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Portrait of a Writer: Visual and Verbal Connections between the Art and Literature of Mercè Rodoreda

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Catalan Review, Vol. XII, number 2 (1998), p. 21-35

PORTRAIT OF A WRITER: VISUAL AND VERBAL CONNECTIONS BETWEEN THE ART AND LITERATURE OF MERCÈ RODOREDÀ

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In March of 1991, the estate of Catalan novelist Mercè Rodoreda exhibited for the first time eighty-nine original watercolors, collages and drawings at Altarriba Art in Calldetenes, near Barcelona. Rodoreda, who is much better known as an author, wrote one of the most important Catalan novels of the twentieth century, *La plaça del Diamant*. Her other novels, *Aloma*, *El carrer de les Camèlies*, *Mirall trencat*, *Jardí vora el mar* and *Quanta, quanta guerra...*, along with various collections of short stories place Rodoreda firmly in the canons of Catalan literature. However, the discovery of a large body of artwork by Rodoreda offers revealing insight into her literary works as well as into her struggle with isolation while living exiled in Geneva during the 1940s and early 50s when she produced all of her artwork and not one piece of literature.

Rodoreda's artwork has surprised and delighted the Catalan artistic and literary communities. Editor and critic Josep M. Castellet and Francesc Miralles, art critic for the newspaper *La Vanguardia*, overflowed with praise for the high artistic quality of the collection.¹ Both influential critics spoke at the inauguration of the exhibit in 1991 and presented Rodoreda's artwork as an important key to understanding her psychological struggle with such issues as exile, maternity and the negative effects of the Spanish Civil War on Catalan artistic production in general. The majority of the paintings are untitled and without dates yet their content affirms that Rodoreda succeeded in documenting a difficult time of her exile through visual art instead of with the written word.

Surprisingly, Rodoreda's paintings, drawings and collages had never before been publicly shown and remain unknown to many familiar with her narrative. She frequently gave away her artwork to family members on special occasions but upon analyzing the detail and repetition of theme and image in her art it becomes obvious that painting and drawing were more than a hobby to fill up her spare time. But perhaps even more surprising than the late emergence of her art is the ignorance surrounding this aspect of Rodoreda in Catalan literary

¹. See article in *El Nou* and articles by Piñol, Palomo and Olivier.

and artistic circles. Even after the exhibition in 1991 there have been no articles or scholarly work produced evaluating the possible connection between her art and writing. Maria Josep Balsach published a short article in *Revista de Girona* in 1993 that links Rodoreda stylistically to Paul Klee and suggests that her haunting figures may have anticipated "estats d'ànim de personatges" in her literary works (Balsach 85). Yet she fails to develop a thematic or ideological connection between the two. Anna Palomo wrote in 1991 that even though she didn't know Rodoreda's literary work very well that "we cannot try to relate it with her pictorial work" (Palomo 28). Castellet affirmed that he found no relation between her literary work and her paintings except for allusions to certain forms and colors from her book *Viatges i flors* (*El Nou* 28). If these sweeping generalizations seem to unfairly gloss over the complexity of Rodoreda's novels, they do even more injustice to the caliber of her artwork. In the following essay, I argue that there is a link, both artistic and psychological, that connects Rodoreda's artwork to her literary production. Moreover, her art serves as a valuable window into the artistic mind and spirit of Rodoreda's elusive personality, revealing the importance of the semiotic approach to language that resonates in both her written and visual body of work. First, I would like to analyze one watercolor and one pencil drawing and then suggest possible connections between her visual artistic expression and her literary works *La plaça del Diamant* and *El carrer de les Camèlies*. A short analysis of a second drawing links Rodoreda's artwork to that of Picasso, confirming her awareness of stylized composition.

The Fundació Mercè Rodoreda in Barcelona houses around twenty of Rodoreda's drawings and watercolors. This collection represents Rodoreda's interest in tone as many of the figures are repeated in various works but with different color combinations. The drawings of human figures in the Fundació's collection are representative of the large wide-eyed faces found throughout Rodoreda's artwork. In addition to the collection at the Fundació Rodoreda, a catalogue of the 1991 exhibition entitled *Obra pictòrica* published by the Generalitat of Catalunya provides access to many more reproductions of Rodoreda's work. I will discuss three works that are available in reproduced form in the United States. Rodoreda's untitled watercolor portrait of a startled woman that appears on the cover of Geraldine Cleary Nichols' 1992 critical analysis of contemporary Spanish women's writing *Des/cifrar la diferencia: Narrativa femenina de la España contemporánea*, is a good example of the intensity of her human figures. In the December 1987 issue of *Catalan Review* dedicated to Mercè Rodoreda and edited by Jaume Martí-Olivella, there are three reproductions of Rodoreda's drawings yet no critical

analysis nor informative commentary appear. I will comment on two of these drawings.

It is understandable that Rodoreda would search for ways to express her solitude in exile through means other than words. Rodoreda wrote all of her letters, diaries and literary works in Catalan. During most of the years of Franco's reign in Spain (1939-1975) the Catalan language was banned, or at least discouraged. In the early years of his dictatorship all public manifestations of the language were considered illegal, including theater productions and of course the publication of Catalan literature. For Rodoreda, the thought of writing in Catalan, even though she was physically "safe" from the consequences in exile, posed not only a legal problem but an identity crisis. She had been stripped of her literary identity, perhaps felt less skilled writing in Castilian and of course logistically how could she publish her works if written in a forbidden tongue? Bearing in mind these obstacles, painting offers a logical and liberating alternative to writing. David Rosenthal explains Rodoreda's aversion to writing as she herself expressed it in an interview with the magazine *Serra d'Or*. Rodoreda reveals her anxiety about writing in exile:

I couldn't have written a novel if they'd beaten it out of me. I was too disconnected from everything, or maybe too terribly bound up with everything, though that might sound like a paradox. In general, literature made me feel like vomiting. (Rosenthal xvi)

Writing for Rodoreda during these years was a source of anguish, a glaring reminder of what she had lost with the fall of the Second Republic into the hands of Franco's dictatorship. In contrast, Rodoreda's relationship with her artwork is perhaps best described in a letter that she wrote to Armand Obiols in July of 1953 describing two figures painted in varying color schemes: "Semblo boja d'alegria. Els tinc tots dos –quadres– damunt de la cuina i tot escrivint-te, de tant en tant, me'ls miro." The non-verbal communicative exchange between artist and art establishes an important symbiotic relationship between the artist admiring her own work and the final product producing an unbridled happiness. At a time when Rodoreda could hardly even think about writing, art filled the creative defining space of her being.

Many of her drawings allude to the sense of isolation, abandonment and dislocation of the writer living in exile. Black and white drawings of nude puppet-like female figures or grotesquely elongated twisted bodies with opened mouths turned upward in agony reminiscent of Picasso's *Guernica* form part of Rodoreda's creative production. However, Rodoreda's body of work includes not only

disturbing images but also beautifully executed still-life drawings. A vase of flowers or a large green sunflower radiate warmth of color and simple composition. These cheerful pieces derive pleasure from everyday objects, suggesting that Rodoreda valued the small things in life, or perhaps, just the fact that she was alive. The domestic still-life paintings demonstrate the wide range of theme and mood that Rodoreda incorporated into her work.

Rodoreda's human figures in the three pieces considered in this study appear as disproportional, geometric shapes that pay tribute to the painters she herself loved: Pablo Picasso, Joan Miró and Paul Klee. In several of her watercolors, oversized heads occupy the entire space of the canvass and sit on tiny, trunk-like armless bodies. Almond shaped eyes opened wide stare straight ahead as if frightened or startled, confronting the viewer with an unsettling gaze. The likeness to Picasso's female figures in *Les Femmes d'Alger* (1907) is evident in the African mask-like facial structures as well as in the distorted angular human features that challenge traditional notions of angle and perspective.

The untitled watercolor from the Fundació Mercè Rodoreda that graces the cover of Nichols' book, is a confrontational representation of woman (Fig. 1). The naïve composition and distorted mask-like expression are accentuated by Rodoreda's trademark wide set eyes staring out confronting the viewer. Rodoreda suggests hair with three lines projecting from either side of the figure's head, gently curved and curled yellow lines on the right side, less tamed purple lines flipping up on the left. She wears a boldly patterned blouse with puffy sleeves that seem to grow directly from her body. The dark zig-zag pattern of the blouse sleeves contrasts sharply with the curvy lines of her hair. Perhaps this watercolor is an intimate self-portrait of the artist, revealing two opposite sides of her personality. The strict and ordered right side and the carefree, unruly left. This representation of the dueling sides of human nature, the ordered and the chaotic, foretells the plight of Rodoreda's protagonist in *La plaça del Diamant*. Natàlia spends most of her life suppressing outward expressions and reactions in order to maintain a sense of decorum and order for her children and her husbands. Yet in the famous scene at the end of the novel she lets loose a vocal cry of pent up despair that she describes as her lost youth (Rodoreda 188). Rodoreda suggests in the composition of the watercolor that the two opposite human tendencies coexist in every human being and, as she reveals in the novel, repression only augments the severity of emotion, which will inevitably seek expression.

Rodoreda's watercolor resembles the composition of a classic portrait: the stoic character gazes directly out at the viewer. Yet this woman looks as if she expects something in return, her aggressive eyes

and partially opened mouth suggest that she is engaged in some form of conversation. The figure's active presence, seemingly in dialogue with the viewer, alludes to the symbiotic relationship between artist and portrait previously mentioned.

The framing of the figure resulting from Rodoreda's use of space and structure suggests a reflected image in a mirror. The idea of the canvass as a mirror is a common trope in the analysis of woman's self-portraits such as those by Mexican surrealist Frida Kahlo, or Rodoreda's compatriot, Surrealist painter Remedios Varo.



FIG. 1
Drawing by Mercè Rodoreda

Women painting women disrupts the traditional objectification of the female body, or what is called the "male gaze," which refers to the subject position that traditionally placed men in the role of "seeing" and therefore male artists were able to recreate through painting their own version of reality.² A woman artist who places herself outside of the prescribed objectified role as model and instead seeks to recreate her world vision must confront the re-negotiation of the traditional painter and painted, the imposed male/female opposition. Therefore, many women artists including Rodoreda painted self-portraits in order to directly address the problematic position of female artists. Whitney Chadwick discusses the personal nature of women's painting within the Surrealist movement: "...alienated both from conventional social roles as women and from Surrealism's cultivation of woman as the *femme-enfant* they [women painters] were forced to derive images from personal experience rather than collective goals" (Chadwick 140). Therefore the self-portrait is a way for women to confront their identity through pictorial representation of their own experience, instead of universal life experience which was traditionally "male" and relegated woman to the objectified position.

² Linda Nochlin questions the implications of the male gaze in terms of female artistic identity: "Why must I accept a discourse that consistently mystifies my sexuality by constituting the image of the vulnerable and seductive adolescent as a universally erotic one?" (Nochlin 32). Griselda Pollock locates the male as subject, female as object dichotomy in the gendered division of urban spaces: "They (women) were never positioned as the normal occupants of the public realm. They did not have the right to look, to stare, scrutinizer or watch." (Pollock 71).

Rodoreda's portrait of a woman, which can be considered a kind of emotional self-portrait since it is rather abstract and not a traditional "realist" rendition of her features, breaks Chadwick's mold in several ways. Rodoreda painted in the nineteen forties and fifties and therefore had a short history of women painters to draw from, most notably the Surrealists, but her works in general move away from the individual concrete experience of one particular woman. Unlike the autobiographical paintings by Kahlo, *The Two Fridas* or her shockingly brutal version of giving birth in *Henry Ford Hospital*, Rodoreda moves towards more universal representations of inner chaos and turmoil. The mirror image of the woman in the watercolor represents a type of Everywoman, her powerful presence pays tribute not only to Rodoreda's own inner strength in exile from Catalonia and life on foreign soil but also to the strength of the human spirit. Rodoreda creates abstract, depersonalized figures because she is not concerned with telling her personal story but rather focuses on the story of female/human suffering, fear and loss. Physical rendering of inner fear, instead of the outward manifestations we find in Kahlo's work, exposes human, not personal, tragedy that allows the viewer who identifies with that fear to appropriate the emotion and make it her own.

One of the drawings included in the *Catalan Review* homage to Rodoreda speaks to the same fear while representing the darker side of the artist's psyche. One untitled drawing shows a female human figure leaning precariously to one side, as if in the middle of a fall (Fig. 2). The limp figure lacks control over her movements and her limbs are undefined shapes only suggesting arms and legs. Her unstable position becomes more alarming when the viewer notices that she has no hands, her arms simply taper off into points. Her bald head is pitched forward unnaturally over her body as if her neck were broken. The profile, shape of mouth and nose resemble several of Picasso's portraits of women. The figure seems thrown off balance by the two large and darkened spheres or breasts that don't fit onto her thin body but instead sit lopsided, connected to each other, but not to the figure. One visible eye is wide open, staring out from the canvass enclosed in a dark oval that echoes the dark circles around the breasts. Rodoreda defines texture in her drawing by smudging lines, erasing pencil shading to leave bright white streaks and by contrasting the lines of the figure against a cloudy background of darker shades of gray.

The unsettling lack of balance in the composition disturbs traditional notions of composition and line. The tilted figure is helpless and if she is falling she cannot save herself, for her body seems out of control and her missing hands add to her awkwardness. However, the most noticeable impediments are the disproportionate, darkly circled breasts. It seems as if their weight or bad positioning cause the figure



FIG. 2
Drawing by Mercè Rodoreda

to struggle with her balance. Symbolically the breasts represent maternity, and in this case an overwhelming, insurmountable responsibility. The enlarged breasts in the drawing also function as a metaphor for feminine sexuality. They are spatially misplaced in the drawing and therefore cause danger to the figure just as misunderstood feminine sexuality poses a threat to women in society. Rodoreda addresses the issue of oppressive feminine sexuality in her art as well as in her literature. It is evident that the role of women in society and in the family structure intrigued her and that she saw it as a provocative topic well worth attention even though she never declared herself a feminist.

Motherhood and sexuality as negative experiences appear frequently throughout Rodoreda's literary works. Sex and motherhood often appear as perverse, eerie moments in Natàlia's life in Rodoreda's *La plaça del Diamant*. On her wedding night Natàlia

fears she will be split in two because her only knowledge of sex is that "les dones... moren partides" (54). Her husband makes fun of her innocence and fear by telling her the story of Queen Bustamante whose husband "per no tenir feina, la va fer partir per un cavall i de resultes va morir" (55). This propagation of misogyny and fear blind Natàlia to any truth about her own sexuality, she is convinced that her body is not her own but at the mercy of possible sexual violence. The drawing of the woman figure falling out of control is a symbolic parallel to Natàlia's lack of dominion over her sexual self.

Pregnancy continues Natàlia's fear and uncertainty towards her own body when she sees herself as a huge balloon that some unknown power has inflated full "d'una cosa molt estranya" (63). During the delivery of the baby, which she calls a "bestiola," (64) she is deafened by her own screams and afterwards hears the far off voice of the midwife mutter that Natàlia almost suffocated the baby. The confusion, anxiety and fear about sex and birth seem commonplace to Natàlia, she accepts her ignorance with a childlike complacency that forces the reader to imagine and create the inevitable emotional repercussions. The misogyny inherent in the Queen Bustamante myth and in the cultural silence surrounding such "taboos" as female sexuality and childbirth are exposed as harmful and manipulative when told from Natàlia's fragmented point of view. This same precarious positioning of femininity is also expressed though Rodoreda's drawing of the anatomically disproportionate woman.

The distorted female bodies that represent a psychological discomfort with the roles of motherhood and female sexuality are not the only connections between Rodoreda's artwork and her literary production. The importance of visual images in both *La plaça del Diamant* and *El carrer de les Camèlies* becomes apparent as the protagonists of each novel observe and remember very specific paintings at key moments in the narrative. Both novels were written after Rodoreda's most productive period as an artist, in 1962 and 1966 respectively. The protagonists of the novels are both drawn to paintings and seem to identify their particular situations with painted scenes. Far more than mere coincidence, the presence of paintings as catalysts for self-realization in Rodoreda's novels stems from her own success of self-expression through the visual arts.

In *La plaça del Diamant* the protagonist, Natàlia, observes a strange and disturbing painting in Senyora Enriqueta's house.

...figurava tot de llagostes amb corona d'or, cara d'home i cabells de dona, i tota l'herba al voltant de les llagostes, que sortien d'un pou, era cremada, i el mar al fons, i el cel per sobre, eren de color de sang de bou i les llagostes duïen cuirassa de ferro i mataven a cops de cua. A fora plovia. (Rodoreda 38)

The surreal painting of lobsters emerging from a well into a blood red war zone appears at various points in the novel as a reference to Natàlia's unconscious mind. The abrupt shift from the detailed description of the painting to the descriptive statement, "outside it was raining" marks the significance of two separate spatial realities: the internal or that of the painting, and the external represented by the weather. While the painting occupies and defines the space inside Enriqueta's house and inside Natàlia's mind, the external world continues on uninterrupted and oblivious to human emotion and suffering.

During Natàlia's wedding to Quimet, the lobster painting reappears in the text as a symbol of violence. The wedding sermon focuses on how Eve was made from one of Adam's ribs and emphasizes how Adam had to educate Eve not to destroy the flowers in Paradise because "Adam, que era el pare de tots els homes, només volia el bé" (Rodoreda 46). After the sermon Natàlia wonders how mossèn Joan would react to the lobsters in the painting, "amb el cap tan barrejat, que mataven a cops de cua..." (Rodoreda 46). Neus Carbonell has suggested that the long haired lobsters represent for Natàlia a form of androgynous utopia and that the protagonist's evolution in the novel moves towards "a new Symbolic Order where sexual dichotomies do not occur, and the suffering inflicted by them is also extinguished" (Carbonell 19). However, in the sequence of events in the text the image of the painting appears immediately after the priest's subtly violent rendition of female submission to man. The physical violence of taking one of Adam's ribs in order to create woman, of Eve blowing off the petals and thus destroying a flower and Adam verbally reprimanding her because she had hurt the flower conjure up related images of violence for Natàlia. The first thing she thinks of is the lobster painting and she wonders what mossèn Joan would say if he could see the violence of the lobsters killing each other. Therefore, the painting is more directly related to the text than Carbonell suggests, and completes the chain of violent images on Natàlia's wedding day that eventually will define her sexuality, motherhood and social reality.

The painting also alludes to the violence of the Spanish Civil War. Hunger, the death of her first husband and her own thoughts of suicide stem directly from the oppressive conditions in war-time Barcelona. The warring lobsters, which combine human and animal characteristics, can be considered an allegory of the Civil War.³ The

³ Kathleen Glenn describes the lobster painting as an allegory of the Spanish Civil War yet does not analyze in detail the iconography or metatextual qualities.

surreal juxtaposition of incongruous objects, such as lobsters emerging from a well, or their long hair, represents the absurdity and incomprehensibility of the war. The recurring vision of the disturbing painting expresses the violence that Natàlia cannot imagine, much less verbalize. She relates to the painting as an expression of the unspeakable: the illogical death and horror of the Spanish Civil War. In a similar way, Rodoreda herself found that she could express the isolation and rupture caused by the Spanish Civil War through images that were perhaps less difficult to create than written stories at that time of her life. Visual images can symbolically allude to various personal experiences without the painful recreation of details.

In another episode from the novel, Natàlia takes her two young children to Enriqueta's house for safe-keeping while she goes to work. As soon as they arrive, "El nen, de seguida, es va enfilar a mirar les llagostes" and after he is called away: "el nen tornava a ser a dalt de la cadira, encastat a les llagostes. Plovisquejava" (Rodoreda 91). Again, the contrast of the inner world of the house dominated by the painting and the outer world is highlighted by the sudden shift in narration from the child staring at the painting to the abrupt weather report. While the lobster picture plagues the inner, emotional realm with images of violence and death, the world outside continues to ignore the family's trauma.

Later in the novel, when the events of the war are heating up and Quimet has left to fight at the front, Natàlia returns one day to Enriqueta's house to pick up her children and she finds them staring at the painting. Their interest has become an obsession for she exclaims: "Els treballs que vaig tenir per treure'ls d'allà" (Rodoreda 130). In the next chapter, she is forced by circumstance to take Antoni, her son, to a youth colony for starving children. The emotional low point of the novel, this chapter describes the bombing of Barcelona and the hopelessness of a single woman trying to survive the war. Antoni's prior fascination with the violent lobster painting has become his own reality as he falls victim to the harsh circumstances of war depicted allegorically in the painting. The apocalyptic scene of the lobsters attracts the young boy's attention but ironically the iconography narrates his own shattered familial situation.

Rodoreda's protagonist, Cecília Ce, from *El carrer de les Camèlies* also struggles with imposed feminine roles and relates her experience to a painted image. Cecília Ce, abandoned as an infant, spends her life trying to replace the absent father figure. The search for her father leads Cecília on a horrifying roller coaster ride of physical and emotional abuse at the hands of obsessive men. She finally finds the remaining shreds of her identity when at the end of the novel she returns to her only known origins, the house of her adoptive parents.

The watchman who found her as a baby confesses to the grown up Cecília that it was he who named her and not the absent father figure: it was the watchman who wrote the name on a scrap of paper and pinned it to her bib.

Cecília desperately tries to find a sense of who she is through men. Her failure to "speak the language" of an upstanding female citizen, who inevitably must be linked to a male, leaves her lost and confused.⁴ She struggles with her femaleness and with her sexuality, which eventually becomes a trap into which men fall and from which she cannot escape.

One curious scene that occurs at the low point of Cecília's life involves a portrait of a woman. Cecília is living with Eladi, who forces her to drink cognac in excess, eat, sleep and parade around the house naked yet he refuses to touch her because he is scared that she will tarnish (Rodoreda 145). One day when she has been left alone in the house, Cecília decides to search for her suitcases and clothes and happens upon a portrait.

Em vaig quedar sense respirar de tan misteriós que vaig trobar-lo. Era una noia de cabells foscos, tallats curts, partits per una clenxa, amb un serrell que li tapava tot el front. Tenia els braços plegats damunt d'una taula, descansava la cara en els braços, i amb els llavis una mica enfora mossegava un collar de perles. El que fascinava eren els ulls, que miraven fixament amb la nina una mica enlaira i a sota d'aquells ulls n'hi tenia dos més d'iguals i no es podia acabar de saber si mirava amb els de dalt o amb els de baix o amb tots quatre alhora. (Rodoreda 145-146)

The reader cannot be sure that the four eyed woman is not just a hallucination due to Cecília's demoralized state of constant inebriation, yet the fact that her breath is taken away by the portrait connects this scene to Rodoreda's own artistic production. Once again the idea of a painting acting as a mirror and reflecting a horrific and undesirable reality appears in the narrative. The portrait of the four-

⁴ Cecília's inability to enter into the patriarchal realm of the Symbolic represented by languages proposes a Lacanian interpretation of Rodoreda's text. Jacques Lacan extrapolated Freud's theories on desire in regard to the relationship between the child and the mother and the father. Lacan affirms that all language is based on desire and thus the acquisition of the Law of the Father or language septs up boundaries and limits to certain kinds of desire. Lacan's mirror stage, which implies the recognition of the subject as such, ushers the child into social discourse of the self and other. The importance of the search for a correct language in *El carrer de les Camèlies* stems from the lack of a father figure who reveals the law of language inscribed in a name. The protagonists' search for her father symbolically suggests the search for the Law that defines social order, permits entry into society and consequently formulates identity. Cecília never achieves any of this but manages to arrive at a distinctly non-socialized sense of peace at the end of the novel.

eyed woman plays the same role of reflecting the narrative reality as the lobster painting did in *La plaça del Diamant*. Cecília pauses in front of the portrait confused by the woman's gazes. She can't tell where the eyes are focused just as she herself lives in a disorienting, unfocused, somewhat surreal circumstance. The portrait reflects Cecília's own directionless life as she identifies with the woman in the portrait and her directionless gaze.

Aside from symbolic interpretations of the portrait, the recurring use of painting that we have seen in two of Rodoreda's novels heightens certain narrative moments by creating images allegorical to the character's experience. Thus, the reader must decipher the inclusion of the visual into the written and in doing so we discover the impact and authority that a painting acquires in the narrative and how Rodoreda crosses strictly linguistic narrative boundaries. By describing an image with words, Rodoreda forces the reader to recreate not only the images of the narrative but also the metatextual image of the painting. That is to say, the painting exists as a work of art outside of the text, separate from the events that shape the character's lives and therefore as a timeless artifact attains a certain authority within the text. This leap from textual narrative to visual recreation disrupts traditional linear story-telling and introduces an association between words and images that enhances the symbolic value of the text. As readers, we must be willing to "see" the portrait as Cecília sees it and then evaluate not only her reactions to it but our own reactions as well.

One of the other drawings from the issue of *Catalan Review* reveals yet another side of Rodoreda's artistic talent. Another female figure staring at the viewer with wide eyes appears in this drawing (Fig. 3). However, her elongated body stretches the length of the canvass and in contrast to the other works mentioned, her head is quite small only occupying the very top portion of the picture. The figure is thin-waisted and wide-hipped yet dainty as she holds her hands up defensively to her chest with her fingers spread apart. She wears a patterned striped skirt that echoes the pattern of her braided hair. The attention to detail of clothing and hair, not unlike that of the watercolor, seems to indicate the socially imposed rules of female adornment. However, this drawing fits neatly into the trio presented as it links the works together through erotic female imagery. The clothed figure cradles two large round breasts in her arms. Similar to the other drawing of the unbalanced anatomy, this woman also seems to struggle with body parts that do not seem to be her own. This is another attempt on Rodoreda's part to reveal symbolically the troublesome female and maternal role that she herself refused to play. Rodoreda left her husband and child in Barcelona when she fled to

France. She never remarried and her illicit relationship with the married Armand Obiols was often frowned upon by members of her own supposedly liberal group of friends. Therefore, the pictorial image of an adorned woman struggling with her feminine identity reveals the tension Rodoreda may have felt about her own circumstance.

Another important aspect of Rodoreda's drawing is the link it provides to other artists of her time. Imitation of style suggests that Rodoreda studied other painters, was aware of current trends and consciously worked toward perfecting her own style. Rodoreda's drawing of the tall female figure adorned with striped clothes holding her hands up to her chest bears a striking resemblance to a



FIG. 3
Drawing by Mercè Rodoreda

virtually unknown clay sculpture by Pablo Picasso. In an article from *The New York Times* art section on February 28, 1999 entitled "The Unknown Picasso: A Revolutionary in Clay" one of the figures reproduced to illustrate Picasso's mastery with clay is entitled "Woman With a Mantilla" from around 1949. The painted clay statuette wears a similar designed dress, her elongated body widens at the hips as does the figure in Rodoreda's drawing. Both the drawing and the clay statue place the woman's folded arms, hands spread open, framing large, uncovered breasts. The most notable distinction, however, is the calm, controlled facial expression radiating authority from Picasso's figure compared to the startled look of surprise in Rodoreda's drawing. Nevertheless, it is doubtful that Rodoreda actually saw this statue because during the late 1940s she was living in

Geneva and Picasso pursued clay-work in southern France, but in any case, the similarity to such a consecrated artist reveals Rodoreda's attention to detail, line and form. Her love of Picasso's work and his influence on her own style is an evident fact. The clay figure bears the stamp of Picasso's signature style in the voluptuous curves and distorted proportions of the female body. Rodoreda challenges representations of the female body which illicit erotic pleasure or repulsion according to the "male gaze." Her drawings strike a much more profound psychological chord through facial expressions of fear, surprise or horror and emphasize the unsettling fissure between being a woman artist and dealing with the inherent femaleness inscribed into images that manipulate and distort the female body.

As a writer whose language suffered from political prohibition, Rodoreda found herself in exile unable to use the tools of her trade. While the theme of exile has been studied in many of Rodoreda's literary works, the solitary images found so often in her art also speak out on the topic and deserve analysis. Rodoreda's most memorable literary characters struggle with isolation and imposed patriarchal modes of femininity. Visual representations of the literary found in her art can help to understand the point of view of the writer. Just as Federico García Lorca's drawings that accompany *El poeta en Nueva York* enrich and broaden our understanding of that complex work, Rodoreda's art may serve a similar function in redefining restrictive boundaries that separate the visual and the verbal. The richness and depth of Rodoreda's narrative can only be enhanced and better understood when a full analysis of her artwork has been completed.

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