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Catalan Review is the premier international scholarly journal devoted to all aspects of Catalan culture. By Catalan culture is understood all manifestations of intellectual and artistic life produced in the Catalan language or in the geographical areas where Catalan is spoken. Catalan Review has been in publication since 1986.

Catalan Review és la primera revista internacional dedicada a tots els aspectes de la cultura catalana. Per la cultura catalana s'entén totes les manifestacions de la vida intel·lectual i artística produïda en llengua catalana o en les zones geogràfiques on es parla català. Catalan Review es publica des de 1986.

The Unconscious in the Novels of Mercè Rodoreda
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Catalan Review, Vol. II, number 2 (1987) p. 101-117

THE UNCONSCIOUS IN THE NOVELS OF MERCÈ RODOREDA

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In a paper that I presented at the last NACS Conference, I stated that, from *La plaça del Diamant* on, the novels of Mercè Rodoreda could be defined properly as psychoanalytical, since the Unconscious determines the thematic development and the formal structure in all of them. On that occasion, I tried to demonstrate that the leading and overwhelming theme in *La plaça del Diamant* is the sense of guilt (and the correlative inferiority complex) resulting from an event transformed into myth that is at the source of the Western cultural tradition: the Paradise, the Fall, the Punishment, the loss of Immortality. At the same time, I showed that its narrative is a verbalization of memory aimed at «retrieving the energy of the libido in order to make it accessible to the consciousness and put it at the service of the reality» (Freud).¹ The physical and moral traits of the characters, their deeds, gestures, words, memories and unvoluntary associations as well as dreams and conscious fantasies that man draws out of collective mythology, must be seen as «symptoms» or overt behaviour of an underlying reality unavailable to consciousness and as elements that shape at the same time the narrative of these works and determine the idiosyncrasies of their style. The analysis of the novels following *La plaça del Diamant* which I intend to deal with here confirms this statement and reveals the existence of the same thematic nucleus in all of them.

¹ I have extensively exposed these views in my «Vers una lectura psicoanalítica de *La plaça del Diamant*», *Quaderns de literatura ibèrica e iberoamericana*, Milan, 2 (march 1984), 74-96, and «El mito de la culpa en *La plaça del Diamant*», *Cuadernos Hispanoamericanos*, 420 (june 1985), 117-140.

" EL CARRER DE LES CAMÈLIES "

Rodoreda writes about this work as follows: «The childhood of Cecília, I don't know why, inspired me a chapter of a novel about another family where the garden had already taken on life: *The Children*».

In this chapter seventeen of the first part of *Mirall trencat*, the reader attends a mimetic representation of the psychological process and mechanism of the Oedipus complex. It is the focal point of the drama, the soul of the novel.

Behind a curtain of red velvet, which suggests the barrier that separates the world of children from that of adults, and which symbolically alludes to the sexual deflowering with which infantile erotism turns into object-oriented erotism, Sofia's three children live the anguish of a repressed desire. The two older ones, wearing the clothing of the parent of their respective sex, and miming his/her gestures, undergo a process of identification. Through this, they show their desire to supplant their parents in their possession of the opposite sex. In this marginal and hidden space, the three siblings live the culminating moment of a common experience which has repeatedly appeared previously in the narrative. Maria loves her father and, by means of unquestionable symptoms, displays her unconscious hatred for her mother/rival (for example, playing with her grandmother's knives «to kill mom»). Ramon loves his mother and hates his father, as seen in his castration desire (cutting lizards' tails and chopping off tree branches), in his imaginative potentiation of his own sex (urinating vigorously and ostentatiously into the fountain in the garden) and in his removal of the father-figure by tearing off the head of the male doll in the doll's house who looks so much like Eladi. Jaume, the youngest, also lives his maternal love in Oedipal terms: faced with a hostile mother, he transfers to his grandmother the love that the former refuses him.

At this point, one can understand the significance of the murder which occurs briefly in the same chapter. Without knowing

it, Ramon and Maria hate in Jaume his being the fruit of a betrayal: that of the father or mother respectively with the detested rival.

The story of Cecília is born and grows out of this missing process. Mutilated psychologically by the non-existence of the Oedipus complex, and by the lack of the parental identification necessary to form her personality, Cecília remains *fixed* in an infantile pre-Oedipal stage which does not allow her to live out the sexuality of an adult in a completely normal way. This is what her self-contemplation in the mirror seems to be saying, after realizing that Maria-Cinta is the lover of her foster-father. The narcissism inherent in this image presupposes a double fixation: that of sexuality at the auto-erotic stage and that of her identification with the maternal figure, replaced here by Maria-Cinta since her foster-mother is the clear usurper of the natural one.

Thus, the object-oriented love which unfolds after the episode of the mirror reveals a reality that consciousness ignores: by identifying herself with the Maria-Cinta of her childhood, Cecília's erotic drive towards the male becomes a regression to her childhood, a search for the father in order to accomplish her frustrated Oedipus complex.

From her fixation and psychological involution, come Cecília's unhappiness and also her privilege: her ignorance of the sense of guilt inherent in the incest prohibition, implicit in the Oedipus complex. I cannot elaborate here on this peculiar phenomenon of the human Psyche: it is sufficient to say that clinical psychopathology finds in people like Cecília — prostitutes, delinquents and other social «outcasts», which, like her, are abandoned children (the so-called weak-willed psychopaths) — both an inconsistent will, and the lack of guilty feelings, which is what makes them indifferent to social norms and insensitive to the principles which, from outside of conscious, rule human conduct.

Thanks to her mutilation and personal drama, Cecília ignores, therefore, this Guilt which contaminates the pure innoc-

ence of the socially privileged children of *Mirall trençat*. The latter live out their eroticism in a garden which is the Garden of Eden and also the Garden of the Fall — the world of adults which has become individual and collective unconscious — and in a house — society — ridden by remorse and anguish. Cecília, trying to fill in her unsatisfied and unsatisfiable emptiness, jumps over the fence and, with an instinctive subversive gesture, leaves society in favor of the uncontaminated purity of the periphery, of the «formless», of marginality, as they are at the fringe of the conventions and obstacles of established morality. Her gesture is an outburst of psychological and social freedom, to which society replies with condemnation and punishment (the mother — moral conscience — punishes gravely her first escape). Thanks to her privileged situation, on the other hand, Cecília represents the primigenial being, previous to the Lost Paradise, innocence exempted even from the concept or intuition of guilt; she is the Eve previous to the sin of Concupiscentia whom man treasures in the innermost recesses of his soul as an image of blessedness and immortality.

Cecília's gesture, however, is soon revealed as mere impotence. The society which she had succeeded in escaping traps her in its inexorable net of lies, hypocrisy, and neurosis. Thus, through marginality, Rodoreda leads us to the core of the social: to the back, to «the maids' entrance», hidden behind a façade of respectability and decorum.

The bourgeoisie, which rides around in cars, goes to the Liceu and frequents elegant cafes, and the petit bourgeois that mimics the gestures and the rites of the upper middle class, all pass through Cecília's small room (or through the apartment or small villa set up «especially» for her), closing and bolting it carefully as if it was a den of thieves. A respectable man does not shut his own sin or evil in a brothel. What he closes in is his own sense of guilt and shame. In this prison, in the midst of garlands and lace, he lives out the dissociation of a split conscience due to a social morality that has created a manichean and neurotic antithesis between «honest» love and sinful love, between the conjugal bed of

repression and frustration, and the bed of the prostitute, where he badly tries to satisfy his desire for love. Such a dissociation is translated by a myth that dates back to the origins of our ethical and cultural tradition: that of the Mother-Virgin. It is no accident that it is one of the mysteries that Cecília is unable to understand. Her instinctive revulsion for institutionalized love expresses, then, her rejection of these disintegration and alienation.

Before a whole and naked Cecília (integrity and innocence that precede the dissociation), society is stripped of the mask of normality that it puts up before the world, revealing its psychological flaws as a consequence of a civilization that does not allow sexuality and love to exist in complete harmony. All the men that Cecília knows, all of them, from the first to the last (and I insist on the last), live prostitution as a luxury and as a shame. All of them reveal a pathology that reflects an unresolved sexual-familial conflict, that shows itself into several different forms, often comical and grotesque, but that univocally betray an inferiority complex and the need to dominate.

With the creation of Cecília, Rodoreda is not only saying that purity and goodness are to be found where society sees sin and perdition. She shows the equivocalness, or the bad faith, of those who, despite considering legal marriage an ethical and social ideal, bring about and tolerate the prostitution which they themselves condemn. This safety-valve which leaves the system intact, guarantees the existence of a society which is repressed and sick, always at the verge of its own destruction, and which, by degrading the other and reducing love to a commercial act, fools itself with the illusion of dominating the world and of fulfilling, even if in a distorted manner, that part of the Ego which it despises.

In the preadamic and uncontaminated world of the shacks, in that world which knows nothing of the Guilt, Cecília finds goodness, generosity, and passion of sex and of heart. There she knows the plenitude of love and happiness which the unconscious manifests through a profound and archaic myth: the mortal moon and the immortal sun uniting in a projection of human sexuality

and mortality. However, the earth, which rolls on to infinity beyond lunar death, is nothing more than a verbal figuration of the desire for immortality, expressed by the return to the Origins — Paradise before the Fall — and by other symptoms and symbols which bear the same meaning. Her childhood pyromania, her suicidal impulse, her maternal instinct, her desire never to come out of the water again just in the penultimate chapter, the cross of fire and water that shines at the breast of Maria-Cinta (and, naturally, at her own), all express her ultimate desire to return to matter (Mater/Materia), to the amniotic liquid, to the Tree of Life and Death, to the primordial elements, symbolic doubles of the same archetype: the maternal Imago of rebirth and of the Eternal Return.

Cecília, then, represents the primordial Whole, the ancient innocent human being which civilized man has lost in the dawn of his way and towards which he turns incessantly in the form of a longing for lost immortality.

" M I R A L L T R E N C A T "

In *Mirall trencat*, terms are identical to those in *El carrer de les Camèlies*, but they are inverted. What in the work we have just examined is prostitution, illegitimate love, love *tout court*, here is to be found at the margin. The elements that are peripheral to *El carrer de les Camèlies* — society and more concretely the bourgeoisie as an emblem of Western civilization —, here become the center. *Mirall trencat* is, then, the story of the bourgeoisie, made up by a façade of respectability, normality, and decorum, and a hidden substance that leads inevitably to the brothel to the maids' entrance, to the equivocal theaters of the Parallel. Consequently, it is the story of the cultural, moral, and psychological dissociation we saw in the previous novel. Sense of guilt and inferiority complex are still the mechanisms of a neurotic behavior which fakes the appearance of normality.

All the characters of *Mirall trençat*, at some point or the other in their lives, follow the dictates of instinct and desire, regardless of the laws that govern society, which condemn sex as mere libidinal satisfaction and sanctify it in its reproductive function within the institutionalized state of matrimony. Nevertheless social morality, internalized as moral conscience and Super-ego, soon brings about an interior obstacle to the fulfilment of a desire that appears as a transgression. Teresa will always see in her son Jesús the objectification of a guilt that she would like to erase from her memory, becoming in this the embryo of a guilt feeling which will haunt her until the last minute; Eladi manifests, in his voyeuristic tendency, his moderately sadistic behavior and his attraction for prostitutes and maids, the guilt due to a sexuality which he feels as a betrayal of his mother; Salvador feels the weight of guilt for the purely mental infidelity which he is committing against his legal wife; Ramon and Maria would abandon themselves to a natural and innocent love, to pure instinct, if the law of the adults did not trouble a state of primeval grace by rendering sexuality and incest a sin, and overwhelm their innocent soul with the ancestral burden of Guilt.

The moral conscience and the distortion inherent in a culture that has diverted its libido into the values of money and prestige, lead all the characters to direct their lives into the ways of legitimacy and convention, without entirely renouncing their desires. Like Cecília's clients, they live love as transgression and shame, on the fringe of a life full of frustration and conjugal dullness, full of hate and scorn, resentment, interest and revenge. They live out their sinful love in the shut room of the brothel, in the back. The concessions that they make to the heart do not compromise the stability of the system or the dignity of its façade. But their submission to the laws which are contrary to nature, and their enslavement to interest and comfort, pays the ultimate price of their own mental sanity and, in the final analysis, of their own happiness. Their interpersonal relationship, as before in the confrontation with Cecília, reveal the kind and intensity of their neurosis.

Teresa's guilt-complex regarding the illegitimacy of her sexual relationships, and the compromises to which she had to subject her conscience, literally crosses the whole work as leading theme from which, like secondary ramifications, other conflicts sprout and interweave, dictated by interest and other guilt feelings. Teresa's guilt complex, taking the form of self-punishment through paralysis and through shutting herself up inside her room as in an expiatory prison, unmasked at the same time by a troubling question («am I bad?»), lies heavily like a curse upon the family and their inner events. Her positive counterpoint, like Cecília earlier, is Maria, dressed in white in a white room, like Colometa in the dance before knowing Quimet.

Maria goes back to being Eve before the Fall, sex without any conception or intuition of guilt, exactly in the same way as primitive imagination has brought together in the myth of the Virgin Mary: it is the fusion of what our culture conceives as an antithesis. The union of Ramon and Maria becomes, in effect, similar to the union of Cecília with Andreu «in the open». I say sexual union without adding «symbolical», because in infantile and archaic consciousness the symbolic gesture is the real one. «Did you know that your eyes and mine are made of water? It would be nice if the water of your eyes and mine mingled... I would become you, and you me. Would you like that?» (XII). It will be the adults, as I was saying, who will transform an innocent act into guilt through censorship, degrading it to the level of the «ugly things» of senyoreta Rosa: «all this filth that they have inserted inside». The myth of Paradise and the Fall enters, thus, the innocent collective consciousness as a heritage which is passed down from one generation to another, carrying with it, the concepts of Evil, of Corruption and of Death. Here, as in *La plaça del Diamant*, flies and mosquitoes and the rat of the last chapter express remorse and the consequences of divine punishment — loss of immortality — inflicted on the sin of Concupiscence.

Nostalgia for the lost Garden brings Maria, nevertheless, to accomplish a gesture which shows her desire to return to the To-

tality and Harmony of the origins. Her crucifixion on the laurel, a tree doubly eternal because of its ciclicity and everlastingness renews the sacrifice of the Innocent on the Tree of Knowledge, which, with Death, becomes the Tree of eternal Life. After the unconscious has brought to the surface of consciousness a sequence of memories connected with guilt — recriminations and prohibitions of senyoreta Rosa, the grandmother, the Japanese chest, the diamond brooch — Maria, repeating the rite which condenses the moral history of the West, projects the ancient longing of humanity to return to innocent happiness and retrieve lost Eternity.

“ Q U A N T A , Q U A N T A G U E R R A ”

Like Cecília in *El carrer de les Camèlies*, the protagonist of this work, in entering adolescence, jumps the fence of the garden and abandons the protection of her home. Both accomplish an act of rebellion as they free themselves from the prison of «sadness of their lives at the mercy of adults» liberating themselves from the coercions and conventions of the social world. Their escape is a gesture of liberation. Both of them undergo a journey through the Unconscious, the former through the individual, the latter through the Collective one.

Unlike Cecília, Adrià Guinart leaves behind her a fulfilled childhood and takes a road without any apparent concrete end or goal. Cecília returns from her voyage with a delusion and an emptiness, Adrià with a fruit in his hands and a plenitude; that of the knowledge of the essence of the Universe and of his own existence.

Despite its transcendental symbolism, the story of Cecília has a real and concrete life of its own which is missing in *Quanta, quanta guerra*. In this work, Rodoreda takes a further step towards the treatment of the Psyche as an entity in its own right. The contents break away from their frame, like the soul from the body. Here, and even more in *La mort i la primavera*, the Unconscious

becomes purely mental projection, collective mythology, which feeds, like the source of the river, the individual Unconscious of its characters and of its readers.

Apart from the setting of the paternal home, the geography of the places we see is a universal landscape. The characters are mythical and abstract: *the* house in the woods, *the* tree, *the* girl of the river, *the* house by the sea... Because of the definite article, things are categories, essentiality; they are the universal landscape which we carry inside us.

On the contrary, the placing of the hero in his anagraphical space and time is exact and precise, and remains defined in the beautiful lesson of sacred history that opens the novel. The elements we have already seen come to surface again: the Paradise of the origins, the Sin, the Fall, the Punishment, the Law, the Forgiveness and the Redemption. Inscribed in the cultural tradition of the West, Adrià carries in his heart the burden of disintegration and death which are the consequences of the Fall. The story of Adrià Guinart is the history of the cultural and moral tradition of the West that we carry within us.

The life of the protagonist, typical and paradigmatic, is composed of three phases, corresponding to those of human life: childhood, adolescence, and virile adulthood. It is the story of an evolution and a growth. In the first stage, under the paternal roof, the Oedipus phase unfolds, as is shown in his identification with the father figure and his possessive and exclusive desire for the mother: «Hand in hand with my father who was tall and good, I used to walk straight as a skittle. I don't know why girls made me angry. They stole away mothers' love» (I, 29).

The overcoming of the Oedipus stage, rather, the renunciation and repression of the incestuous desire, is indicated by his leaving the house, when he finally cuts the umbilical cord which still tied him to his mother and childhood. Behind him, Adrià leaves plenitude and happiness, as is signified in the figure of his father carrying him as a child which he sees at the moment of undertaking the journey to the unknown.

From this moment on, Adrià *is* (not represents) the myth of the journeying hero. His walking is a thirst for knowledge, his wandering is vision, contemplation, knowledge. Knowledge of what? Of himself and of the world, because, as the man in the house by the sea teaches, «every person is the mirror of the universe. Of God». By means of contemplating the world, Adrià will at the same time think about himself, will know the essence of his human nature; he will understand that the world and God are entities that man carries within him. The search for Totality is a path that leads to the very center of our being.

It is a very old aspiration of his which explains the significance of the angel, or archangel, which everyone sees in him. He has shown this longing at the end of the first section of the first chapter:

The day we studied the picture of the crucifixion, as soon as I arrived at the field of carnations, I ran from one side to the other, I stretched upwards, as high as I could, on tiptoe, to hear the stars which were saying poor little thing, poor little thing, he doesn't have wings... (I, 29)

The figure of Christ (the boy who at twelve leaves his parents for the mission that is going to end at the Tree of the Cross) awakens in the child the desire for an undefined Absolute which he senses *at the very limit* of things. It is the desire repeatedly expressed in the projection of totality par excellence: to be or to become a tree. The field of carnations, field of flesh and blood, seems to suggest above all that the Eternal is in the world and that the Promised Land, far from attainable through a beat of a wing, requires sacrifice and the strength of conquest. Man, after all, has to be measured with his humanity: that is the meaning of Samson's cut hair, with which the child identifies.

In the world — in himself, since the Universe is a projection of the Libido — Adrià directs his steps towards the deepest fountains of Being, towards the Immortal enjoyed in a preadamical mythical age that conscience can only conceive as maternal Imago. The erotic tension directed at first towards the mother, is now geared

towards the primeval Eve, who characterizes the post-Oedipal stage of the protagonist and his entrance into the object oriented erotism of the adult.

This new tension, however, is not fulfilment: it is desire. For this reason Eva, an almost androgynous figure, as if expressing the totality of ancient gods, will never be completely possessed. Adrià finds her in the water, in a double image, one framed by the other (water/mother), but she escapes from his fingers, slippery as a fish. He is only to see her again, dead by the lush tree, once he has killed the Terrible Mother, an embodiment of the dissociated image of the Virgin/Whore (see the scapulary with its frightening face) that in the history of our civilization has splitted the primeval Unity.

In his inner journey towards an internalized Absolute, Adrià knows the good and evil of his soul as an undefined projection of the Good and Evil of our origins. Sacred History is repeated endlessly because man carries engraved in his soul the history of mankind, which is a history of Death and Life, Punishment and Forgiveness. War, thus, is a simple manifestation of Evil, Time and Death following the Fall. It is a replica of the Dead Sea, of Cain's crime, of the universal flood and of the crucifixion revised in the lesson of Sacred History, in other words, in the collective historical memory.

From this negativity, however, comes the great nostalgia for the Origins which the child's uplifted arms expressed: regret of the Garden of Eden, of the God that we were but have ceased to be. For these reasons the images of death mentioned carry their positive counterpoints: Moses' Rod, Noah's Arch, the rainbow, the Cross of Resurrection. After destruction and regeneration through the purging fire which sweeps the forest that has born witness to the consumation of the crime; beyond the river of Time, of Destruction and of Death, Adrià contemplates the upsurging white horse of victory and the temple made of angels, the new Jerusalem (our *mother* church), through which the unconscious, once more, projects the Whole in maternal Imago.

With this symbolism which unifies opposites (God/Devil) and resolves the manichaeic dualism of our ethical tradition in a superior Unity, Adrià reaches the essence of his being. He comprehends that Evil has its beneficial function, that Sin, after all, is *felix culpa*, and that Cain is the angel which God has made into the fallen one so as to guide him and lead him to eternal happiness.

Having acquired true knowledge, Adrià-Cain, like the sun that rises in the horizon while the story comes to an end, relinquishes in the depth of the water the knife of temporality and sexuality, to dive into the womb of the Great Mother that has called him in a dream from the innermost part of his conscious. The cyclical image of the Sun with which the book opens to the greatest hope condenses the significance of both an itinerary and an aspiration: that of an Absolute without dualities or contradictions which, like the Mother, may become a never-ending source of eternal Life.

“ L A M O R T I L A P R I M A V E R A ”

La mort i la primavera is the story of an inner landscape and of a cosmogony; it is the objectification of a symbol which man has carried engraved in his heart since ancient times. Being pure projection of soul, whether myth or dream, it is landscape outside time and space. The narrative is pure Psychism, unconscious fantasy, soul without body, as the epigraph from Ronsard with which Rodoreda opens the book expresses vividly: «Ceste voix sans corps qui rien ne sçaurait taire».

If Adrià still has a name and a place, the protagonist of *La mort i la primavera* dissolves in his being the primitive man present in civilized man throughout time. The concept «man is the mirror of the Universe» and the world is energy (psychic energy) — the lesson of the man of the house by the sea in *Quanta, quanta guerra* — becomes objective and independent symbol, like a cry-

tal that nature has formed over time and suddenly presents in its most absolute perfection and purity.

The steep mountain, the river, the village, the slaughterhouse, the forest of the dead: we have here the cosmogony of an unconscious fantasy and a conflict: again, the Oedipus complex.

The imposing mountain is, undoubtedly, a symbol of feminine sexuality: it is the Mother, the Origin, the navel of the world, as testified by its verticality and height, which transform it in a doublet of the cyclical Tree and of Wholeness. But it is also evidenced by the anatomical slit from which, like a serpent, rather, serpent become water current, originates the river of life in which we find our hero submerged when the action begins. The double peak created by the slit which parts the mountain from top to bottom, suggests an ambivalent androgyny. At the very top, in fact, there is the lord, the Father who the brothers of the origins have removed, with the crime, from society, from consciousness. But the Oedipus crime, even though suppressing the tyrant and making possible the theoretical fulfilment of incestuous desire, has brought about new problems. The paternal imago, even if reduced to ghost and impotence, impends over the individual and collective conscience as remorse and punishment. In the inaccessible castle, that nobody manages to approach (who would dare take the place of the Father?), mankind locks its sense of guilt and its fear together with the prohibition of instinctivity and incest.

At the extreme opposite of the origin, at the end of a linearity that is temporality, eternity in its constant becoming (serpent/water), one finds the End embodied in the Forest, or better, in the trees of the forest, living cemeteries, tombs which speak of the cradle and the warmth of the mother.

A primitive and archaic roughness distinguishes the collectivity that gathers in the «village». It could well be said that Rodoreda is writing a historical book: she grasps and rekindles that transcendental moment in the history of humankind when man, barely leaving behind the animal realm, becomes the «primitive horde». In the village, huddled at the rim of a rock above the wat-

er abyss, the consciousness projects terror, since the wrath and the power of the Father could annihilate the community born of the crime. With the appeasing rite of throwing the boy into the water, the Son sacrifices his own life on behalf of the collective survival.

And while the Father is chained high above without abandoning his predominant position in the conscience, and the men of the slaughterhouse act out a ritual which expresses their renunciation of sexual desire (the internalization of an external prohibition) once again, the desire of supplanting the Father to possess his object of love recurs. This desire is projected by the mind in the self-sacrifice of the father in the tree of death and with the consummation of incest.

The sexual union (final pages of the second part of the book) occurs, not between two bodies, but rather between two shadows, and is inscribed in the coordinates of time and eternity, a river «always the same» and a moon which «is dying». Neither shadows are euphemism, nor cosmic myth is poetic image. The shadow is pure instinct, the union is pure desire. But the world is born of a desire: «And we had a baby exactly like my wife». Man could not imagine creation other than as maternal Imago.

Soon comes the recrimination of this instinctive and innocent act of incest. A few lines later:

[*the woman with the tresses*] said that what I should have had was a bit of shame and that when my father died I should have been given a beating from time to time instead of ending up, disgracefully, she said, getting into bed with my step-mother (3, I, 83)

Society has taken possession of the ancestral prohibition and punishes the transgression. «The village» thus becomes moral conscience and Super-ego. The consciousness, repressing desire, begins to direct the erotic drives towards a person of the other sex. It is, properly speaking, the beginning of the hero's adolescence.

Nevertheless, the drive towards the sexual object hides a re-

gret. His love for «the girl» differs little from that of Adrià Guinart towards his Eva. It represents the post-Oedipal stage, as these words suggest:

I had never walked like this with anyone, because with my wife we had walked hand in hand and I had put my arm round her shoulders and she held me round the waist... *but it was a childish thing*; whereas the girl in the water, very close to me, took my arm with two hands and laughed (4, V, 152)

But «the faceless girl» — the desire for the girl — appears inside the water, inside the totality of being, and an unknown voice that comes from within, prevents the sexual consumation. The narrator speaks of a «bond» which I interpret as the umbilical cord that has never been completely cut because of his longing for the return to the mother. This seems to be proven by the fact that it is only now that the boy looks at himself in the mirror and becomes aware both of his being and non-being, that is, of the dissolution of his consciousness due to the aggressive invasion of the unconscious. The life impulse which drives the Ego towards a differentiated sexuality recedes in favor of the death instinct, which leads him towards the pre-sexual and fetal stage, towards inorganic matter, towards the origin of life. His steps, in fact, take him to the Forest, to the Tree, to the Mother.

The death instinct, this extraordinary intuition of Freud at the limit of paradox, finds in the myth of the trees of the dead its formal manifestation and the proof of its psychological existence. Rodereda recasts here freely the recorded ancestral custom in some Celtic groups, of opening up a tree (*Totenbaum*) and using it as a tomb for its owner. The variations on this myth let me affirm that the Tree of Death in which the protagonist sacrifices himself with a dagger condenses a polysemic image the various symbols which in previous works had represented the Eternal Return. The self-sacrifice of Christ, the Tree of the Cross, superimposes and fuses (as the Judeo-Christian heritage in the common trunk of human mythology which feeds the collective Unconscious) with the

myth of the tomb/cradle, of the uterine cavity of the *Totenbaum*. Not only does the boy open a cross in the tree, but he also removes from within a gigantic seed, the fruit of the womb (God becoming man inside the Virgin's womb), to replace it with his own Ego in his desire to enter anew into the Mother and assure himself of rebirth.

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