

Emotional Mismanagement: Academic Labor's Neoliberal Values in Lourdes Ortiz's *Las manos de Velázquez*

En Las manos de Velázquez, la novela de campus de Lourdes Ortiz publicada en 2006, se representan los nefastos efectos emocionales de la incursión del neoliberalismo en la universidad española. Sin embargo, la representación de las emociones del protagonista, Teodoro, cosifica los valores neoliberales y los representa como parte natural de un modo de ser contemporáneo. Al representar al protagonista como un mercado autorregulado cuyas emociones deben manejarse para asegurar su éxito, Ortiz no cuestiona nunca la creencia neoliberal en la auto-responsabilización del individuo. Los fracasos del protagonista son suyos y no se encausa el sistema que limita sus acciones.

Palabras clave: *novela de campus, neoliberalismo, Lourdes Ortiz, literatura española del S. XXI*

Lourdes Ortiz's 2006 campus novel, Las manos de Velázquez, depicts the deleterious emotional effects of neoliberalism's encroachment into the Spanish university on the physical, psychological, and emotional wellbeing of faculty. Through a study of narrative technique and the representation of emotion, I will demonstrate that the protagonist is depicted as a self-regulating market whose emotions must be managed for success, and that Ortiz never challenges the neoliberal belief in self-responsibility or questions the university's role in provoking personal crises. Her protagonist's failures are depicted as his own and the system that constrains his actions is never indicted.

Keywords: *campus novel, neoliberalism, Lourdes Ortiz, twenty-first century Spanish literature*

It is now commonplace to say that neoliberalism is everywhere. We are living neoliberalism's "ontological phase," as Mitchum Huehls and Rachel Greenwald Smith call it, in which it "becomes what we are, a mode of existence defined by individual self-responsibility, entrepreneurial action,

and the maximization of human capital" (9). This assertion builds, of course, on Wendy Brown's claim that we are "only and everywhere *homo oeconomicus*," meaning that we are all "intensely constructed and governed bit[s] of human capital" (10).¹ When literature thematically engages neoliberalism's omnipresence, it often does so through the representation of precarity in labor or the economization of non-economic aspects of life. More important than the simple representation of these themes, however, is the work's attitude towards them.² Does it accept neoliberalism's encroachment as natural, demonstrating its complicity with it, or is that naturalness challenged? What relationship does the text have to this now-hegemonic ideology?

In this essay, I will discuss Lourdes Ortiz's 2006 campus novel, *Las manos de Velázquez*, which thematically engages the ways that neoliberalism impinges on the life and work of a professor in the humanities. Ortiz depicts labor conditions for knowledge workers that stem from the adoption of neoliberal values and practices by university administrators and the internalization of these imperatives by faculty. *Las manos de Velázquez* is Ortiz's most recently published novel as of 2023 and one of the least studied of her oeuvre. However, most of those who do study this text do not treat it as a campus novel but rather as historical novel about art. Nuria Sánchez Villadangos's assessment of the novel is a case in point: she calls it "un homenaje a la pintura, [que es] a la vez, el relato de la soledad, de la incomprensión, de la controversia, de la rivalidad, de los celos y sentimientos encontrados, convirtiéndose en una novela histórica que juega con el ayer y el hoy" (191). I do not disagree with these terms, but this text is indeed also a campus novel in which significant changes to the academic work environment are expressed through the art historian protagonist, Teodoro's, largely negative emotional responses to everything related to his profession: he feels anxiety and frustration far more than he feels satisfaction (much less joy), in relation to his work, life, and working conditions.

This novel is not a critique of neoliberalism's impacts in the lives of faculty per se. Rather, the privileged view of Teodoro's interior emotional life in *Las manos de Velázquez* reveals the novel's enmeshment with neoliberalism in two interlocking ways. I do not wish to suggest that Ortiz has written an intentional neoliberal apology, but rather that her text demonstrates neoliberalism's omnipresence. First, Ortiz's consistent use of second-person narration, in which Teodoro speaks to himself, demonstrates her protagonist's complete assumption of the personal productivity mandate, key to a system in which, as Brown notes, "entrepreneurship replaced production" (67). Not once in the novel does a boss or any kind of authority figure tell Teodoro what to do; nor do they

need to. Teodoro is his own boss, though this is not liberating in any sense. Instead, when his monologues turn dialogic and he addresses himself as a second person, we see the evidence of what Geo Saura and Antonio Bolívar call “una gobernanza suave, por la que el sujeto asume [los procesos del gobierno] como propios” (12).³ The representation of Teodoro’s emotions as something to be managed to maximize productivity is the second way the novel reveals its entanglement with neoliberal values. In the following pages, I will explore how the feelings of this overworked and undervalued professor indict *him* as a poor self-manager, rather than the system that exploits his labor.

This essay does not pretend to be a sociological study of the effects of neoliberalism in the university. Rather, I share with Rodrigo Guijarro Lasheras, in his recent article on the campus novel, the goal of writing “un análisis de los mecanismos, estrategias, y significados con los que tal asunto aparece tratado en [una novela reciente]” (424). To that end, I have chosen to focus on the academic’s emotions in *Las manos de Velázquez*, a decision grounded in Rachel Greenwald Smith’s study of the relationship between literary affect and neoliberalism, which contests the belief that the representation of individualized human emotion can prove a text’s oppositional relationship to neoliberalism. Many readers, critics, and even writers believe that “literature is at its most meaningful when it represents and transmits the emotional specificity of personal experience” (Greenwald Smith 1). This belief, which Greenwald Smith refers to as the “affective hypothesis,” has led many to believe that “interest in nonrational experiences should counter the tendency to evaluate human needs according to economic logics” (3).⁴ Greenwald Smith actively opposes this notion in her book, suggesting that the rise of the affective hypothesis coincides with the establishment of neoliberalism as a cultural dominant (1).

Not all emotion is represented equally in literature. Personalized emotions in and of themselves “[do] not challenge market-oriented thinking,” especially because neoliberalism “amplifies the tendency for capitalism to individualize” (Greenwald Smith 3-6). Living as we are in neoliberalism’s ontological phase, the representation of emotion can be yet another way of depicting the entrepreneurialism and personal responsibility that characterize neoliberal individualization, as emotions “are understood as resources to develop and manage” (5). The responsibility for that management depends on the individual, who should strive to eliminate or transcend any constraints on their action to become their own “self-moderating market,” that is, “working autonomously from the effects of the others who surround them” (10). The representation of emotion, therefore, sometimes comes to reinforce neoliberal patterns rather than stand apart from them. Greenwald Smith notes that novels’ formal

operations can “affectively reinforce neoliberal norms” when such patterning of behavior is depicted as ordinary (11).

In Ortiz’s novel, Teodoro’s ability to self-moderate, to focus on his writing, and to produce his masterwork on Diego Velázquez is constantly threatened. Fears of his own professional and marital inadequacy, guilt about past actions toward his ex-wife Luisa, concern that he has alienated his grown children, and even the nagging trepidation that he cannot really understand his object of study – Velázquez the man, not just the painter – all demand management.⁵ An inability to harness his emotions, bracket them, or dominate them is depicted in the text as tantamount to failure. The reader is left with the feeling that a failure of emotional management spells disaster in the form of potential professional and interpersonal ruin. *Las manos de Velázquez* therefore reinforces neoliberal patterns of thought in the way that this impending catastrophe, which stems from emotional mismanagement, is taken as natural.

Spain, like the rest of the West, has experienced the neoliberalization of its higher education system in which competition is prioritized over collaboration. Saura and Bolívar offer a brief history of changes to Spanish universities and the attendant changes to academic labor since 2001, when a shift towards a more quantitative approach to university accreditation and evaluation of faculty was set in motion (12). This happened as a result of Spain’s participation in the Bologna Process which aimed to systematize and streamline standards for higher education across Europe, as well as determine how to measure compliance with said standards. Just a year after the first Bologna Process meetings, Spain established the Agencia Nacional de Evaluación de la Calidad y Acreditación (ANECA), which as Saura and Bolívar describe it, had the effect of configuring “lo que tiene valor en la carrera universitaria y en las vidas profesionales de los investigadores” (12).⁶ Lawrence D. Berg, Edward H. Huijbens, and Henrik Guzton Larsen note that, regardless of where and how these changes are implemented, the consequences of neoliberalism on academics and academic workplaces are similar. Competition grows between individuals and sectors, academic scholarship is valued in market terms, and surveillance intensifies as the universities seek to track how much and what kind of work scholars are producing (171). The question of *value* is central to this changed university landscape. As Richard Hall notes, universities increase the value produced in them by “reducing the quantity of intellectual labor that is socially necessary for their production and circulation in the market,” an action which is grounded in “reducing the quantity of time” (832). This may mean reducing the amount of time to degree for students, but also in quicker turnaround time for reviewers and faster production of scholarly products, so to speak. The effects of time reduction are essentially dehumanizing.

Rather than determining value “by social purpose,” heterogeneously evaluating individual projects to assess their contributions, value is determined homogeneously, “by abstract human labor measured by time” (832). The academic subject is transformed “from laborer to human capital,” who must be “invested in and enhanced” to maximize their potential for production (Berg, Huijbens, and Gupton Larsen 172). All of this leads to a modern university that is, in Francis O’Gorman’s words, “a breeding ground for worry.”

The rise of the campus novel in Spain tracks closely with the neoliberal turn. In general, “campus novel” refers to a genre of novels set on university campuses, both as physical settings and as institutional contexts, and that feature academic protagonists. Susana Gil-Albarellos acknowledges the difficulty in defining the campus novel as a genre outside of these core features but notes that “[todas] derivan de un modo u otro de la forma de vivir y convivir en el ámbito universitario” (190). Though the campus novel has been evolving since the mid-twentieth century in English-language literature, Spain did not see a significant number of campus novels published until after 2000 (Gil-Albarellos 192).⁷ Gil-Albarellos suggests that this is, in part, because the university system under Franco offered little in the way of imaginative possibilities for writers (197), but perhaps increased interest in the campus novel as a genre is more closely related to the rise of neoliberalism than previously thought.

Campus novels, in both Spanish and English, tend to feature professors in the humanities as their protagonists. They are often depicted as ineffectual teachers and scholars whose work is largely pointless (Dalton-Brown 595). This pointlessness, or valuelessness, as Leigh Claire La Berge calls it, is key to understanding how the campus novel not only depicts the “work of the humanities in the financial or neoliberal university, but also accomplishes that work” (294). By representing humanities professors whose work appears “valueless,” at least by implicit comparison to other sectors of the university, these novels show that work that means and does so little could only exist in a “place not concerned with accumulation,” an obvious obfuscation of what is happening in real, corporatizing universities (303). Such a depiction of valueless labor also has the effect of rendering the professors as pampered idlers, as people who do not *really* work.⁸ La Berge maintains that these novels “do the rhetorical work of rendering universities non-profit” (306). Yet, as Gil-Albarellos notes, Spanish campus novels often display a different tenor than their English-language counterparts, given that “la vida académica en España no se presenta como un cosmos consolidado y cerrado en el que el trabajo y vida se entremezclan” (197). It is here that *Las manos de Velázquez* diverges from

other contemporary Spanish campus novels, as life and work become indistinguishable in its pages.

In the panorama of campus novels that began proliferating in Spain after 2000, *Las manos de Velázquez* occupies a unique position. Published before the onset of the 2008 financial crisis, it nevertheless anticipates some of the conditions of precarity that would come to mark the genre after 2010. In his 2022 article, “La vida es un artículo académico, o el precariado intelectual en la novela de campus española,” Guijarro Lasheras analyzes four works published after 2018 that represent a new tendency to depict the “intellectual precariat.” The campus novel at the center of Guijarro Lasheras’s article, Raquel Taranilla’s *Noche y océano* (2020), is in many ways a generation removed from *Las manos de Velázquez*. Taranilla has a different language to describe and a different appetite for engaging the precarity of academic life and the conditions that continue to worsen by orders of magnitude, but Ortiz anticipates, perhaps obliquely, what the much younger Taranilla depicts frankly nearly fifteen years later.

There are two important characteristics that *Las manos de Velázquez* shares with more contemporary texts like Taranilla’s that directly engage the effects of many years of neoliberal encroachment on the university: its largely off-campus physical setting and the densely psychological portrait it offers of its protagonist. Guijarro Lasheras assures his readers that the campus novel is not defined by the site of its action on university grounds, but rather by its “retrato de la vida universitaria y la profesión del docente e investigador” (425). Teodoro is usually depicted writing – or, more likely, *not* writing – in his home office. He infrequently roams the halls of the department or interacts with colleagues or students. Gil-Albarellos deems *Las manos de Velázquez* the first Spanish campus novel of the twenty-first century to center on the research process more than on departmental drama or student-professor relations. Particularly, this novel depicts the effects of research on the professor’s psyche, leading to “la ansiedad, inseguridad y obsesión de la investigación universitaria cuando ésta es rigurosa” (Gil-Albarellos 201). Like many more contemporary campus novels, *Las manos de Velázquez* offers a psychological portrait of a researcher and a teacher which, like Taranilla’s novel, “emerge del flujo de pensamientos” (Guijarro Lasheras 428). Though Teodoro is often not on campus, the effects of the economization of the university follow him home. Ortiz depicts in *Las manos de Velázquez* a similar phenomenon to the one Guijarro Lasheras describes in *Noche y océano*: “el entorno doméstico en el que [el profesor] vive casi aislad[o] reproduce las relaciones de jerarquías, precariedad y subalternidad propias del espacio universitario” (428-30). Teodoro’s experience as an older professor who started working at a time when the effects of corporatization on the university were less evident is

about adjusting as his work environment changes, whereas more contemporary campus novels depict both the extreme difficulties keeping up the pace of production from the very start and of finding work in the first place.

Teodoro describes himself in the opening chapter of the novel as “un buen y comedido profesor de Historia del Arte, sin muchas publicaciones, sin grandes tratados” (Ortiz 9). He is en route to being promoted to the highest professorial rank, *catedrático de universidad*, but he understands that climbing the ladder depends on compliance with a particular set of rules, on not deviating from “la pauta marcada” (13). To fail to comply means punishment in the form of “anonimato, silencio, olvido” (13). A source of constant stress is the fear of being a “loser” in the academic game of the kind Berg, Huijbens and Gutzon Larsen describe (172). They expand on this concept of winners and losers as central to today’s academy. They are careful to note that the “older, liberal university was a highly competitive space” as well, but the difference today lies in the stakes (172). Whereas the liberal university either produced “winners or non-winners,” under neoliberalism there are defined losers: those who never get tenure or permanent jobs in the first place or who lose the jobs they have for “lack of productivity” (172). Teodoro’s fear of punishment indicates his experience of precarity as he knows that one misstep could be enough to upset years of work.

When Teodoro talks to others, like his students or Mónica’s friends who work outside academia, he sees a vision of his labor reflected back to him that does not resonate with his personal experience. These non-academic others see Teodoro as a man lucky to be in control of his working life and fortunate to engage in intellectually gratifying work. Such romantic assessments see just one side of academic work, and not the kind that Ortiz most commonly depicts in her novel. Though he has no direct boss, Teodoro still feels like and describes himself as a “funcionario” who has to “agachar la cabeza y cumplir el horario” (9). I have argued elsewhere that Ortiz’s novel does in fact take pains to represent Teodoro’s academic work as the labor it is and pushes for its dignification, largely through Teodoro’s frequent association of himself with Velázquez, whom he describes as a manual laborer striving for recognition who was not afraid to get his hands dirty (Vater 121-22). However, what interests me here is how Teodoro’s emotional response to his working conditions reveals a campus novel carrying water for neoliberalism in different and potentially unintended ways. In a highly competitive environment filled with winners and losers, Teodoro fears being a loser in every sense. His primary worry is that the book he tries to write about Velázquez, a work he considers his *magnum opus*, will not be his ticket to the coveted *cátedra*. These fears that keep him

chained to his desk feed into his worries that Mónica will leave him for a younger man, probably an artist, with more creative energy and free time than he is able to muster. We might say that Teodoro's plight reflects the "malestar" that Santiago López Petit described in a 2009 interview as common to so many of us in this world in which capitalism is enmeshed with our lived reality: "es querer vivir y no poder hacerlo" ("Tenemos que liberarnos").

Anxious and fearful, Teodoro represents the "neurotic academic," characterized by Vik Loveday in his eponymous article as "an entrepreneurial figure governed *through* anxiety, but one who is also incited to take responsibility for the self-management of those anxieties" (162). The context in which the neurotic academic exists and works is one in which anxiety is a feature, not a bug. The constant fear of "losing" – in the sense of not winning the status game but also of real material losses – is "inherent in the design of a system driven by improving productivity and potential for accumulation of capital" (Hall and Bowles 33). And yet, acknowledging feelings of anxiety is often seen as "a personal shortcoming," something to be overcome through a constant reworking of the self (Loveday 158). The concept of emotional management – or as we will see in Teodoro's case, mismanagement – and of keeping anxieties in check becomes a central feature of Ortiz's campus novel.

There are two primary ways that emotion and academic work become intertwined for Teodoro in *Las manos de Velázquez*: either his work functions as a tool to numb and distract him from his feelings, or feelings overwhelm his capacity for productive work. The task manager who lives in Teodoro's head and who often speaks in a second-person voice reminds him of work's positive effects on his mood and tries to bolster his spirit on days he lacks concentration: "te gusta sumergirte en el trabajo y olvidarte de todo lo demás" (Ortiz 34). He later describes work as a drug, an addictive habit that offers him temporary comfort and an opportunity to escape from himself (55). The creative attempt to inhabit Velázquez's mind through his writing, to "fundirse con el pintor, oír sus latidos, sus miedos, sus satisfacciones" (8), serves as a way for Teodoro temporarily to elude his own subjectivity. As López Petit notes, we are capitalism and so "resistir es cada vez más resistir(se)" ("Tenemos"). When he imagines Velázquez's life through his feelings, not just through the paintings he has left behind for posterity, Teodoro is able to be someone else for a little while, someone who feels pressures and satisfactions different from the ones he knows. Yet, he is always brought back down to earth when he is forced to reinhabit his own subjectivity, something that often occurs when he rereads what he has just written. The kind of writing he produces in these states of flow is verboten for academics and will get him sanctioned because it too closely resembles

fiction, which “produce indignación en la Academia” (Ortiz 152). He chidingly reminds himself to get back in line: “Imita a tus colegas, sé conciso” (158).⁹ Too many digressions mean the project will not get finished and he will be stuck answering the question about the state of his book to which more than one academic can relate: “¿Para cuándo?” (214).

Much of Teodoro’s work is not the kind of writing described above in which he is able to transcend himself. Rather, it is much more banal. In her fascinating history of time management tools, Melissa Gregg describes the individual productivity practices that many of us rely on today as “variations of the need for ... insulation” that “summon a membrane of protection against the aggressive climate of a capitalist economy and the private worries of an interior world” (18). Managing our own productivity offers us a greater sense of control and helps us impose order when our work and personal lives feel chaotic, as Teodoro’s often do. This mindset is also convenient to university administrators interested in maximizing output. It shifts faculty focus away from working conditions defined by surveillance and quantification that circumscribe their production as well as their lives and emphasizes the enterprising self who assumes responsibility for the conditions, even when they are unrealistic. Gregg also notes that the effect of the drive to be productive, to “carry out tasks that appear obvious and necessary in a broader catalogue of things that always need doing,” often keeps us from asking important questions about the ways that tasks are unequally distributed and even about the virtues of the work itself (19). Sometimes the work that keeps him distracted from the most uncomfortable feelings – those of shame, self-loathing, and the fear of failure – is deeply engrossing, but often it is not fulfilling. Teodoro describes himself as trapped, not in an ivory tower as some would have it, but rather one made of “inercias, componendas, clases y cursos repetidos” (Ortiz 55). If he can stay busy with banalities or lose himself completely in the subjectivity of another, he can avoid hard feelings. At first, this seems to be win-win: Teodoro avoids discomfort, and he satisfies his employer’s demands.

Yet, more often than not in Ortiz’s novel, Teodoro is unable to discipline his emotions in the name of productivity. In this context, the protagonist’s internalization of the “publish or perish” dictum becomes clear as Ortiz depicts him constantly reprimanding himself, first for being distracted, then for not writing, then for showing up late to functions with Mónica with nothing to show for the time he has spent at his computer. These reprimands are sometimes related in the third-person narration, as we see when Teodoro has squandered a morning of writing thinking regretfully about the way he once treated his ex-wife, Luisa: “Teodoro se regaña a sí mismo, se insulta. Un mal comienzo, una jornada desafortunada donde las visiones del pasado y de Luisa se superponen a su incertidumbre, a sus

miedos" (122). While these third-person descriptions are revealing, the frequent turn to second-person narration in which Teodoro speaks to himself as if he were his own manager drives home the degree to which self-governance operates in Teodoro's life.

Ortiz relies heavily in this novel on what Dorrit Cohn has called "quoted monologue," or the rendering of a "character's mental discourse" to narrate Teodoro's consciousness (14). The act of narrating these monologues, as Cohn argues, lends the narrator's quotation of the "characters' silent thoughts the same authority he lends to the quotation of the words they speak to others" (76). Teodoro's self-talk shows the direct conflict of his intellectual pursuits with his desires. It is common in narrated monologue to find a "free alteration of first and second person pronouns in reference to the same subject" as "interior monologue takes the form of dialogue with an internal partner" (90). I am particularly interested in the way the use of this narrative technique in *Las manos de Velázquez* reflects Teodoro's self-disciplining tendency as just as powerful and as having as much authority as any exterior disciplining voice. An example of this self-disciplining second-person voice appears in the first chapter when Teodoro chides himself: "Últimamente dejas que se produzcan fugas en tu mente y todo se enlaza en una cascada vertiginosa de temores y anhelos que te impiden centrarte en tu trabajo" (Ortiz 22). Evidenced in this exhortation to concentrate by blocking the fears and longings, is Loveday's assertion that the neurotic academic must take responsibility for managing their own anxiety to succeed (162). The use of the second-person voice emphasizes the inner provenance of these directives.

The passages described above show the anxiety that Teodoro feels when he considers himself to be working too little or without enough concentration to produce academic writing at the desired rate. However, there is another type of anxiety, this time about style and content, that manifests itself as well. The fear of producing the wrong work, the kind that will not be valued by peers or institutions, disciplines academics to follow a set path. Anxiety is both something to be managed for optimal success and a feature of academic workplaces, a "tactic of governance" as Loveday calls it (157). The deep, personal connection Teodoro feels to Velázquez and his desire to know him at a level that the archival material would preclude mean that his work is often more grounded in intuition than in fact. Though his passion to know Velázquez motivates him to keep working, Teodoro often worries that the style of his writing will prompt the rejection of the academic gatekeepers – "subjetivo, dirán. Más o menos encantador. Poco académico" (Ortiz 7).¹⁰ This anxiety about the type of work he produces is yet another way of showing market logic's effects on the academy. If we think about academic publications as "commodities we can sell and that can

sell us stars or stars-to-be,” as Sharon O’Dair does (2), then we can see the academic publishing world as a market in which authors are responsible for choosing saleable topics and adhering to successful formulas.¹¹

In other words, in order to succeed in the academic publishing market, Teodoro is responsible for choosing a topic that can produce a book quickly and well, a book that will sell, if not in real economic terms, then in terms of its cultural capital, raising his prestige in the field. As Berg, Huijbens and Gutzon Larsen explain, when workers become human capital constrained by markets, “they must behave to outperform the competition and align themselves with good assessments about where those markets may be going” (172). For this reason, despite his love for Velázquez, Teodoro also worries about the choice of topic for his book, and Mónica often exacerbates his anxieties. In the first chapter of the novel, she chides her husband for choosing Velázquez as his object of study. “Es un tema manido,” she tells him. “Creo que te equivocas de tema. ... ¡Ya está bien del XVII! ¿Por qué no haces un trabajo sobre la generación de los ochenta, por ejemplo...?” (Ortiz 15). There is one exception to Mónica’s resistance, however, for if Teodoro could prove the identity of Velázquez’s *Venus del espejo*, it would be “un hallazgo que tendría resonancia e importancia” (15). According to Mónica, a young woman with her finger on the pulse of the contemporary art scene, Teodoro’s looming failure is of his own making. In choosing to study Velázquez, he is making a bad investment, failing to read the market.

Anxiety about making the wrong choices – the wrong topic, the wrong style – and fear that his pace is too slow and progress too infrequent lead Teodoro to question his own suitability for academic work. Teodoro’s questioning is, in some ways, typical of professors on both real and fictional campuses. Without directly mentioning the impacts of neoliberalism, Elaine Showalter notes that many of the best campus novels “convey the pain of intellectuals” in competitive environments, people “called upon to measure themselves against each other and against their internalized expectations of brilliance” (4). The audit culture of many universities that ranks faculty, implicitly or explicitly pitting employees with different levels of resources and differing personal circumstances against one another, is often internalized by individuals.¹² The plethora of ways that one may fail to measure up to certain standards can be anxiety-inducing to the point that “the sense of not living up to the ideals of what it is to be an academic” may cause us to “distance ourselves from the activity” (Loveday 260). We see Teodoro fight this battle of self-worth throughout the novel, as he struggles to convince himself that he can write the book he imagines. Again, in the first chapter of Ortiz’s novel, the second-person voice with which Teodoro speaks to himself is actively self-sabotaging, suggesting that if he cannot find the concentration to finish his book, he might as well give up: “O te contiene

y te centras o vas de culo. Más vale que tires tu trabajo, o el proyecto del trabajo, a la papelera, que te olvides del éxito, de la cátedra y de los aplausos” (13). In contrast, after he gives a conference presentation in Italy that goes well, he breathes a sigh of relief, and for a brief moment, “recobraba una dejadez, un bienestar,” convinced that “su intervención había estado a la altura que se esperaba de él” (232). There is a deliberate linkage of self-worth and professional performance: harsh insults on the days he cannot live up to expectations, sweet but momentary relief when he finally feels like he has done well. The relief is always temporary, though, because the next paper or conference presentation looms on the horizon as another chance to prove oneself worthy or fail.

As I have demonstrated thus far, the impacts of neoliberalism on the contemporary Spanish university pervade Ortiz’s representation of it in *Las manos de Velázquez*. Her novel suggests that the academic must be in a constant state of self-optimization, making good investments in the topics they choose to research or the kinds of books and articles they write. Academics must allow anxiety, fear, and shame (or potential shame) to motivate them to action without allowing it to paralyze them. It is a personal objective of every individual academic to discipline those emotions and serve as their own task manager, something Ortiz represents with the repeated use of second-person narrative voice in Teodoro’s case. His experience in the novel reflects Loveday’s assertion that, in the “neoliberalizing university,” each individual academic is solely responsible for their achievements or lack thereof, regardless of the circumstances that may condition them (156). Teodoro’s clear internalization of these values culminates in the following remark, expressed towards the end of the novel: “Es verdad que las circunstancias cuentan, pero el que puede, puede. Y el que no, aunque sea una bellísima persona, tenga una vida reglada y todo el tiempo del mundo, nunca hará nada o hará una obra mediocre” (270). Teodoro is determined to prove himself as one of *those who can*, no matter what he must give up achieving it.

The sacrifices that Teodoro makes are manifest in a stark division between the “life of the mind” that represents his work life, and the desires and needs of his body, which must be controlled and suppressed. Once again, Teodoro is cast in the role of manager in charge of keeping his own needs from getting in the way of his duties. This is Ortiz’s rendering of a classic trope of the campus novel, one Sally Dalton-Brown calls “the academic’s struggle for survival in ... a scholarly world, and the strong questioning of whether such survival is worth this cost” (592). Often, she notes, this takes the form of a conflict that pits a “life of the mind” against a “life of desires, whether sexual, status oriented, or commercial lust” (592). Teodoro’s desires, however, seem to be simply for deep and physical rest.

There are two salient scenes in *Las manos de Velázquez* in which we see Teodoro's dedication to a life of the mind begin to falter. Though his inner task manager is constantly reminding him to "dejarlo todo por el trabajo ... de una puñetera vez," he is not always able to do so (Ortiz 127). In the first of these scenes, Teodoro struggles to concentrate, his "manuscritos abandonados en el suelo," when he begins to think that "la vida no se reduce a los libros" (119). He briefly allows himself to name the things he longs for: "la vida es ese momento del despertar, ese cuerpo de Mónica ... la pulpa de la naranja flotando en el vaso" (119). He lingers in his desire to do nothing a little too long, for in moments his inner voice is spurring him on, pushing him to the next task.

In the second instance, Teodoro has no choice but to slow down as his bodily needs suddenly surpass his adhesion to duty. Late in the novel, we find Teodoro lying in bed with a fever, searching for the will to rise and making a mental do-to list: he must return to his languishing research; there is a pile of exams awaiting grading; he needs to plan his graduate seminar; and, the paper for the conference in June is not going to write itself. Yet, even for a man who has always "procurado no cuidar de la enfermedad," on that day, he takes sickness as the chance for "un respiro" (Ortiz 295). His bed becomes, even if for just a day, "un refugio," wherein he can be "alejado de lo inmediato, de las muchas obligaciones, de los trabajos por hacer, de las decisiones por tomar" (296). Teodoro welcomes his illness as a chance to rest with less guilt, to tune out a constant demand for productivity, and to allow his wife to dote on him. Even his inner task manager cannot rouse him from his rest that day and caring for the needs of his body allows him to temporarily detach himself from responsibility. Rest and freedom from work are what he desires, but he cannot freely give them to himself. Instead, he works to discipline the wants themselves, attempting to transform himself, effectively, into one without a body, into nothing but a mind satisfied entirely by "las ideas geniales, las intuiciones maravillosas" (119).

Though Teodoro spends the entire novel working on himself, optimizing the "technologies of the self" that would convert him into the enterprising academic (Loveday 156), *Las manos de Velázquez* ends with an abject failure of management. The dam that Teodoro builds to hold his emotion in check breaks at the most inopportune time imaginable. He is presenting what he describes as an audacious paper, one that is predicated more on intuition than hard data, to a packed room at a prestigious conference.¹³ This is a paper he has written as much with his heart as with his head. The reader soon discovers that Teodoro's relationship with Mónica has by this time dissolved as a result of his infidelity rather than hers. In the middle of his conference presentation, Teodoro suddenly starts to choke up. When the tears start flowing so freely that he is unable to speak,

he is forced to flee the stage, where he can cry in private for the loss of Mónica and the life with her that he did not know how to value. The third-person narrator describes his tears as “inoportunas, a destiempo, improcedentes,” and makes clear that these tears are not an emotional response to art or a testament to the power of his work (Ortiz 340). Rather, these are personal tears that have rudely impinged on a professional space, “lágrimas contenidas durante tanto tiempo por Mónica, por esa Mónica que ya no está a su lado” (340). Everyone in the room is shocked, but no one more than Teodoro himself, who has spent the better part of his life using his academic work to discipline his emotions. This dramatic scene reveals a failure of control, which Teodoro expresses by calling himself “un hombre que se desnuda ante un público pasmado” (341). His inability to manage his emotions leads to this physical outburst, a body responding to emotion in a way the mind cannot refrain. In an instant, he has transformed. No longer, he tells himself, is he “el personaje rígido que te habías construido y en el que te habías refugiado, en ese hombre ... preocupado solamente por el estudio” (17). Even Teodoro must acknowledge that his crying self is indeed his truest self, as he tells his colleague after the fact: “Me he puesto en evidencia” (342). Yet, this scene, and Teodoro’s revealed authenticity, can only be read as deeply humiliating. This is congruent with Hall’s description of the twenty-first-century neoliberal university in which “all potentially sensuous or meaningful activity is objectified as powerlessness and self-loss” (839), as true in this case of Teodoro’s work that is a labor of love and his personal tears in a professional space.

Teodoro’s emotional outburst at the end of *Las manos de Velázquez* could be read as an example of the aforementioned “affective hypothesis,” which reflects a belief that literature is meaningful because it “transmits the emotional specificity of personal experience” (Greenwald Smith 1). In fact, this is how Sánchez Villadangos interprets this final scene, noting that we never learn the outcome of Teodoro’s research project because “*Las manos de Velázquez* no es una novela cuyo nudo sea el proyecto de una tesis sino que, más bien, es una obra sentimental ahíta de gallardías y dolores humanos” (205). As we read this passage, we are invited to feel Teodoro’s pain with him, perhaps even to feel for him, though our compassion may be limited as he suffers the consequences of the same type of sexual dalliance he sought to forestall in Mónica.¹⁴ We might even say that this scene allows a reader to understand the unique experience of the modern university professor living under constant stress. However, even if this novel engages authentically with Teodoro’s human experience, I maintain that it does so in a highly scripted way, one that fits “within prevailing economic narratives,” to use Greenwald Smith’s words (11). Given that the prevailing narratives feel so inevitable, it may help to imagine a possible counterfactual ending to

Las manos de Velázquez, one in which Ortiz depicts a work environment that holds more space for the professoriate's bodily needs and personal desires.¹⁵ What would it look like to imagine an academic milieu in which Teodoro could explore different models of writing without shame? In a new and different academic world, would some competition be eschewed for collaboration, or perhaps even solidarity and connection? How might Teodoro and his relationships have benefitted from a little less time spent "pegado a [sus] papeles" (Ortiz 13)? Hall notes that the only way that university laborers can have hope in an exploitative environment is by reconciling of the notion of "human-as-intellectual" with "human-as-psychological" (843).¹⁶ When the professor is a human "divorced from herself as a worker and exploiter of the natural world," there is only hopelessness (843). As the novel depicts it, "human-as-psychological" – both in Teodoro's own experience and in his representation of Velázquez – may have a place in the world of fiction but it is alien to the world of academia. The emotional must be disciplined through rigorous self-management that, in Teodoro's case, often fails.

In Ortiz's novel, there is no connection, either with others or with these different facets of the self. Except for a long-time colleague who does not seem terribly interested in the answer, no one asks Teodoro after the fact how he is or what happened. As the narrator observes, "Nadie comenta lo sucedido. Todo va bien, todo va bien" (346). The conference rolls on and the gears of the academic machine keep turning. What is more, in her attempt to comfort him, his colleague Carmela tries to cast Teodoro's outburst as marketable, even good for his "brand." She frames her consolation in competitive terms, when she assures him: "creo que has ganado puntos" (345). Perhaps, she seems to suggest, others will read this scene as calculated and deliberate. They might see him as more interesting than before, now the Man Who Cries. And yet, at this point, Teodoro seems totally uninterested in scoring points or seeing his star rise. He ends the novel slumped in a chair, only half listening to another conference presentation and thinking to himself, "¿Qué más da?" (346). He has lost Mónica, he has lost the life with his first wife and children that he gave up for Mónica, and he is left with nothing but his work that does not – that cannot – love him back. His failure is depicted as being of his own making. Again, we can turn to Hall and his recipe for hope in his so-called "Hopeless University" to understand an alternative response: situations of mental distress, like the one Teodoro suffers, can become "moments for reconceptualizing those experiences at the level of the university" (840). In *Las manos de Velázquez*, there is no indictment of the working conditions, but rather of Teodoro's abject failure of personal management.

Perhaps nothing marks *Las manos de Velázquez* as of the neoliberal age more than this lack of connection to others. The deeply held belief internalized by Teodoro and many of the contemporary readers of *Las manos de Velázquez* that the individual is an entrepreneur responsible for himself is never challenged. Again, I wish to be clear that Ortiz does not explicitly *endorse* these beliefs, but neither does she defy them. The novel represents the world as Gregg describes it, in which “efficiency thinking [has normalized] asociality and asymmetry in the guise of appropriate professional conduct” (4). At the same time, the self solely responsible for its own management, praised for “flexibly” working anytime and anywhere “has upended the assumption of labor politics that saw worker solidarity and formed the collective imposition of work limits” (4). The representation of Teodoro’s emotions, especially his anxiety and frustration, is not an inherent counter to the logic of neoliberalism. The failure to discipline his anxiety into the service of productivity is punished. He loses everything: professional respect and personal relationships. He is punished as a bad self-manager, and the novel ends rather hopelessly, at least for the academic. If there is consolation to be found, it is outside of the academy and in the world of fiction. Ortiz’s novel concludes that there is no place in the university for someone who feels intensely as Teodoro does, someone unable to keep his emotions under wraps. His illness, his tears, his exhaustion – in short, his very human body – have no place in the university’s neoliberal logic.

University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee

NOTES

- 1 Brown in turn builds on Michel Foucault’s *Birth of Biopolitics* lectures in her understanding of neoliberalism as much more than economic policy. Foucault’s “crucial articulation of neoliberalism as a political rationality” deeply informs her work (78). However, *Undoing the Demos* (2015) also aims to remake Foucault for the twenty-first century by acknowledging that there are “limitations and anachronisms associated with the time, conditions, and intellectual temperament animating them” (78).
- 2 Huehls and Greenwald Smith also note that neoliberalism generally appears in literary studies as “a problem to be solved” (9). This assertion tracks with Brown’s claim that the term is “mainly deployed by its critics” (20). It is, those critics might say, a Bad Thing whose valuation of personal responsibility obscures systems of oppression and whose sense of collectivity does not extend beyond the nuclear family. Scholarly analysis of literature in this vein is

- often about revealing texts' relationship to the hegemonic ideology of neoliberalism.
- 3 Brown, drawing again on Foucault, explains that neoliberalization is enacted, not only in academia but generally throughout the "Euro-Atlantic world," through "'soft power,' drawing on consensus and buy-in" (35). Nothing is imposed through violence, but rather it governs "as sophisticated common sense" (35).
 - 4 Greenwald Smith cites Martha C. Nussbaum as a specific, though not exclusive, source of this belief. Nussbaum sees the representation of characters' emotional worlds in literature as "profoundly opposed ... to the reductive economic way of the world" (qtd. in Greenwald Smith 3).
 - 5 One of the ways that emotions Teodoro feels with respect to his personal life begin to blend with his work are through frequent ekphrastic passages that remind the reader periodically that Ortiz is an art historian by trade. While a detailed exploration of these ekphrases is beyond the scope of this essay, it is worth mentioning that they often provide a window onto Teodoro's emotional state better than his own monologues can. One of the best examples of this technique comes when Teodoro is examining Velázquez's famous *Apolo en la fragua de Vulcano*, imagining himself as the grizzled Vulcan and the glowing, divine being as Beltrán, the man he fears is sleeping with his wife. When he tries to manage his emotions by simply dampening them, they are often recast onto his object of study. For more on the ekphrastic passages in this novel, see Vater 115-17, 121-22.
 - 6 The official role ANECA plays is to "contribuir a la mejora de la calidad del sistema de Educación Superior mediante la evaluación, certificación, y acreditación de enseñanzas, profesorado e instituciones" (Saura y Bolívar 12).
 - 7 For more on the development of the English-language campus novel and its connection to the post-World War II rise of MFA programs in the United States, see La Berge 291-92.
 - 8 In *Discourses of Denial*, Thomas A. Discenna notes that both supporters and critics attempt to "render academic labor not labor at all" (12). He maintains that the modern university was founded as the preserve of "culture," which stands in opposition to the notion of labor (5). Critics of the university consider the work performed by professors "of both such insufficient quantity and quality that it does not rise to the level of being labor in any legitimate sense of the term" (8), but notes that academics themselves often consider the university "a space outside ordinary labor" and that they "frequently deny that what they are doing is labor at all" (12). This denial of academic labor on multiple fronts is tied directly to deteriorating working conditions for all university employees.

- 9 For more on the relationship between fiction (namely, historiographic metafiction) and academic writing in *Las manos de Velázquez*, see Vater 114-20. The perceived need to bring his writing in line with standards that feel limiting might be understood as the capitalist university's "disciplining of the labor of love" when, in Hall's words, "induced behaviors are [made] incongruent with her inner being" (839). The result of this discipline, which "negates human possibilities" can only be "depression and melancholy" (839).
- 10 One of the hallmarks of neoliberalism as Foucault conceptualized it is the prioritization of productivity over product (Brown 67-68).
- 11 Discenna argues that the strictness of academic publishing mores or "orthodox academic practices," both smother innovation and keep academics from being able to critique their own institutional practices (69).
- 12 In his fantastic and thoroughly enjoyable essay on the state of academic Hispanism, Sebastiaan Faber notes that the "institutional circumstances under which our work is produced [are] normally swept under the carpet or hidden from view" and as a result creates "a false equivalency between very different kinds of products" (304). For Faber, Pierre Bourdieu's work, which "comes with a built in imperative to include the institutional view," is key to helping us rethink "some basic things that urgently need rethinking" (305).
- 13 Guijarro Lasheras notes that two of the novels he studies – *Cambridge en mitad de la noche* (2018) by David Jiménez Torres and *Yo no he muerto en México* (2021) by Pablo Sánchez – end with representations of conferences, as well. For Guijarro Lasheras, these culminating *public* moments confirm a disheartening reality: "más vale la maña social que la fuerza investigadora" (442).
- 14 In *Between Market and Myth*, I note that Teodoro's affair with Caterina, an Italian colleague he meets at a conference in Rome, does little to challenge the blurred boundaries in his life. His pleasure is his work and work is his pleasure. He does not try to escape the academic world – something he could do with his wife – but rather entrenches himself further in the academy through this affair (Vater 123-24).
- 15 This counterfactual would require more disciplined resistance on Teodoro's part, perhaps the kind López Petit defines as "odio libre," which he describes as hatred for "lo que no estoy dispuesto a vivir" (*Amar y pensar*, 40). Teodoro does not want to be confined by the parameters of academic writing or by the requirements for achieving the *cátedra*, but he allows himself to be dragged along by them. His "malestar" comes precisely from "la imposibilidad de ser [dueño] de [su] propia vida" (López Petit, "Tenemos que liberarnos").
- 16 Teodoro's association with Velázquez throughout the novel confirms his representation as a laborer, rather than an intellectual in the twentieth-century interpretations of Edward Said and others. In fact, Teodoro stands as

the antithesis to Said's intellectual who, in order to retain his title as such, must reject "professionalism: thinking of your work as something you do for a living, between the hours of nine and five with one eye on the clock and another cocked at what is considered to be proper, professional behavior – not rocking the boat, not straying outside accepted paradigms or limits, making yourself marketable and above all presentable" (74).

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