The Body and Imagination in *La mort i la primavera*

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Resum

La mort i la primavera és una novel·la complexa que incorpora elements de la fantasia i de la vulgaritat per crear un univers summament humà. Les tècniques surrealistes que empra l'autora sorprenen el lector amb imatges de ritus de sacrifici que revelen la relació violenta que existeix entre el cos humà i la identitat individual. Aquestes contradiccions aparentment inconnexes entre la realitat, el desig i la imaginació es fonen en la novel·la i revelen així la naturalesa inquietant de l'ésser humà.

La juxtaposició il·lògica de diversos elements suggereix un món oníric que celebra l'associació lliure evident en l'escola surrealista. Igual que els paisatges estèrils del pintor català Salvador Dalí, les descripcions literàries de Rodoreda combinen elements no relacionats per destorbar idees tradicionals de la versemblança. La dicotomia central de la novel·la es troba en el cicle de la vida i la mort, que no funcionen en l'univers rodoredià com un començament i un final sinó com un procés continu. El jove narrador s'adona de la seva pròpia mortalitat en testimoniar la mort i l'enterrament del seu pare i per comprendre la seva naturalesa humana s'esforça per acceptar el terror de la mort a través dels ritus comunals.

Resumen

La mort i la primavera es una novela compleja que incorpora elementos de la fantasía y la vulgaridad para crear un universo sumamente humano. Las técnicas surrealistas que emplea la autora sorprenden al lector con imágenes de ritos de sacrificio que revelan la relación violenta que existe entre el cuerpo humano y la identidad individual. Estas contradicciones aparentemente inconexas entre la realidad, el deseo y la imaginación se funden en la novela revelando así la naturaleza inquietante del ser humano.

La yuxtaposición ilógica de varios elementos sugiere un mundo onírico que celebra la asociación libre evidente en la escuela surrealista. Igual que los paisajes estériles del pintor catalán Salvador Dalí, las descripciones literarias de Rodoreda combinan elementos no relacionados para estorbar ideas tradicionales de la verosimilitud. La dicotomía central de la novela se encuentra en el ciclo de la vida y la muerte, que no funcionan en el universo rodorediano como un comienzo y un fin sino como un proceso continuo. El joven narrador se da cuenta de su propia mortalidad al testimoniar la muerte y entierro de su padre y para comprender su naturaleza humana se esfuerza para aceptar el terror de la muerte a través de los ritos comunales.

Abstract

La mort i la primavera (*Death in Spring*) is a complex novel that incorporates many elements to create a fantastical, visceral, yet crudely human literary universe. Surrealistic techniques exploiting metaphor and symbolism provide jarring images of sacrificial rituals that expose a violent relationship between identity and the human body. The seemingly overwhelming contradictions between reality, desire, and the imagination blend together in the novel to reveal a frightening yet provocative comment on human nature.

The illogical pairing of elements in the rituals suggests a dreamlike or imaginary world that celebrates innocence and free association as evident in the surrealist school of thought. As in the barren dreamscapes of paintings by Salvador Dali, Rodoreda's literary descriptions combine unusual elements that jolt the reader from preconceived notions of verisimilitude. The main dichotomy in the novel, expressed in the title, posits life and death on a continuum rather than as a beginning and an end. The young narrator's coming of age is accelerated when he witnesses his father's death and burial, thus realizing the permanence of death and his own impending doom. Consequently, he embraces the fear of death, as does the entire community in which he lives.

The literary landscape that Mercè Rodoreda creates in her novel *La mort i la primavera* is a startling mixture of repression, violence, and death. Nevertheless, the novel, published posthumously in 1986, can be considered a culmination of Rodoreda's enigmatic, complex literary style we look at the incorporation of surrealist motifs, the body as the site of articulation, and the incorporation of intertextuality. Her exploration of death and desire and her rich surrealist imagination culminate in a provocative, totally unique novel that unabashedly confronts the violence of human nature. The shocking effects of graphic descriptions of bodily mutilation connect the imaginary of the novel to that of surrealism, in which the body becomes transformed into the playground of the psychological. In this essay, I will look at how the body is used to explore social violence and repressed desire in the novel and in some of Rodoreda's paintings as well.

It is important to keep in mind that the novel is an unfinished manuscript that Rodoreda did not intend to publish in its current form. However, in this unpolished state, the reader can perhaps feel privy to certain scenes, description, and images that may have been edited or softened for a general reading public. One only has to think of the extensive rewriting of her first novel, *Aloma*, at the urging of Armand Obiols to understand the drastic changes the author can make to her own text, as pointed out by Randolph Pope in the article "Aloma's Two Faces and the Character of Her True Nature".[1] The unedited version of *La mort*, with the appendices included in the Club editor edition, permit the reader to actively participate in the construction of the narrative. The fact that this novel was not a finished product allows us to peek into the inner workings of the novelist and to acquire some sense of her primitive text.

In *La mort i la primavera*, the characters, town, landscape, and interpersonal relationships all reflect a barren sense of purpose: death is the driving force behind the narrative. The discourse of violence that runs throughout the novel points to the symbiotic relationship between death and life, decay and rebirth. Perhaps it is significant that Rodoreda worked only on this text during the last year of her life but it should be noted that this text formed a part of her literary vision for over 20 years, as she began work on the novel in the early 1960s. She submitted the manuscript to the Premi Sant Jordi in 1961 without success and in that same year she wrote to Joan Sales: "*La Mort i la Primavera* és molt bo. Terriblement poètic i terriblement negre. Amb el meu estil d'ara: primera persona i procurant dir les coses de la manera más pura i més inesperada [...]. Serà una novel·la d'amor i de soledat infinita." (Rodoreda 9). Twenty years after she had abandoned the project she enthusiastically reclaimed her excitement about the text: "Abans que res vull enllestir

1. Randolph Pope. "*Aloma's* Two Faces and the Character of Her True Nature." *The Garden Across the Border*. Ed. Kathleen McNerney and Nancy Nosburg. Selinsgrove: Susquehanna UP, 1994, 135-47.

La Mort i la Primavera. Falta poquíssim!" (10). She would die that spring before finishing the text.

Rodoreda's literary vision perhaps can be defined as a philosophy that prioritizes both physical and spiritual transformation through violence.[2] Her style incorporates violence on the page that is blunt and direct, yet eloquent and moving. Some of her best-known characters, Colometa, Cecilia Ce, the woman in "La salamandra", the sailor in "La meva Cristina," all suffer physical and emotional violence yet emerge transformed both emotionally and in some cases quite literally as well. The pain is always physical as the bodies face starvation, physical abuse, burning at the stake, survival in the belly of a whale, in fact the whale, Cristina, suffers physically from the sailor's need to eat the flesh of her mouth to survive. The violence that each experiences on the way to transformation extends beyond the boundaries of any one "reality" and in Rodoreda's literary world embraces the limitlessness of imagination.

Donna McGiboney has written about ritual and sacrificial rites in the novel and she points out the systematic nature of ritual that maintains order in the society as well as the clearly patriarchal subordination of women. In order to expand on these themes, I focus on the body as the site of articulation and cultural meaning. I suggest that the rituals and desire elaborated in the novel locate the body at the center of a surreal imagination. The focus on the psychoanalytic elements of the novel, as analyzed by Carme Arnau, Loreto Busquets, and others, emphasizes the connections between a surrealistic aesthetic of the body and Rodoreda's imagery.

In terms of the literary imagination portrayed in the novel, the presence of several other texts plays into the foundational myth of violence and suffering. The shock of illogical metaphor that surrealism brings to the imaginary and the inherent violence in birth and springtime are two references that point directly to other literary influences. Dalí's barren landscapes in *Persistence of Memory* 1931 and his exploration of the oppressed sexuality of human interaction as well as T.S. Eliot's masterpiece on death, "The Wasteland," echo throughout Rodoreda's text. In Dalí's painting, the sterile landscape that boasts the craggy coastline of Catalunya plays host to images of organic time and the march toward death, symbolized in the sleeping figure and ants devouring a pocket watch. The alternative realities represented in the painting and in the novel heighten the urgency of bodily desires that falsely promise to ward off death.

Rodoreda was certainly familiar with Dalí's art and the tenets of surrealism, but her way of interweaving the references throughout her text suggests an innovation

2. See "Mercè, o la vida dolorosa" by Anna Murià for intimate accounts of Rodoreda's difficult marriage to her uncle and romantic relationship with writer Armand Obiols. Murià comments on Rodoreda in a letter saying hers was "una joventut sense joventut" (19).

in the illogical imagery of surrealism and a more biting, less romanticized view of aging and death. Nevertheless, I don't mean to imply that Rodoreda was a surrealist but I use the term broadly and in a figurative way. Her style and process are anything but random and spontaneous; rather, her novels and stories stem from the realist tradition in character and plot development. But I do suggest that her use of symbolism and metaphor includes elements of surrealism such as disturbing associations and fantastical, dreamlike realities. In the following, I look briefly at Eliot's poem and then move to a discussion of images of surrealism in Rodoreda's text.

Rodoreda had read Eliot and used his verses for an epigraph that appears in the second appendix of *La mort*.[3] In the main text of the novel, the narrator talks about the sadness of spring "que tot el món està malalt i les plantes i les flors són una malura de la terra" (109) and then goes on to claim that the earth is more peaceful without all the green foliage. The notion of spring as a time of sickness is one of many inversions in the novel that undermines the concept of a stable and recognizable reality. Similar to the initial verses from the first part of Eliot's poem *The Wasteland*, which is titled "The Burial of the Dead," the epidemic that plagues the earth in *La mort* confirms that death comes inscribed in spring and in new life. Eliot writes: April is the cruelest month, breeding/Lilacs out of the dead land, mixing Memory and desire, stirring/Dull roots with spring rain" (29). Spring brings the memory and desire for the life and abundance of summer that can only lead to death and decay in the autumn, as represented in *Autumnal Canibalism* by Salvador Dalí from 1936. As depicted in this painting by Dalí, the human body is consumed by age and nature. The self-inflicted violence here may reflect the sociopolitical changes sweeping Spain in 1936 as the country began to cannibalize itself in a civil war. Thus, according to the image, war does not produce heroes but self-destructing forms immobilized by their own insatiable desire to consume. Eliot characterizes aging and death in a similar way in his poetry even though his aesthetic is a modernist one of nostalgia and not the psychoanalytic probing of sexuality and desire found in surrealism. But for Eliot, life leaves the body empty and weak, there is no triumph in age or heroism in living; instead, death approaches and is unremarkable and banal in such poems as "The Lovesong of J. Alfred Prufrock" and "Preludes." In *La mort*, the sadness of spring takes the cruelty one step further in that it shifts the desire for life to a desire for and obsession with death. If for Eliot the treachery of spring lies in its transitory and deceiving pleasure, the narrator of *La mort* condemns spring for its destruction, for the invasion of the land by plants and life. There is no yearning for the impossible eternal spring but disdain that it may deter

3. The epigraph of the alternate version of the third part of the novel that appears in the second appendix comes from T.S. Eliot's *Four quartets*, ensuring that Rodoreda was very familiar with his work. It reads: "You say I am repeating/ Something I have said before. I shall say it again" (175 *La mort*).

the subject from reaching the ultimate goal, which is death. Desire then becomes displaced from the craving for lost youth to the desire for inevitable yet always untimely death. This shift in perspective from Eliot's modern aesthetic that prizes melancholy to the novel's more disturbing obsessions with death signals a change in the overall use of metaphor in Rodoreda's text and its ironic or surreal characteristics. The yearning for eternal youth is reversed and converted into an urgent push toward embracing and comprehending death.

The juxtaposition of two contrasting elements that produces the irony characteristic of surrealism is found in the symbolism of the horse in *La mort*. As the text confirms in the first chapter: "Els cavalls només eren per menjar. Ens els menjàvem cuits damunt d'un foc de llenya, sobretot a les festes d'enterrament" (23). With this short description of the horses' social value, Rodoreda establishes a dichotomy within the readers' extraliterary reality. Concretely, within the Spanish literary tradition, the horse has represented a companion and embodiment of heroic virtues as varied as El Cid's Babieca and Quijote's faithful Rocinante. Christine Arkinstall mentions Picasso's *Guernica* (1937) in "which the suffering of the Spanish people is represented by a dying horse, its body transfixed by a lance" (181). The powerful image of the horse that suffers alongside humanity also solidifies the notion of the horse as an animal that shares feelings and emotions with humans. The image of the horse also is frequently one of power, allied to production, commerce, transportation, and war, all areas in which the animal works to secure human survival and wellbeing. The inversion of the symbol in *La mort*, from one of strength to one of death, presents the reader with a world that is clearly distanced from ours. The idea that horses are only to eat rejects traditional symbolism and challenges the reader to reformulate this seemingly stable relationship between human and beast. Of course, many cultures do eat horse but it is the radical reduction of the traditional symbolism suggesting that horses do not contribute in any other way to the cultural landscape other than as food that separates the textual world from ours.

Another example of the creation of a fantastical literary world is the transformation of a young woman to a salamander in the short story "La salamandra." The woman accused of being a witch pines after her married lover even after the flames intended to burn her alive turn her into a salamander. This story is remarkable in that the metamorphosis changes her body but not her mind and she lives in a horrible state of physical purgatory. The literal fusion, in this case, of the human and animal world suggests a relationship with nature that goes beyond one of interdependence but rather shows the complete penetration of human reality by fantastical natural sources. Nature in Rodoreda's texts is a force beyond human comprehension that ultimately overtakes us, ingests us, and swallows us whole. The ritual of entombing dying members of the community in tree trunks and sacrificing young men to

the rocky river bed in *La mort* reflect this overwhelming aspect of nature that consumes humans literally and psychologically. The fear inspired by the natural world echoes that of the disturbing reality of many surrealist images.

One of the opening frames of Luis Buñuel's masterpiece *Un chien andalous* (1929) plays with the animal/human fusion as well. In one shot, a man (Buñuel) sharpens a razor and then the shot cuts to a hand that spreads a woman's eyelids apart exposing her eyeball. The camera moves to a close up and the razor enters the frame. The scene cuts to a shot of an animal's eyeball that is quickly sliced through the center. The complete fusion and confusion of human and animal here produces a stunning repulsion in a few seconds of film. The woman in the film undergoes a quick metamorphosis through the editing of the sequence of scenes or montage and the viewer barely distinguishes between her eye and that of the animal. The elevation of the animal to the human level reiterates the profound connection between civilization and the natural world. Buñuel embraced the illogical in this film that he co-wrote with Dalí and captured a visceral, immediate response to violence in the opening sequence.

Much of the fascination with the illogical in surrealism revolves around the mystery of violence. Violence is a means of power and control but also is a social tool used to establish order and structure in a given society. Rene Girard explores the sacred nature of violence and how the acting out of negative impulses through ritual maintains social relationships. In the novel, the act of ritual is tantamount to the coming of age story and the life cycle becomes an unending chain of rituals linked together and ending ultimately with the death of the narrator. Most of the rituals revolve around burial preparation of the body: pouring cement down the throat, placing the body in a hollowed out tree and rubbing herbs on the eyes. The metaphorical cleansing or purging of the dying body gives the townspeople the opportunity to control the effects of death on the body. These acts translate metonymically as a form of control over death in that they are meant to bring the living closer to the body as it moves from life to death; in doing so, each person involved in the ritual displaces his or her own death onto the body in question yet at the same time recognizes that they too will someday undergo the same treatment. Thus death is registered concretely in the body and through the manipulation of another's body we recognize the symbolic importance of our own. The emphasis on the body links the fantastical experience in the novel to the reader's reality.

There are many examples of ritual and ritualistic behavior in the text but here I focus on one that connects the experience of the father with that of the son. Young men of the village are forced into the rushing river and have to fight off the current that drags them across the bottom. Many die and those that survive suffer horrible mutilation from the rocky riverbed. The survivors are forced to live in packs separate from the society for they bear the mark of death in the wounds and scars they bear

on their faces. The narrator of the story follows in his father's footsteps and this creates a cyclical structure to the novel. He witnesses his father's death and burial at the beginning of the novel and then later describes his own torment in the rushing river waters and consequent burial at the close of the novel. In this way, the text can be read as a coming of age story, even though the outcome of maturing in the novelistic universe is to embrace death. The focus on the body throughout the text allows the protagonist to understand his own death.

Girard explains the existence of violence in ritual as a way in which societies maintain order. Rituals are performed when there is a threat of rebellion or instability that could weaken the social hierarchy. The disruptive threat usually arrives in the form of an outsider, someone who can easily be targeted in acts of ritual violence. In most cases, this is a stranger, representative of foreign cultural values. The threat in *La mort* comes from within the society itself; it is the threat of death, as the narrator so eloquently explains at the end of the novel, that resides within every human heart. The internal threat can be purged through a surrogate victim who can be "substituted for all the potential victims, for all the enemy brothers that each member is striving to banish from the community" (79). Thus the sacrifice of the men thrown in the river represents the death that the townspeople embrace and try to control. By banishing the mutilated men from the society or performing lengthy rituals on a dying body the townspeople strive to control death through violence and action. Janet Perez notes "Collective aversion and shunning makes still more patent the victims' character of sacrificial scapegoats" (186). Girard explains:

> "Men cannot confront the naked truth of their own violence without the risk of abandoning themselves to it entirely. They have never had a very clear idea of this violence, and it is possible that the survival of all human societies of the past was dependent on this fundamental lack of understanding." (82)

Similar to Girard's assertion that society functions only because of a fundamental lack of understanding the necessity of violence, the novel places primary importance on violence and death as social order. The young narrator spends most of the novel trying to understand the rituals that surround him. It seems that only upon dying does he gain a certain understanding of his community. Specifically for the protagonist, the cyclical nature of his life includes in a large part the experiences of his father. He bears the same scar on his forehead from the river rocks as his father, as he gazes into the water he sees his father's face reflected in his own, and the blacksmith says to him "t'han fet la cara del teu pare," confirming the metamorphosis from child to adult. The presence of the father figure at the end of the novel points to the patrilineal inheritance of violence and death, with clear Oedipal overtones. The narrator confesses that his wife, who is also his stepmother, aban-

doned him leaving him only with his mutilated face, the presence of his father, and the shadow of death chasing him.

The end of the novel, excluding the appendices, reveals the transformative experience of death. Perhaps among the most poetic and moving pages of Rodoreda's work, the final scene reveals the narrator's philosophy of death and passage into the unknown. In the narrator's final days he dedicates his time to making small figurines out of mud and explains that "les morts em voltaven...escapades dels arbres...com les flors amb fúria que es tiren amunt i endavant. La meva mort era jo amb el cor presoner de les venes" (150). Death as a prisoner of our veins locates the experience within the body instead of a result of outside forces. The inversion of terms gives agency to the individual as it suggests that death does not come for us but we carry it within every day of our lives, and when it is realized it escapes from us and we die. As if in anticipation of the difficulty of narrating the death experience the narrator claims "No hi ha paraules, s'haurien de fer" (151). In this moment the text turns in on itself, denying its own existence, for what we will read about death is an invention, an imagined state resulting from the narrative drive. It is the impossibility of language that seduces the reader into the final narrative sequence. Rooted in the body, in nature, in the visceral world of the dying and decaying, the text embraces the imaginary death by avoiding mysterious generalization but rather explaining in detail the process. The unknowable can be known only through the imaginary and invented language. The genius of the ending is that we are advised that it is impossible to narrate death and then are presented with a precise narration of it. Just as Elaine Scary explains in her study *The Body in Pain*, "physical pain does not simply resist language but actively destroys it" (4), the narration of death can only exist symbolically, removed from individual experience. This textual and philosophical irony at the close of the text is that the death of the narrator signals his understanding of life. The passage from childhood to adulthood in this case is from life to death: only when the narrator understands the true nature of death can he embrace it and leave the shadow of his father behind. He understands that he cannot change anything in his life and in that moment death flies out of his heart and he dies.

Death, therefore, is a visceral experience and a moment of realization between the spirit and the body. But the experience is always rooted in the physical, in the transformational quality of experience, and in the literal metamorphosis of the body into another form. The attention given to the body as it crosses the divide between life and death is of supreme importance in the novel. The preparation for burial focuses on the power of the body to expel the spirit, to send forth the ghost of the living. The ritual pouring of cement down the throat of the moribund is shocking and physically repulsive, but it reaches the reader at the core of her being, at the absolute essence of existence, at the moment of breathing in and exhaling

out. Rodoreda isolates the corporeal markers of existence and even though her work is marked by existential and philosophical predicaments, she routinely roots the human experience in the bodily expression of life and death. As Jaume Marí-Olivella observes, the novel embraces the semiotic that is "able finally to articulate the symbolic as something exterior and hostile to the primeval origin of the text" (167). The external markers that include the tree, the river, and the horse are all synthesized in the mutilation of the human body.

Judith Butler has focused her scholarship on the cultural significance of the body in its ability to perform identity. In her study *Bodies that Matter* she looks at the body as a text or a site of cultural and social articulation. Butler is concerned with the relationship between the body and power as well. She writes: "what constitutes the fixity of the body, its contours, its movements, will be fully material, but materiality will be rethought as the effect of power, as power's most productive effect" (2). Power exercised by outward forces that manipulate and control the body are part of a process of identification, the body does not display a particular identity but rather shows the process of and development of hegemonic power. The body in *La mort* specifically plays out the process of death by hosting the signs of ritual and manifesting the slow progression through pain toward obsoletion. The separation of the mutilated male bodies and of the pregnant women's bodies from the larger social group indicates a need to recognize and reject the deformed body. In the case of the river victims, the body anticipates death, while in the case of the pregnant women the body indicates birth and life. Yet as observed in the parallel to Eliot's poem, the promise of life is only a masked certainty of death. Thus the body is where the materiality of power is expressed.

Julia Kristeva locates psychoanalytical attraction and repulsion of the body to that of the omnipotent mother. According to Kristeva, the individual relationship with the body begins inside the womb, within the realm of non-verbal language with impulses, movements, and energies transferred between mother and fetus. This idea of identity established through a form of non-verbal communication takes a step back from the theories of Jaques Lacan, who locates the formation of individuality in the mirror stage, when the subject recognizes his or her identity in another entity, or the reflection in the mirror, and thus adopts patriarchal language to define the "I" and the "other." For Kristeva, the "I" and the "other" co-exist in the psyche and the body. She defines the abject as that which we reject but must understand as part of the ultimate definition of ourselves. Upon birth, the newly formed subject rejects the maternal body theoretically, yet it remains a defining element.

Kristeva defines the abject as "a rite of defilement and pollution in the paganism that accompanies societies with a dominant or surviving matrilinear character. It takes on the form of the exclusion of a substance (nutritive or linked to sexuality),

the execution of which coincides with the sacred since it sets it up» (17). The obsession with female presence and rejection in *La mort* is found in the figures of the stepmother turned wife and the phantom girl, who places the female body on the periphery or outside of dominant discourse within the novel. Julia Kristeva explains that abjection exists as "exclusion or taboo" (17) in many religious systems and societies. Thus the mystery surrounding carnal desire and sex in Rodoreda's text mythifies the female body, and the male narrative voice expresses the misunderstanding of female sexuality and reproduction. The attraction to the female and simultaneous repulsion of the mother, seen in the isolation of pregnant women, brings together the conflictive nature of sexuality and identity in the novel. The systematic repression of desire in the novel is exercised by literally forcing two bodies together until all desire has passed out of them. Thus the body is denied pleasure and forced to recognize its most basic form of materiality while the emotional, even spiritual aspects of desire and longing are completely suppressed. The lack of spirituality afforded the characters in the novel is manifested in the mutilations of the body upon death in that the body remains a site of violence and pain instead of release or liberation. The primacy of the body in *La mort* as a site of the conflictive yet coexisting nature of life and death can also be seen in pictorial works executed by Rodoreda in the 1950s.

While living in Paris, Rodoreda turned to painting as a means of artistic expression. In the images that populate her watercolors, we see repeatedly the theme of the abject woman's body. In a watercolor dated from the 1950s, the full-length figure dominates the artistic space. As in all of the compositions, the figure exists in a void; there is a lack of background detail that would indicate a specific location and thus the thematic elements turn to universal representations of human nature. The most important element to notice in these paintings is the gaze of the figure. The confrontational stare of the female figure challenges traditional depictions of female modesty. This figure challenges the viewer directly and in a play on the viewer and viewed, she looks as if she is the one analyzing us.

In this particular figure the ornamentation seen in the hair and dress suggest particular social conventions of female beautification, also a type of ritual. However, the most noticeable aspect of the body is the overt sexuality expressed in the large breasts. The location of the body parts reveals a troubling relationship between the body and female sexuality; the anatomy is cumbersome, and in a way seems unnatural given the figure's stance. The statuesque figure appears stoic and solid yet the image gains a sense of movement in the contrasting patterns of the skirt and the circular curve of the arms leading to expressive open hands. The contrast established between composition and line here is characteristic of Rodoreda's artwork. The fusing together of two opposing artistic elements results in paintings that are vibrant with motion yet almost always consist of single figures in a por-

traiture setting. Her paintings are not surreal as in Dali's dreamscapes; rather, the caricature of theme seen in Joan Miró, for example, is much more akin to Rodoreda's representation of the conflict inherent in representing "reality" through visual or verbal language.

In Miró's painting *Woman in Front of the Sun*, from 1950, the symbolic representation of a full-length figure of a female is presented on a blue background. The hair and dress silhouette suggests the gender of the image while the engaging single eye that emphasizes the gaze reminds us of Rodoreda's figure, with her almost surprised stare directed at the viewer. The female gaze inverts the commonly employed theory in cinematic studies of the male gaze that dictates the hierarchical relationship between subject and object. The female body is inevitably posited as the object since the camera or viewer is assumed to be male. The implications in painting are the same, for the traditional painter necessarily objectified the human body to recreate forms and structure as realistically as possible. The female body lacked a subject position and thus was always regulated to objectification in symbolic terms. In Rodoreda's work, the female gaze becomes aggressive and challenging while at the same time she incorporates the typical eroticized elements of the female nude. The realization of a female gaze clearly depicted on the canvass upsets norms of object and subject, rupturing the omnipotence of the male gaze and suggesting a more complicated, conflicted female reality.

An image of a primitive masked face perhaps most closely relates to the text *La mort i la primavera*. The tone achieved here through composition, color, and line reflect the uneasiness of the verbal narrative and the constant threat of danger and death that permeates its pages. The gaze here becomes an invasion of space as the figure almost steps out from the frame to confront the viewer; the painterly quality here is brash, the brushstrokes are heavy and clearly marked. The heaviness is echoed in the dark colors and the outline around the eyes, nose, and lips accentuates the pale face beneath. The headdress and mask-like features harkens to Picasso's use of African masks in his work *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* (1907). The reconfiguration of the female face into a flat-surface mask devoid of softness or emotion challenges traditional 19th century ideals of female beauty as malleable and youthful. The African mask suggests, once again, the idea of the ritual in which the bearer of the mask dons an alternate identity in order to subvert or undermine normal social hierarchies and status. The mask as a symbol carries the weight of alternative identity and the power of transformation in that it allows the wearer the freedom to explore other subject positions within the social structure. Therefore, the women with mask-like features cease to be women as seen through the male gaze and take on another dimension that is mysterious and unidentifiable.

In another watercolor the figure is an abstract representation of a woman, yet is only denoted female by the oversized breasts and wide hips. No other identifying

mark, such as clothing or hair adornment, suggests the gender of the figure. Thus, Rodoreda resorts to the body as the final identifying mark of gender and in this case the composition suggests a body falling through space. The spatial relationship established in the frame by the slanted lines of the figure and the twisted, broken neck create a tense anxiety augmented by the darkly outlined eye. The gaze in this watercolor jumps out at the viewer with the color detail of the pupil and the repetition of form and color in the breasts. The primitive form can be seen as a traditional representation of fertility yet the disjointed figure that is bent to fit in the space of the canvas is unsettling to the viewer's eye. The precariousness inscribed in the form combines elements of movement and destruction. The fertility suggested by the breasts is countered by the broken neck and falling movement. The image combines movement and stasis, life and death in a surreal irony similar to that in the novel.

In one of her better-known paintings, the divided face of a woman best represents the divided identity of the human condition. The bust of a woman with a divided face and body contains some familiar elements such as the engaging stare that directly confronts the viewer. The adornment and decorative clothing are reminiscent of the first figure discussed, yet in this case color distinguishes two different sides of the figure. The line through the middle of the face clearly separates the figure, suggesting the fusion of opposites. The line and movement of the yellow strands of hair oppose the curly pink strands, creating two distinct halves of the same face. The dichotomy of humanity and violence expressed in Dalí's painting *Autumnal Cannibalism* as well as in Picasso's *Guernica* are located in the single figure of the body in this watercolor by Rodoreda. The body as a site of violence and conflict becomes evident in all of the images by Rodoreda we have seen and the power is in the lack of resolution and finality that challenges the viewer or reader to make the connections and accept the ambiguity of life and death.

Therefore, violence toward the body manifests itself as a desire for death. The drive toward finality pushes the narrator of *La mort* to embrace death and release the same fear in his heart that perhaps our author also held in hers. Nevertheless, Rodoreda remains a multifaceted literary and artistic voice that constantly surprises and challenges what we may have come to expect. The image of a bright yellow flower in one of Rodoreda's watercolors is again an irony, the unexpected representation of spring, light, and rebirth. The huge, beaming flower radiates life and perhaps can be understood to illustrate the complex range of emotions and experience of human existence. Rodoreda surely incorporates a vast range of perspectives in both her literary and artistic production. The lasting images of violence, destruction, transformation, and hope create a literary and artistic legacy that is profound and philosophical. Put more simply, as the epigraph to *La plaça del Diamant* declares, "My dear, these things are life."

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