loss of innocence, as a nostalgia for a lost childhood. Importantly for Jones, Clara is emblematic of this childhood: "their new, green-world love is completely unselfish and powerful enough to enfold – and possibly improve – all people's" ("Afterward" 189). This description, quite reductionist and essentializing, uses a very specific scenario as a model for "all people." Further, it ignores the distance the protagonist and narrator place between the relationship and their own narrative. They do not believe this relationship to be a model; quite the contrary: as I have argued, it is a self-conscious reading of temporality in sexual subjectivity.

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