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TITLE: Bodily Functions: Ricarda and Corporeal Resistance in *Tiempo de silencio*

AUTHOR: Joseph Patteson

EMAIL: patteson@wisc.edu

AFFILIATION: University of Wisconsin-Madison; Department of Spanish & Portuguese; 1028 Van Hise Hall; 1220 Linden Drive; Madison, WI 53706

ABSTRACT: While *Tiempo de silencio* is widely seen to be a socially critical novel, the effectiveness of this critique has been questioned due to the extreme cynicism and linguistic complexity of the narration. Most characters are portrayed with scorn as manipulative and self-defeating neurotics who use verbal deception against themselves and others, and there is little evidence of positive valorization of any character or social tendency. This study investigates the implications of Ricarda, a character who has a relationship to both language and social reality that is fundamentally different from that of the others. A degraded being nearly devoid of language as we know it, Ricarda moves steadily along a course that is plotted by bodily drives, while her idiosyncratic language expresses these drives. More broadly, she supposes an assertion of the material body, on its own terms, as an agent in social reality. Ricarda shows how the expressivity of the body, though tightly channeled and controlled within Franco's Spain, can work to destabilize the exclusions and obfuscations that project a stable and unitary sense of national identity. This revindication of the body marks a moment of ethical positivity that complements the scathing social critique characterizing the work as a whole.

KEYWORDS: Body, Julia Kristeva, Language, Luis Martín-Santos, Myth, Poverty, Women

RESUMEN: Aunque *Tiempo de silencio* frecuentemente se considera novela socialmente crítica, la eficacia de su crítica ha sido cuestionada debido al cinismo extremo y la complejidad lingüística de la narración. Los personajes generalmente se retratan con escarnio, como neuróticos manipulativos y autodestructivos que engañan a otros y se engañan a través del lenguaje, y hay poca evidencia de una valorización positiva de cualquier personaje o tendencia social. Esta investigación estudia las implicaciones de Ricarda, un personaje que sostiene una relación con el lenguaje y con la realidad social que es totalmente distinta. Un ser degradado, casi carente del lenguaje tal y como lo sabemos, Ricarda sigue un rumbo determinado por las pulsiones corpóreas, y su lenguaje idiosincrático expresa estas pulsiones. En términos más amplios, ella constituye una aserción del cuerpo material como agente, a su manera, en la realidad social. Ricarda muestra cómo la expresividad del cuerpo, pese a ser canalizada y controlada en la España franquista, tiende a desestabilizar las exclusiones y la ofuscación que proyectan un estable sentido de identidad nacional. Esta reivindicación del cuerpo constituye un momento de positividad ética que complementa la crítica social mordaz que caracteriza la novela en general.

PALABRAS CLAVE: cuerpo, Julia Kristeva, lenguaje, Luis Martín-Santos, mito, pobreza, mujeres

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BIOGRAPHY: Joseph Patteson is an ABD doctoral student in the Department of Spanish and Portuguese at the University of Wisconsin–Madison. His dissertation centers on intoxication and culture, with narco-violence as its epicenter but placed within a global, historical, and interdisciplinary framework. Other interests include marginalized perspectives in literature, Central American narrative, Brazilian culture, the theory of the novel, and social critique in Spanish Golden Age narrative.

Bodily Functions: Ricarda and Corporeal Resistance in *Tiempo de silencio*

Joseph Patteson, University of Wisconsin-Madison

Language is, perhaps, a central protagonist of Luis Martín-Santos' *Tiempo de silencio*. The baroque splendor of the narration overwhelms the reader in its stream of consciousness, disorienting her with constant use of hyperbole, extended metaphor, and seemingly interminable anaphora. These techniques, in turn, aid in the construction of complex layers of irony that result in a superproduction of meaning. This seemingly uncontrolled verbal and semantic proliferation draws a comparison to the unchecked reproduction of cancer cells within a living body, itself an important motif in the novel (Faverón-Patriau, Fraser, Muñoz). The extravagance of the language of *Tiempo de silencio* calls attention to itself to the point that it obscures referential meaning. Within this metastasizing narration we witness the language of various characters in dialogue and interior monologue, and the overwhelming trend that emerges is the mythification and distortion of social reality, with the intention of deceiving self or others. In fact, the novel's overwhelmingly negative view of the use of language, added to the mordant and pervasive irony of the narration, has led some critics to consider it a work of profound pessimism.¹

There is one character, however, who does not fit the same pattern, who in fact has a relationship to both language and social reality that is fundamentally different from the others. This is Ricarda, the "redonda consorte" of Muecas. In stark contrast with the labyrinthine verbal constructions by which the other characters position and justify themselves, Ricarda, a being completely degraded by life

and by the narration, nearly devoid of language as we know it, moves steadily along a course that I will argue is plotted by bodily drives, while her idiosyncratic language is an expression of these drives. More broadly, through both what she *is* and what she *does*, she supposes an assertion of the material body, on its own terms, as an agent in social reality. Ricarda shows how the expressivity of the body, though tightly channeled and controlled within Franco's fascist Spain, can work to destabilize the exclusions and mythical obfuscations that maintain an apparently stable and unitary sense of national identity. This revindication of the body marks a moment of ethical positivity that complements the scathing social critique that characterizes the bulk of the narrative.

Myth, Critique and Cynicism

In fact, this social-critical context is crucial to understanding both Ricarda's role in the novel and certain critical responses to it. No one has analyzed this aspect more exhaustively or more fruitfully than Jo Labanyi, for whom *Tiempo de silencio* is an "anti-mythical novel" that takes aim at certain discourses developed by the writers of the Generation of '98 and José Ortega y Gasset (Labanyi 81). These discourses, which Labanyi considers to be linked to the authoritarian ideology of the Franco regime, are mythical in the sense of Barthes' definition of myth as a reduction of history to nature (128). Ortega y Gasset, for example, maintained that Spain's problems

stemmed from a genetic inferiority caused by defective blood inherited from both the Goths and the Romans. Also put forward was the idea that Spaniards had an immutable anarchic essence. The common element of such ideas was that Spanish people were bound to a common destiny by geography and biology; they were beliefs that called for a form of government strong enough to repress the chaos and make up for the deficiency inherent in the very nature of the Spanish people, led by a savior figure who would understand, and help them fulfill, their collective destiny (60-63).

These myths, surfacing in ironic form in the novel, are exposed as especially pernicious, since they provide a framework for countless individual submissions to authority. The most prominent is that of the novel's protagonist, Pedro, a young medical researcher who gets into trouble after trying to save the victim of a failed abortion attempt in a Madrid shantytown. He wearily accepts defeat when he loses his research appointment and is sent off to practice medicine in the provinces. His attitude of resignation is analyzed by Labanyi as the final resolution of the ongoing motif of an oedipal return to origins, in which Pedro seeks the security of the maternal womb, whether in the form of various maternal figures in the novel, or in the mythical feminized landscape of the Castilian *meseta*. But Pedro's retreat is shown ultimately to be a castration and a submission to the paternal authority of the state and its discourse (70-71).

The prevalence of the oedipal/castration motif leads Elizabeth Scarlett to conclude that Martín-Santos simply fights one damaging set of myths with another, with the female body as a casualty. According to her analysis, "in Martín-Santos' work the female body is cast in the role of the anthropophagic collective protagonist" (157). Although she allows that in this work, "the body is in some ways the target of demystification," she continues:

[I]n other ways Martín-Santos imbues female bodies with the engulfing power of the amorphous mother, associated with the castrating authoritarian state. It is left to postmodern novelists to once more separate the female body from the myth of the Oedipus complex. (193)

I would argue, however, that the separation of the female body from the Oedipus myth is indeed represented in *Tiempo de silencio* by none other than Ricarda, in whom such imagery is conspicuously absent. This fact is no doubt related to her unique relationship with language: she functions in such a way as to destabilize not only the toxic social discourses that Martín-Santos seems to target, but perhaps also even the general representation of women put forth by the text itself.

This would indeed be significant, because apart from Ricarda, the older female characters are frequently portrayed, as consistent with Scarlett's reading, as scheming, engulfing, oedipal mothers. Both the *madame* of the brothel and the grandmother at the *pensión* where Pedro lives have their own designs to envelop him into their respective spheres. However, these figures also tend to resort to the same self-defeating thought patterns as Pedro. According to Labanyi,

as an existential psychiatrist, Martín-Santos saw neurosis not as biologically-determined but as a refusal to face reality on the part of the individual. Neurosis is thus defined as a willed falsification of meaning. (82)

The novel's characters, then, in addition to deceiving each other, perhaps dedicate their most elaborate verbal-logical subterfuges to self-deception. While Dorita's grandmother uses the girl as a pawn in order to entrap Pedro so that the family may benefit from his higher social status, she also idealizes her deceased husband, who was in reality abusive

and unfaithful, and even caused her to become sterile when he exposed her to a sexually transmitted disease he contracted in his travels (20-28).

Long before his final defeat, Pedro himself is seen to be prone to “making a virtue of necessity” (Labanyi 58). In the jail, after being coerced into a false confession of his responsibility for the abortion, his extreme passivity leads him to begin to believe the charges, and he immediately resigns himself to the situation in order to cope with it:

Los hombres deben afrontar las consecuencias de sus actos. El castigo es el más perfecto consuelo para la culpa y su único posible remedio y corolario. Gracias al castigo el equilibrio se restablecerá en este mundo poco comprensible. (237)

Here we see the tendency for submission caused by the synthesis of an extreme stoicism with authoritarian discourses, another point of connection signaled by Labanyi between the thought of the Generation of '98 and Ortega y Gasset and the ideology of the Franco regime (57-60).

For Michael Ugarte, the ubiquitous and caustic irony with which the narration portrays these cynical strategies of deception, self-destruction and submission, and the baroque complexity of the narration in general, mean that “Martín-Santos’ relentless verbal distortion [...] cannot, in the last analysis, be edifying or even socially critical” (356-57). As an example, he points to an exclamatory passage praising the “valores espirituales” of people like Muecas and Ricarda who live in misery in the *chabolas*. Ugarte asserts that there are two voices clashing within this passage: a “we” that goes along with the surface meaning of the text, idealizing the suffering of the poor, and the

hidden voice of the shanties themselves [...]. As these two voices clash, the reader winces at the thought of being included in the realm of the

‘nosotros,’ for he or she is aware of the conflict. The ultimate effect of this struggle on the reader is not moral purification but ambivalence and emptiness. (348-49)

I would argue that the two voices heard in this passage are actually, on one hand, an appropriated and stylized discourse associated with certain Spanish thinkers, and on the other, the appropriating discourse, underlying but clearly audible, of the narrator/author.² While Ugarte criticizes Martín-Santos for failing to stake out political or ethical stands in the novel that emerge unscathed from the narration’s corrosive irony (346), this second voice is indeed a critical enunciation from an ethical standpoint—it at once ridicules and censures the practice of elevating a state of suffering on the part of others to an aesthetic or spiritual value to be appreciated by those who do not have to experience it. It is true that the function of the novel is largely negative: it seeks to corrode certain discourses prevalent during Franco’s regime. It is also true that no *overt* valorization of any social sector or tendency, as an alternative to the near universal deception, is portrayed. However, to assert that this fact excludes the possibility of effective social criticism is to short-change the reader’s role in the construction of meaning, and in fact Martín-Santos meets the reader more than halfway. In certain moments, underlying the most extreme hyperbole and irony, and in rare moments of respite from the onslaught, the attentive reader may pick up on signs of compassion and social preoccupation that are not totally negated by the “all-encompassing [...] ironic voice” of the narrator (Ugarte 357). Such is the case in the treatment of Ricarda.

Ricarda and Normative Spanish Femininity

As an impoverished and battered woman and the grieving mother of Florita, the victim of the failed abortion, Ricarda appears as

perhaps the most pitiable—and most powerless—character in the entire novel. In general, the narration maintains an emphasis on her relation to the earth and to non-human life, portraying her overall as a subhuman being. She is a creature whose substance is “una tierra apenas modificada” (237), and her very materiality stands in sharp contrast with the mythical figurations of motherhood that abound in the text. If Spanish men in general are driven to seek the security of the maternal womb of tradition, of obscure origins in the landscape of the *patria*, submitting in reality to patriarchal authority, a reaction of resignation—as in Pedro’s case—may be more practicable for those of the middle and upper classes. Among the hungry masses, frustration and violence may be the most likely result, and the most likely target is the historical, material women at their side who cannot offer them the desired mythical protection. Muecas beats his wife with such frequency and duration that a rhythm is established like that of a laborer cultivating the land, and she, in consonance with her identification with the earth, bears the blows in silence (238-39). The narrator cruelly suggests that the beatings do not hurt her because of their regularity, her corpulence, and finally because, in a new negation of her humanity, only “quien sea persona” can feel “*dolor verdadero dolor*” (239, emphasis original).

As shown in this passage, often the degree of ironic scorn the narrator heaps upon so defenseless a target tends to create an emotional dissonance between text and reader that draws attention to this figure. There are also moments in the descriptions of Ricarda in which the irony dies down, as when the narrator speaks of her “desolación física por la muerte de la que había parido [...] y había luego ido haciendo crecer primero con las sustancias de su cuerpo, luego con las sustancias de la tierra,” in a somber exposition of her pain and destroyed hopes that continues for several lines (240). Such a passage from the pen of Martín-Santos should attract the reader’s attention. As Carole Holdsworth has

noted, in contrast with the habitual scorn with which his narrator seems to relate to virtually all of the characters, there seems to be a note of compassion showing through in the portrayal of Ricarda (43-44), and I would argue that this fact points to the centrality of this character to the ethical stance of the novel.

In fact, Ricarda’s singular importance has been recognized by a handful of critics, who have often focused on her embodiment of an archetypal Earth Mother, “a nurturing and protective force” in opposition to the nearly universal deceit that characterizes social relations in the novel (Anderson 293). C.L. Anderson points out that, in addition to the clear references to Ricarda as a being composed of earth, her “redondez” is emphasized, her skirts are compared to the layers of an onion, and their earthy colors to those of an insect’s wings. She is the bringer of the rat food on which so many depend, directly or indirectly: the rats themselves, her own family, and Pedro and his laboratory assistants (Muecas runs a kind of “family business” breeding lab rats for researchers). She herself even built the house in which her family lives, “moulding the substances that form her own body into an edifice that protects, nurtures and preserves life” (290). For Anderson, this identification explains the role of “savior figure” attributed to this seemingly minor character (288). Carole Holdsworth shares a similar vision of Ricarda, but also very astutely develops an opposition between her and “el Maestro,” a parodic figuration of Ortega y Gasset appearing in the novel (Martín-Santos 154-88).

This opposition allows us to better understand Ricarda’s identification with the earth, because in spite of her undeniable archetypal resonances, she is entirely material, historical, and particular, in stark contrast to the mythical origins and essences that characterize the thought of Ortega y Gasset and related intellectuals. She is, in fact, an anti-mythical figure, in perfect consonance with the anti-mythical tenor of the novel as

a whole, as proposed by Labanyi. One field of mythical constructs she destabilizes is that of Spanish femininity, as defined by a set of discourses, current in the early years of the Franco dictatorship (and beyond), on the nature and proper place of women, and considering these ideas will provide an important context to help us understand the extent of Ricarda's social significance. Perhaps the most important source and channel of these discourses was the *Sección Femenina* (SF) of the *Falange*. María Teresa Gallego Méndez has explored the ways the immense social apparatus of the SF taught that women were "naturally" inferior to men, and so owed them obedience in the home and in the workings of the state. Their role was to work tirelessly and silently in support of male projects and desires, and above all, to properly train and nurture the next generation (175-95). Brother Justo Pérez de Urbel, religious advisor to the SF, exhorted women to their duty in these terms: "Sembrad, sembrad silenciosamente, abnegadamente [...] se trata de formar esposas y madres, esposas cristianas y españolas" (qtd. in Gallego Méndez 147).

The irony that a women's organization composed of thousands of incredibly energetic activists endeavored tirelessly to maintain women's absolute social immobility, inferiority and confinement to the home, can be understood in terms of Foucault's analysis of power dynamics as explained in his lecture of January 14, 1976, at the Collège de France. In Foucault's analysis,

power, if we do not take too distant a view of it, is not that which makes the difference between those who exclusively possess and retain it, and those who do not have it and submit to it. Power must be analyzed as something that circulates, or rather something which only functions in the form of a chain. It is never localized here or there, never in anybody's hands, never appropriated as a commodity or a piece of wealth. Power is employed and exercised through a net-like organization [...]. [I]ndividuals are the vehicles of power, not its points of application. (*Power/Knowledge* 98)

Foucault argues that, instead of focusing exclusively on the actions of kings and dictators, power should be studied most carefully "at its extremities, in its ultimate destinations, [...] those points where it becomes capillary, that is, in its more regional and local forms and institutions" (96). The *Sección Femenina's* corps of educators and social workers were indeed vehicles of power at such "capillary" articulations, taking part in "subjection in its material instance as a constitution of subjects," as young women were taught their proper role by women frequently not unlike themselves who had *volunteered* for the task (97).

For, of course, the discourses of femininity promoted by the *Sección Femenina* were not invented by the *Falange* or Franco. In the words of Gallego Méndez, the emergence of an anti-democratic, antifeminist women's organization was made possible by pre-existing "valores vigentes relativos a la femineidad," long promoted by previous forms of economic and political organization, and by the Catholic Church (188, 198-99). Discourses based on these deep-rooted values were simply strategically appropriated and strengthened by the regime, such that it was able to enlist women in their own subjugation, positioning itself at a privileged point in the circulation of power implicated in the maintenance of a rigid and limiting femininity.

In addition, despite Spain's problematic history with science, "scientific" discourses were enlisted not only to reinforce the notion of female inferiority, but also through a concept of hygiene that played an important part in shaping and solidifying ideas about femininity during the early years of the dictatorship. A booklet from the early 1940's called *Pequeñas reglas de convivencia social*, written by *Sección Femenina* ideologue Carmen Werner and aimed at SF leaders, sought to shape these women as models of the desired femininity. Its approach includes hygiene concerns and considerations related to a peculiar Falangist aesthetic.

Chapter 2 in this tract, entitled "De la higiene o disimulo de la vida animal," counsels a radical suppression of human corporeality, which is equated exactly with "animal life," as becomes clear collating the chapter title and

excerpts like this one: “Cuanto más deshumanicemos físicamente, tanto más sociabilizaremos” (Werner 14). Products and secretions of the body of any kind are presented as not only undesirable, but as dangerous. Wool clothing is to be avoided, because this animal fiber mixes with human sweat to produce an unpleasant odor. If it cannot be avoided, such garments should be defended from the retention of body odor with “una vigilancia extrema” (13). One should “ventilar o lavar cada noche los vestidos por los lugares *peligrosos*” (13, emphasis added).

Odors emanating from bathrooms, being distasteful evidence of human physicality, must also be suppressed (14-15). A section is devoted to spitting in public, and women are warned against the presence of oil and dandruff in the hair (15). Even the smell of food, “manifestación absolutamente física de nuestra vida animal,” can be objectionable (14-22). A well-proportioned body should not be flaunted, and the “contornos excesivos o protuberantes” of “un cuerpo defectuoso” should be covered with thicker clothing (17). Often such norms are quantifiable, as when specific proportional measurements are prescribed for clothing (16, 18).

But *Pequeñas reglas* goes even further in its management of the body. Displays of negative emotion were to be avoided.

Es de muy mal gusto y está fuera de estilo de la Falange los lloros, compunciones, males y todas las manifestaciones excesivas de dolor e histerismos [...]. Hay que tener el pudor de los sentimientos y esforzarse en guardarlos para sí. (38)

Finally, in an illuminating passage that contemplates the proper disposition of a Spanish woman's hands, we are given the example of a pair of hands in a state of harmonized repose in a portrait of a lady by a great painter. Such a *pose* represents nothing less than “la más

interesante conquista femenina: la de la propia personalidad. Para ello, se hace preciso un enérgico estudio de todos y cada uno de nuestros movimientos” (21). What is called for is strict control of the semiotic function of the body, in service of the performance of a uniform and passive femininity.³

The anti-material tendencies of the *Sección Femenina* at first seem to create a strange dissonance with the emphasis placed on the biological function of maternity.⁴ However, these two strains of discourse can perhaps be understood as complementary restraints that force female subjectivity to navigate a narrow passage that tightly restricts and channels sexual energy and bodily expression. If, on one hand, a scientific doctrine of feminine inferiority was enlisted by disciplinary power to emphasize women's essential and limited status as bodies that produce more bodies, in service of increasing the population and perpetuating ideology, at the same time, any other kind of production or expression by such bodies was strongly discouraged by the networks of knowledge and power deployed by the SF.⁵

When we analyze Martín-Santos' Ricarda in the light of these considerations, a contradictory picture emerges. On one hand, she is a caricature of the Falange's ideal woman: silent, abnegated, defined by motherhood and total submission to male authority. During Pedro's first visit to Muecas's house to secure rats for his experiments, when Florita complains of the troublesome task of caring for the rats, Muecas reprimands her, holding out Ricarda as the model to emulate: “Calla, hija. Y no hables más que cuando te pregunten. Mira tu madre qué callada está y qué poco molesta. Y, sin embargo, aguantó la misma pejiquera” (62). However, the dehumanized figure of Ricarda ironically shows that the extreme manifestation of the Falangist model of passive femininity coincides with the *vida animal* that the *Sección Femenina* seeks so vehemently to suppress.

This is because in terms of hygiene and decorum, Ricarda represents the *Sección Femenina*'s worst nightmare of uncontrolled bodily production. She is one of:

ciertos seres redondos, malolientes, sucios, en cuyos intersticios corporales se acumulan sustancias grasas y pringosas que nunca son arrastradas por el agua, sino que se desprenden en forma de costras cuando el tiempo las seca. (237)

Beyond being merely dirty, she *is* dirt, being, again, made of “una tierra apenas modificada” (237). Her previously mentioned role in bringing the feed for the rats further highlights the kind of corporeality that was odious to the SF through her intimate association with both food and animals.

Moreover, after the death of Florita she largely abandons her custom of submission and silence, becoming loud and insistent. Her manner of vocal expression, which will be considered in more detail later in the present study, is in fact marked precisely by “los lloros, compunciones, males y todas las manifestaciones excesivas de dolor e histerismos” (Werner 38). Her complaints will disrupt both the dominance of Muecas within their family and the disciplining of Pedro—as we will also see later—for his transgressive incursion into an abject world.

At the same time, while Ricarda's identity is inevitably shaped by motherhood, in her, motherhood itself becomes subversive. According to Mary Nash, in Spain, “the definition of women's identity through motherhood was not contested in the early twentieth century, as it was still essentially an unquestioned cultural value” (“Un/Contested” 40). The idea remained *doxa*, then, in Bourdieu's terms, even during and after the Second Republic.⁶ The idea of defining herself otherwise would not have been available to Ricarda, or even to a more educated woman of the time. Demographic reproduction was important in Spain under Franco, as it was in other strains

of European fascism. The ravages of the civil war and the general militaristic tenor of the regime called for increased production of healthy young men (Gallego Méndez 163).

However, a woman's duty also included being an obedient agent of *social* reproduction, such that the values of the regime, especially “el par autoritarismo-sumisión,” would retain their power, at the level of both the family and the state (16). In this way, women were to be “vehículo, en ultimo término, de la sumisión” (84). What we see with Ricarda, on the other hand, is motherhood wrenched free of this assigned role, as her maternal feeling leads her to work slowly but insistently against submission to patriarchy, at both the individual level (in her defiance of Muecas) and the social (in her nullification of Pedro's punishment). Departing from the most marginal capillaries of the circulation of power, she diverts that circulation from its course by giving free reign to the disruptive potential of a fully material and expressive maternal body that exists in tension with the mythical figurations of the maternal that proliferate in the text.

This is possible because, as we have already seen, beyond—or perhaps alongside—her role as a nurturing, protective force, she embodies a potent negativity vis à vis certain dominant discursive constructions. One critic has noted the peculiarity of Ricarda's role in an analysis of mechanized imagery in the novel, identifying her as a human element “that causes the gears to grind” (Knutson 283). As previously mentioned, she is a striking figure among other things for her uniqueness in the context of verbal distortion that characterizes the novel. What Labanyi calls her “alienation from language” can be understood as identification with a certain mode of expression that differs from purely referential language (83). Ricarda, mysteriously also referred to as Encarna (Martín-Santos 238), incarnates the expressivity of the body in language, and her function within the novel parallels that of the “semiotic” element in language as proposed by Julia Kristeva.

Ricarda and the Semiotic

Before discussing the semiotic it will be useful to note that Dale Knickerbocker has previously shown that Kristevan concepts may be fruitfully applied to *Tiempo de silencio*, plausibly suggesting that Pedro suffers an excessive narcissistic abjection that causes him to approach all maternal figures with an exaggerated mixture of desire and disgust. Abjection is the process through which the subject defines itself through exclusion, first of the maternal body, and later of all that is considered unclean and impure by the dominant social configuration. The abject forms the boundaries of subjectivity, but simultaneously undermines its integrity: as in case of the maternal body itself, the subject cannot exist without the abject. We reject feces and decay, for instance, although they are interpenetrated with our being. In this sense, the abject is:

a threat that seems to emanate from an exorbitant outside or inside, ejected beyond the scope of the possible, the tolerable, the thinkable. It lies there, quite close, but cannot be assimilated. It beseeches, worries and fascinates desire [...]. (Kristeva, *Powers* 1)

Knickerbocker notes that this dynamic is not at play between Pedro and Ricarda, and most importantly for the purposes of this study, he develops a picture of the *chabolas* as an abject space that troubles the symbolic constructs of Spanish national identity, an idea to which we will return (22-26).

The abject maternal body is, in turn, the origin of the semiotic, defined as the discharge of bodily drives in language.

It is an emotional field, tied to the instincts, which dwells in the fissures and prosody of language rather than in the denotative meanings of words. In this sense, the semiotic opposes the symbolic, which correlates words with meaning in a stricter, mathematical sense. (Perumalil 344)

In the words of Kelly Oliver, “It is associated with rhythms and tones that are meaningful parts of language and yet do not represent or signify something” (Kristeva, *Portable* xiv).

The semiotic has its roots in the relationship of the infant with the maternal body during pre-oedipal development. The regulation of the incorporation and expulsion of nourishment and waste, first inside the womb and continuing after birth, provides a model of communication with an *other* even before the formation of the subject. After the subject is formed through abjection—first and foremost the abjection of the maternal body—the subject can enter the realm of symbolic language, traditionally associated with the father, but the semiotic continues to function alongside or within the latter, often destabilizing its verbal-logical constructions. According to Oliver, “Like a political revolution, the semiotic in language causes an upheaval of the Symbolic and the subject” (96). I want to suggest that, within the context of the novel, Ricarda embodies this bodily force in language, undermining from within repressive symbolic constructions that contributed to a pattern of passivity among broad sectors of the Spanish populace.

The narrator’s emphasis on Ricarda’s lack of symbolic mental and linguistic ability on one hand, and her corporeal and emotional superabundance on the other, is impossible to miss. She is limited to “una cierta actividad mental, no en forma de cálculo o de pensamiento, sino de coloreados fantasmas del pasado que se deslizan silenciosos” (237). A few of these images are pleasant: as a child, dancing in a procession, and showing off her beautiful hair. Overwhelmingly, however, they involve physical and emotional pain: that of her violation at the hands of a young Muecas, of giving birth, of mourning the death of her own mother and now her daughter (238). Her mental activity, as described to us, is an archive of strong emotions and bodily sensations from the past. She utters few words, and those she does utter are simple and sincere; more often she communicates through the tones and rhythms of tears and moaning.

It should be stressed that the portrayal of Ricarda in the novel is not a representation of the subtle workings of the semiotic within real language. Through a radical limitation of the portrayal of symbolic ability, her utterances are almost purely semiotic, filtered through the exaggerating lens of the narrator. In reality, the symbolic and the semiotic are interdependent elements of human language—it is only through their interplay that meaning is created. On the other hand, Ricarda's language is not completely devoid of symbolic elements. Her exoneration of Pedro depends on the transmission of basic factual information, something that would be impossible in the absence of symbolic communication. But the sincerity of her utterances is guaranteed by the dominating presence in her language of her body and those of others—especially Florita and Pedro, as we will see.

Ricarda, then, is not merely a mouthpiece for semiotically inflected language, but rather she personifies this phenomenon within the action of the novel and within its represented discourse. We might envision her struggling against the grain of discourses long calcified around symbolic structures erected for varying types of defense. Her mere existence, for example, mocks the feminization of the Spanish landscape as origin of the Spanish people, the mythical mother to which Pedro flees in defeat and surrender. Against this symbolic appropriation of the idealized maternal body is set Ricarda, who, we are to believe, is literally a “ser de tierra,” totally defined by a degraded materiality and an abject maternity (Martín-Santos 239). She represents the maternal body not as an object that exerts a fatal attraction on men, luring them to submission and self-destruction, but as a body that can both suffer and act. Although she has long been held in submission by her husband's abuse, she chooses to seek a proper burial for Florita and to exonerate Pedro, exposing Muecas to accountability for the act of incest that caused the pregnancy. In this way she is simultaneously the victim of men and the protagonist of an enterprise—unique in the novel—that is oriented toward human

freedom and dignity in semiotic defiance of repressive discourses.

As mentioned, after the death of Florita, this abject maternal body expresses itself largely through tears, tonality and rhythm.⁷ Ricarda's “ritornello incesante de ‘hija,’ ‘hija,’ ‘hija,’ ‘hija,’ ‘hija,’” turns into “runrún continuo como de motor o de cascada que pronto deja de oírse” by Perdo and Amador, their ears calibrated more to denotative, symbolic meaning (132-33). However, later we see that the insistence of the semiotic is difficult to ignore. When the authorities exhume Florita for an autopsy, Ricarda follows tirelessly, and the strident tonalities of her wailing outside of the operating room get her sent to jail, where she is questioned about the case, repeating rhythmically, “Él no fue,” and moaning in anguish for the loss her daughter. The narration does not give Ricarda's motivation for this action, instead negating various possible motives that would be connected with the symbolic realm: truth, decency, duty (241). I argue that what drives her are bodily drives—in particular, maternal (parental) instinct: she is compelled to care for her daughter even after her death. As the narrator affirms with characteristic delicacy, Ricarda keeps vigil at Florita's grave due to “algún reflejo biológico que actúa también en el perro fiel al difunto amo” (230). Hiding under this apparent derision is a vindication of the demands of the body, which are indeed shared by non-human animals. The possibility that Ricarda's parental drive is also displaced onto Pedro, as the young man who tried to save her daughter, is supported by neurological research suggesting that a parental instinct may develop in both males and females, and even in individuals who are not parents themselves (Kringelbach, et al). Thus, it is feasible that paternal instinct toward biological offspring may be transferred to another object under conditions such as those narrated in *Tiempo de silencio*.⁸ Silka Freire has noted the subtle maternal bond between Ricarda and Pedro, consummated by the fact that Ricarda “lo saca de la cárcel lo cual simboliza un nuevo nacimiento” (162). In fact, we see from early on her maternal attitude toward him in the

moment we would least expect it. Upon the death of her own daughter, she reverses the predictable pattern, the bereaved mother consoling the medical practitioner: “usted hizo lo que pudo” (131).

This corporeal drive to parental nurturing, however, turns out to be the flip side of a force that is powerfully disruptive at the discursive level. The semiotic is “a negativity introduced into the symbolic order, and [...] the transgression of that order” (Kristeva, *Revolution* 69). In the case of Ricarda, the semiotic is centered in her body, while the symbolic surrounds her on all sides: Pedro’s compulsive analyses, the high thoughts of the Ortega y Gasset figure, and the mythical-scientific discourses concerning the nature of women and the essence of the Spanish people. Although these mythical constructions have a certain corporeal orientation—they attribute social characteristics to biology and geography, reducing culture to nature—their origins are external to individual, material bodies. It is a case of the establishment of supposed essences that impose from above certain fictitious characteristics on individual bodies. It is an incursion of the symbolic into the corporeal, the mythical into the particular.

Ricarda, on the other hand, lends protagonism to the material, maternal body, which has suffered diverse symbolic appropriations within the dominant discourses. In her, this body in itself becomes the point of reference, of comparison, as other phenomena symbolize and are identified with it, as in the striking passage that explores her consciousness, memory and place in the world, immediately before she testifies that Pedro is not guilty of her daughter’s death. After a youth that offered moments of happiness, all that is left to Ricarda is:

hundirse hacia la tierra, rodear el airoso talle [...] de tierra asimilada, comida, enterrarse en grasa pobre, ser redonda, caminar a lo ancho del mundo envuelta en esa redondez que el destino otorga a las mujeres que como ella han sido entregadas a la miseria que no mata, huir delante de un ejército llegado de

no se sabe dónde, llegar a una ciudad caída de quién sabe qué estrella, rodear la ciudad, formar parte de la tierra movediza que rodea la ciudad, la protege, la hace, la amamanta, la destruye, esperar y ahora gemir. (Martín-Santos 240, emphasis added)

Here, the impoverished outskirts of a city become the threatening outer borders of a collective subjectivity, like the abject maternal body is such for an individual subjectivity. Thus, although Ricarda is said to form part of the *tierra movediza* of the *chabolas*, in reality her maternal corporeality is the model to which they conform in the passage. When Pedro gets out of jail, his chief of investigation upbraids him for “crossing over” into the abject world of the *chabolas* and thus, implicitly, for failing to respect the boundaries of a constructed collective subjectivity of respectable Spanish society (248-51). These boundaries are supported by discourses that portray as “natural” the stratification of society, emphasizing, among the poor themselves, values of submission and stoicism, and from the perspective of the upper classes, a moral and aesthetic appreciation of the heroism and “vocation for poverty” of the Spanish masses (Labanyi 59).

We have already seen how *Tiempo de silencio* attacks such ideas, as in the ironic passage in praise of the spiritual nobility of poverty considered above. Similarly, Ricarda’s extreme identification with the earth also constitutes a frontal assault on the implications of an aestheticized identification of the poor with an idealized Nature. The contrast between the description of her physical aspect, cited previously, and that of a poor *hurdana* from a passage from Unamuno’s “Las Hurdes” may be instructive in this regard. Spotted amid the rocks next to a river, the young woman is described in a hushed, reverent tone often reserved for fortuitous encounters with wildlife. Unamuno compares her to “un arbolillo silvestre que no conoce la poda,” and invokes Rousseau’s concept of a “state of nature” (144).⁹

Las Hurdes is a region that suffers extreme poverty, and the tendency Unamuno

displays here to establish a close association between impoverished people and nature—much like heroicizing them—removes any ethical obligation to the poor; neither heroes nor nature need help from anyone else. In contrast, the grotesque realist portrait of Ricarda in *Tiempo de silencio* provokes a mixture of shock and compassion. Like the *moza esbelta*, who is compared to a young tree, Ricarda, composed of earth, is also *un espectáculo* to be contemplated, but of a far more disconcerting nature. In a very direct way, when she leaves home to seek a burial for Florita her foray into the public sphere—in all her startling physical and mental degradation—marks the eruption of the physical necessity of the poor into the wider society, violently undermining discourses about the dignity of poverty.

Conclusion

Ricarda's corporeal insistence, then, threatens dominant symbolic systems of discourse in a number of ways. As we have seen, in her baseline mode of being, as she is first represented to us, Ricarda is a *reductio ad absurdum* of certain discourses current in postwar Spain. In addition to undermining ideas about the dignity of poverty, she implodes the feminine ideal put forth by the *Sección Femenina* by showing that the total abnegation required of women leads to nothing less than their complete animalization, a state that was abhorred by Falangist ideology.

Her bodily drives, in turn, also lead her to resist these oppressive discourses in a more active way, as in her decision to abandon the private sphere that had become naturalized as the space of women (Nash 30). Her corporeal allegiance is to her daughter's body and to Pedro—who becomes a surrogate son—not to her lawfully wedded husband, to whom every social force says she must submit. Muecas's incestuous domination of his family serves as a grotesque condensation of the valorization of complete patriarchal control, on one hand, and the obsession with motherhood, on the other. As Knickerbocker notes, "in Muecas'

household, the law of the father operates as Muecas controls his females' discourse" (21). After Florita dies, the younger daughter screams that Muecas was responsible, but he silences her with a fierce beating (Martín-Santos 134). He later tries to protect himself by arranging a clandestine burial for Florita (159). But there is a law of the mother as well, centered "in the mother's body," which is "what mediates the symbolic law organizing social relations and becomes the ordering principle of the semiotic" (Kristeva, *Revolution* 27). Originating in the relationship between mother and child, this law drives Ricarda to care for the body of her dead child, which for her consists of giving her a Christian burial. The same drive leads her to exonerate Pedro, which in turn facilitates—in a way that seems incidental but cannot be insignificant—the implication of Muecas. Ricarda violates the sanctity of the patriarchal nuclear family by leaving the private sphere, by abandoning her husband to the consequences of his actions, and by establishing a maternal relation with a person unrelated by blood; a person, indeed, who has participated in an abortion of the tragic fruit of a family structure marked by exaggerated patriarchal domination.¹⁰ Ricarda's support for Pedro flies in the face of a social system that needs to punish him not only for his participation in the abortion, a grave crime in light of the emphasis placed on social and demographical reproduction, but also for his transgression of the discursive boundaries that close off the poor from the rest of society.

These semiotic disruptions of the discourses built through symbolic language to protect a stable sense of national identity, committed by Ricarda, a strikingly unique character who receives special treatment by the narrator, suggest an opening for a vision of social change, despite the fact that things do not end well for Pedro. Indeed, it is perhaps significant that the would-be hero ends up crushed by the weight of converging discourses that urge him to submit to the security and repression of the paternal state,

while the most pitiful and oppressed figure is able to achieve real—if limited—gains, channeling to her needs the capillary flows of power that move through her, to remember Foucault's terms. In giving expression to her bodily drives, she defies her own constitution and construction as a passive subject, diverting her own small tributary away from the circuits by which power is exercised to perpetuate popular submission. Her move even seems to be capable of starting a chain reaction, as her rescue of Pedro, at least momentarily, jolts him out of his pathological acceptance of his "guilt" for a crime he did not commit. He only fails to save himself in the end because he is still under the sway of fatalistic discourses of stoicism and resignation: the novel ends praising Saint Lawrence of Rome, who, being roasted over hot coals, supposedly cheerfully asked to be flipped over when he was well-done on one side.

However, it is important to recognize that Ricarda's access to power also comes from what she knows, and thus to reflect on the types of knowledge she possesses and those she does not. Quite simply, she knows Muecas is guilty and Pedro is not; the narrator, of course, is exaggerating when he defines her role as "no saber nada." When he elaborates further on what she does not know, it becomes clear that she, very plausibly for an uneducated person of that place and time, is ignorant about basic scientific and religious principles, but finally we also learn that her ignorance includes "no saber alternar con las personas" (241). Indeed, the first time Ricarda appears in the novel, during Pedro's initial visit to the *chabolas*, Muecas immediately apologizes for her, explaining that "la pobre no sabe tratar" (59). "No saber alternar" means:

no saber decir: «Cuánto bueno por aquí», no saber decir: «Buenos días tenga usted, señor doctor.» Y sin embargo, haberle dicho: «Usted hizo todo lo que pudo.» Y repetir obstinadamente, «Él no fue.» (241)

The opposition established between "normal" social interaction and the way Ricarda uses language is striking: her utterances are acts of consolation and protection, motivated by the parental obligation she feels toward Pedro; they are based on a knowledge tied to bodies and to pain. "Alternar," on the other hand, covers empty formulas of politeness, but could also mean, in light of the common patterns of language use in *Tiempo de silencio*, the destructive discourses that people latch onto to dominate others and themselves.¹¹ Her ignorance of these ways of communicating seems to be the determining factor that makes her arguably the only decent human being in the novel; it is what allows her the honesty of a language grounded in the body, at the same time that her body itself constitutes a language, or an anti-language, that undermines the disembodied discourses *about bodies* that colonize the material bodies of living people.

Notes

¹ The best example is Michael Ugarte, whose work will be discussed later in this study.

² See Bakhtin 324-27 for a discussion of such "double-voiced" discourse. One likely source of the discourse appropriated here is Miguel de Unamuno; compare his tone in "Las Hurdes" (to which this study will return): "¡Hay que ver lo heroicamente que han trabajado aquellos pobres hurdanos para arrancar un misérrimo sustento a una tierra ingrata!" (136).

³ Here we may be reminded of the carefully managed self-presentation of the mother of Pedro's friend Matías, who constitutes an excellent counterpoint to Ricarda with respect to their relation to normative femininity (147-50).

⁴ In fact, the demands placed on women were literally impossible to satisfy, since childbirth, defined as a woman's primary duty, inevitably involved the impurity and degradation associated with the materiality of the body. Gallego Méndez cites the recommendations of a cardinal that a new mother should wait outside to be sprinkled with holy water before being allowed to enter the church (166).

⁵ Here I am thinking of Foucault's notion of how the management of sex serves both "the objective of disciplining the body and that of regulating populations" (The History of Sexuality 145-46).

⁶ Of doxa, Bourdieu writes,

Every established order tends to produce (to very different degrees and with very different means) the naturalization of its own arbitrariness [...]. [I]n the extreme case, that is to say, when there is a quasi-perfect correspondence between the objective order and the subjective principles of organization, [...] the natural and social world appears as self-evident. This experience we shall call doxa, so as to distinguish it from an orthodox or heterodox belief implying awareness and recognition of the possibility of different or antagonistic beliefs. (164)

⁷ We have seen that tonality and rhythm are major channels of semiotic expression. In "Stabat Mater," talking about representations of the Virgin Mary, Kristeva points to "milk and tears" as the "metaphors of nonspeech, of a 'semiotics' that verbal communication does not account for" (Tales 249). It is important to note that she writes "semiotics" here in the plural, seeming to refer more generally to a signifying practice, but surely this is an area where "semiotics" and "the semiotic" approach each other.

⁸ These conditions include the death of the biological offspring, an experiential link between the biological offspring and the "surrogate" (Pedro tries to save Florita's life), similarity in age, et cetera.

⁹ Junto al río, entre las piedras, la moza que estaba a macerar el lino, se lavaba las ágiles piernas. Y era un espectáculo de paz y de sosiego. Una moza esbelta, firme como un arbolillo silvestre que no conoce la poda. Me acordaba de Rousseau y de sus teorías, tan en boga en un tiempo, sobre el estado de naturaleza (144, emphasis added).

¹⁰ On the question of abortion, see Mir Curcó (while she focuses on Cataluña, her study bears on the question at the national level) (155-64). For a broader social background focusing on the war years and before, see Nash, "Ordenamiento."

¹¹ Along these lines, Katarzyna Beilin, who fruitfully analyzes Ricarda's animality, affirms that it is her "honesty" that becomes "an uncalculated interruption of hegemonic discourses," while also noting that these interventions are both grounded in the body and marked by pain (119-20).

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