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WALKING THE REPUBLIC OF LETTERS: MERCÈ RODOREDA AND MODERNIST TRADITION

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Within the Catalan literary canon Mercè Rodoreda (1908-1983) holds an unequalled place for a woman. The international success of her novel *La plaça del Diamant*, published in 1962, places Catalan literature in an international arena unprecedented for other contemporary Catalan writers. Little attention, however, has been paid to Rodoreda as a modernist writer, and to her relationship with dominant literary circles and movements. Yet Rodoreda's work from its inception is obsessed by questions pertaining to the validity of the woman writer and rights of circulation for her and her works within the literary establishment.

Indicative of this preoccupation is the constant presence in Rodoreda's texts of the figure of the so-called fallen woman, in her variants of seductress, adulteress and especially prostitute. Over-determined signifiers, these women interrogate the sociocultural fabrication of Woman within the context of modernity, when, as Shannon Bell puts it, she is "fully dichotomized into madonna/ whore" (187). If Woman is represented as the other of Man, the prostitute functions as the other of ideals of femininity specific to middle-class women, enjoined to leave the streets to their working-class counterparts in favour of leisured seclusion within the home. Politically speaking, the prostitute symbolises the threat of social disorder within cultural spaces such as Rodoreda's Barcelona, where rigid class differentiations and privileges are challenged by the rapid rise of an urban proletariat accompanied by strong anarchist movements from the late nineteenth century onwards (Hughes 374). Other in terms of gender and economic class, the prostitute will later represent conservative Spain's other, Catalonia, whose self-government during the Second Republic is seen to undermine national unity. Lastly, in cultures which discourage women from writing, and equate published authors with public women, the prostitute becomes a symbol of a so-called "low" literature which subverts the premises of a "high" masculine canon.[1]

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1 I here use "high" and "low" literatures to refer to an artificial, arbitrary division between what is considered proper to the interests and value systems of bourgeois discourses, felt to be threatened by forms of "mass" culture accessible to hitherto disadvantaged sectors of society (Sieburth 5-6).

All these representations coalesce in Rodoreda's texts. Her insistence on the fallen woman not only impinges on concerns with gender and class per se. It also allows for an interrogation of the tensions inherent in her position vis-à-vis modernism, a cultural movement predicated on the privileging of masculine over feminine, of "high" over "low" art. These elements are strikingly encapsulated in Rodoreda's feminisation of the epitome of the modern artist or novelist, consecrated by Charles Baudelaire in his male street-stroller or *flâneur* from "Le Peintre de la vie moderne."[2] The result is the figure of the streetwalker or *flâneuse*, embodied to great effect in her protagonist, Cecília Ce, from *El carrer de les Camèlies* (1966). Just as Baudelaire's *flâneur* is synonymous with Paris and the "Belle Epoque," so too is Rodoreda's *flâneuse* inseparable from Barcelona, the centre of Catalan modernism. A close examination of *El carrer* not only situates Rodoreda's works within modernist debates on literature and the writing subject. It also reveals, I will argue, complex negotiations involved in consolidating one's identity as a successful woman writer, in being both popular and original, prostitute and pure. Such issues of legitimacy and illegitimacy, tradition and dissidence have further ramifications for the construction of Catalan regional and cultural identity within Rodoreda's context.

Although detailed critical studies on Rodoreda as a modernist writer have yet to be written, most of her literary production is formed with and against modernism in its European and Hispanic forms, and its Catalan variants of *modernisme*, *noucentisme* and the avant-garde.[3] Identifying with *modernisme's* promotion of the "individualist outsider" and "bohemian rebel" (Yates 253), evidence of modernist and avant-garde influences especially pervades her first four novels,[4] which she repudiates, and *Aloma*, published in 1938. Rodoreda's work rejects, however, the rural realism of the Catalan *modernista* novel,

2 Although I am not aware of any specific reference to whether Rodoreda had read Baudelaire or not, she was certainly steeped in his contemporaries, such as Zola, Stendhal, Flaubert and Poe, all of whom also form the subject of some of Baudelaire's own writings.

3 As Grilli states, "la relació amb els moderns és una altre dels temes que encara estan per aclarir i que està sotmès a complexes interrelacions dins l'obra de Rodoreda" (154). Together with Pérez and Fayad, Ibarz is one of the few critics who explicitly situate Rodoreda within modernism: "... vol fer novel.la moderna i ser ella mateixa una dona jove ben moderna. Admira Víctor Catalá ... però la consigna és ara fer novel.la urbana" and "Tenia aura de modernitat, en aquells anys en què el catalanisme cultural es volia sobretot així: modern" (*Mercè* 33, 46). Other critical studies that do link Rodoreda to modernism through an analysis of her artistic production are those by Everly and González. For the relationships between modernism, *modernisme* and *noucentisme*, see Marfany, Ucelay Da Cal and Yates.

4 These are *Sóc una dona honrada?* (1932), *Del que hom no pot fugir* and *Un dia de la vida d'un home* (1934), and *Crim* (1936).

then in crisis, and the conservative yearnings of *noucentista* nationalism. Consequently, her novels intersect with the drive by the Catalan avant-garde to remedy the void felt by what the poet Carles Riba had called a "generació sense novel·la" (Grilli 156). Moreover, generally foregrounding working-class women in urban Barcelona, they critique the ideal of femininity embodied by the chaste figure of the "Ben Plantada" or "Well-Endowed/Planted One," created by *noucentista* Eugeni d'Ors to symbolise the immutable "essence" of a hegemonic Catalan bourgeoisie.[5] Rodoreda's corpus, then, works to revindicate woman's presence in a public sphere ideologically proscribed to her and which constitutes the very space of modernity. In terms of women's literary aspirations, however, modernism is inherently gender-biased, constantly dependent for its revitalisation on a public participation and display of the self that run counter to patriarchal feminine ideals.[6] Rubén Darío's reference in 1901 to modernism as a "brotherhood" (254) is but one example of the prejudices highlighted by Andreas Huyssen: "[T]he imaginary femininity of male authors, which often grounds their oppositional stance vis-à-vis bourgeois society, can easily go hand in hand with the exclusion of real women from the literary enterprise and with the misogyny of bourgeois patriarchy itself" (45).

Within Spain, social dictates regarding normative feminine roles are mirrored in articles in literary and cultural journals, in the equation of female students with "prostitutas y 'cómicas'" (Formica 13), and in the frequent marginalisation of female writers when attending literary gatherings (Frenk et al. 64). Pertinent to Rodoreda's context is the inauguration of the all-women Lyceum Club in Barcelona in the late 1920s, described in a contemporary article as "una verdadera calamidad para el hogar y un enemigo natural de la familia, y sobre todo, del esposo... El ambiente moral de la calle y la familia ganaría mucho con la hospitalización o el encierro de estas mujeres excéntricas y desequilibradas" (qtd. Campo Alange 209-10).[7]

5 Rodoreda's critique of rural realism and Ors' model of femininity is best seen in her highly satiric first novel, *Sóc una dona honrada?* Regarding Ors' "Ben Plantada," see Duplàa.

6 Perriam refers to a system dependent on intense networking, personality cults and the theorisation of the artist's role in cafés and literary clubs (54). Moreover, the intellectual bonding that takes place in cultural *tertulias* is further reinforced by a sexual bonding only possible among men; as Kaplan indicates with regards to Picasso's artistic circle in Barcelona: "Group visits to brothels often continued men's social intercourse in the cafés, and seem to have been nearly as public an activity" (89).

7 A little earlier Rodoreda's literary predecessor, Caterina Albert, alias Víctor Català, had exclaimed: "En aquesta terra ... és més deshonorós per una dona escriure que fer altres disbarats" (1786).

Such conservatism undermines the ideal of a modern literary community configured in the concept of a "Republic of Letters": an intellectual space synonymous with modernity which, from the Spanish eighteenth century onwards, replaces the notion of a Parnassus or enclosed garden-like space restricted to an élite few. Founded on bourgeois ideology, this literary Republic upholds equal access to the capital of semiotic wealth and the marketplace: an ideal which in practice is far from being fulfilled (Barrientos 7-17). It is not until the heady, but turbulent, years of the Spanish Second Republic prior to the Civil War (1931-1936), with its secularising of education, granting of female suffrage and consolidation of left-wing movements, that disadvantaged groups, including women, may more easily access the cultural and political fortresses held by upper-middle-class men, albeit not without difficulties.[8]

Within this context, the figure of the prostitute assumes blatant political connotations. Rodoreda's own political positioning on the left, with her support for Catalan autonomy and culture in the 1930s,[9] runs counter to the right-wing rhetoric of Falangist ideologues who, decrying Catalonia's self-government, retrospectively cast the region as a fallen woman who dares to divorce herself from Spain.[10] Similarly, Rodoreda's embracing of the Republican cause during the generalised conflict of the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939) equates her directly, in Nationalist eyes, with a whore, given that "[i]f being a leftist meant that you were a disgraced 'Red,' being a female leftist meant that you were a 'Red whore'" (Mangini 106). Thus, in

8 Indeed, Charlon indicates that during these years "[l]a gran majoria d'aquests homes reacciona amb una agressivitat que voreja la histèria, com si la possibilitat de veure que les dones accedeixen a la literatura, a la creació i a la llibertat representés una amenaça a llur poder i a llur tranquil·litat" (94). For Ibarz, such discrimination against women writers continues well beyond this context, being applicable to Rodoreda herself: "La seva generació gairebé li ha negat la condició d'autor i de personatge cultural: els llibres de memòries i de retrats literaris la ignoren o la citen de passada, com si, més que una escriptora, fos una dona a evitar" (*Mercè* 15).

9 As Ibarz states:

Naturalment que estava polititzada. Era catalanista, estava afiliada a l'Agrupació d'Escriptors Catalans (UGT) ... i aviat va formar part dels organismes culturals creats per la Generalitat per aplegar-hi els escriptors que donaven suport a l'autonomia i a la República ... va fer propaganda per ràdio en les emissions de la Institució de les Lletres. (*Mercè* 52)

For more specific details, see Campillo.

10 See especially Eduardo Marquina's "El Ebro de las batallas" and Ernesto Giménez Caballero's *Amor a Cataluña* in Rodríguez Puértolas 434 and 1018-22, respectively. Similarly, Republican Madrid is described in 1937 by one Nationalist ideologue as a "whore" (Labanyi, "Women" 382). For the prominent role played by Barcelona prostitutes in sociopolitical agitation throughout the first three decades of the twentieth century, see Kaplan. For the prostitute as a powerful symbol of sociopolitical rebellion in the French Revolution, see Hertz.

Rodoreda's work, the figure of the prostitute becomes a symbolic space where gendered politics and material production coalesce.

For middle-class women to overstep rigid, traditional boundaries is perceived by a conservative establishment as demonstrating an unhealthy curiosity and moral vulnerability, provoking the spectre of a descent into the working class. Such a fear is incarnated in the late nineteenth-century figure of the overly inquisitive woman or *curieuse* prominent in cultural representations, who warns of the dangers surrounding women's incursions into male-dominated, but disputed, cultural spaces. As a more general concept, however, *curiosité* or what Etienne Condillac defines as "le désir de quelque chose de nouveau" (qtd. House 34-35), constitutes the very essence of cultural modernity, as identified by Baudelaire in "Le Peintre."

Shifts occurring in the economy from the mid-nineteenth century onwards also result in the writer being construed as prostitute. No longer able to depend on patronage to sustain creativity, men of letters must look to marketing their literary wares. Moreover, to come from a lower social class and obscure origins can aid the attainment of fame, in that it stresses the poet's "natural" talent and originality, an inherent power of self-creation (Ross 33-34). Once out in the marketplace, however, the text, like a prostitute's body, may be enjoyed by whoever pays its price. Literary reputation thus becomes contingent on the writer's need to "sell" well, to be a popular bestseller, and the equally strong desire to produce original work untainted by other influences, a "high" art proper to an élite readership. Caught up in paradoxes such as these, masculine modernism tends to categorise itself as "high" culture, associating its feminine counterpart with "low" art. As a result, the *curieuse* becomes symbolic of an indiscriminately voracious, feminised reading public, and the prostitute, of the excessively commercially oriented female writer, whose appetite for success is out of control. The challenge for the woman writer is how to transform a metaphor for authorship which has degrading connotations not only for her literary profession, but also for her gender (Gallagher 40).

The *curieuse* and prostitute, then, can be seen as gendered embodiments of two different moments in a modernity considered proper to man, but off limits to woman, and which condemns women's right to contemplate, read and write their worlds for personal and economic benefit. If the *curieuse* as reader or viewer stands for a more passive engagement with cultural representation, the prostitute or writer marks a more active practice of literary trade and exchange. While, as I develop elsewhere, it is the figure of the *curieuse* that predominates in *Aloma*, in *El carrer* the prostitute testifies to the woman writer's struggle to achieve public recognition

and circulate uncensured along the figurative thoroughfares of the Republic of Letters.[11]

In *El carrer de les Camèlies* Rodoreda rewrites Alexandre Dumas' *La Dame aux Camélias* (1848), where the protagonist's deviance is punished by her death, thus upholding a bourgeois moral economy predicated on the honour of its women. As the two titles suggest, Rodoreda's text shifts the focus of Dumas' construction of Woman as an ornamental, fragile, flower-like other to examine critically women's relationship with given material contexts. In particular, *El carrer* centres on the streets of Barcelona city, perceived as a source of economic opportunity fraught with danger for the single working girl.[12] More than any other, it is this spatial configuration that foregrounds, I argue, Rodoreda's anxieties about writing for publication, and thus becoming a public woman and public property. As Susan Merrill Squier has elucidated:

> Any analysis of the city's treatment by women writers requires a foray into questions not merely literary, but psychological, philosophical, political, and social. In its many guises... the city speaks fluently of woman's public and private life, or her literal and literary confinement in patriarchal models for experience, and of her struggle to win freedom from such constraints in life and art. (6)

Whereas the modern artist or writer is equated by Baudelaire and his contemporaries with the *flâneur* or city-stroller, "l'observateur passionné" who can "élire domicile dans le nombre" ("Le Peintre" 369),[13] the female equivalent or *flâneuse* is more difficult to realise. For Janet Wolff it is well-nigh impossible, given bourgeois sexual divisions between masculine and feminine, public and private (47). For Griselda Pollock, however, modernity is mapped not only on these separations but, more importantly for Rodoreda's text, on polarised class definitions of woman pertaining to bourgeois lady and proletarian worker, and differences in their interactions with the public sphere. While modern bourgeois women do appear in public to promenade, visit, shop or attend cultural events, the urban space still carries with it the threat of contamination and disgrace (68-69). In

11 The presence of these figures in Rodoreda's work exemplifies the need identified by Sieburth to trace the tropes of late nineteenth-century Spanish fiction in novels from after the Civil War, in order to understand the latter fully (25-26).

12 The importance of streets is stressed by Anderson, who states that "they are the places where many of our conflicts and resolutions between public and private claims are accessed or actually played out; they are the arenas where the boundaries of conventional and aberrant behavior are frequently redrawn" (1).

13 For Baudelaire's contemporaries, Louis Huart and Auguste de Lacroix, the *flâneur* is directly equated with the novelist (see Smith, "'Le Peintre'" 94n11).

such a context the working woman, especially if single, acquires doubtful connotations, reinforced by the fact that prostitution is frequently viewed as a source of supplementary income in times of economic hardship.[14] The conceptual categories of working woman and prostitute, then, become fluid, exchangeable entities; both function to demarcate an upper-middle class whose notions of property and propriety preclude their women using their bodies for obvious commercial purposes, from a working class which depends for its survival on women as breadwinners.[15]

These issues of gender and class assume more complex implications, I suggest, with the woman who desires to earn her living through her writing. Usually middle- or lower-middle class, as in the case of Rodoreda, and thus not illiterate like the majority of proletarian women, her desired success depends, however, on becoming public property and engaging in commercial transactions. Nevertheless, unlike working-class women, she does not work with her body but her mind, and the writing activity normally takes place within the contained space of the private home. Consequently, the woman writer is positioned as other not only to her masculine counterpart, embodying an allegedly inferior sex, class and art. She is also other to her own origins of bourgeois womanhood, lacking respectability due to exposing herself in public, and other to the working class, due to her origins and mode of production. The essence of this deviation from defined gender and class definitions is encapsulated in the powerful, if contentious, metaphor of the female writer as prostitute, who cannot go "botanizing on the asphalt" alone (Benjamin 36) in the same way as the *flâneur*. Recast as streetwalker or *flâneuse*, such a figure revindicates the right of women to participate actively in the public domain, even if via routes considered "illegitimate or eccentric" by a patriarchal *polis* (Wolff 45).[16] Rodoreda's Cecília, the protagonist of *El carrer*, can be read as a *flâneuse* whose gradual reclaiming of this androcentric space

14 Regarding the association of "doubtful" with the single working woman, see Wallach Scott 135-36. Regarding prostitution as an extra means of survival in the context of modern Barcelona, see Kaplan 86.

15 As Pollock emphasises:

> Femininity in its class-specific forms is maintained by the polarity virgin/whore which is mystifying representation of the economic exchanges in the patriarchal kinship system. In bourgeois ideologies of femininity the fact of the money and property relations which legally and economically constitute bourgeois marriage is conjured out of sight by the mystification of a one-off purchase of the rights to a body and its products as an effect of love to be sustained by duty and devotion. (78)

16 The prostitute as the female *flâneur*, participating actively in the spectacle of public life is confirmed by Wilson 55-56.

constitutes a challenging of the masculinist premises inherent in the preface, a quotation from yet another modernist writer, T. S. Elliot: "I have walked many years in this city."[17]

First published in 1966 and very quickly a bestseller, *El carrer* tells through its first-person narrator, Cecília Ce, a neo-picaresque tale of rags to riches.[18] An illegitimate foundling, Cecília rejects the lower-middle-class family who adopts her to run away with her lover, Eusebi.[19] Subsequently emerging from the squalor of the shanty-town and surviving unpalatable experiences with a series of lovers or "masters," Cecília ends up owning a substantial property, together with car, chauffeur and maid, in one of the most established areas of town. The implications of a plot such as this are indicated by Stephanie Sieburth, who perceives a character's "rise from uncultured poverty to financial solidity [as]... analogous to the writer's own trajectory from oblivion to literary recognition" (235). In this sense, it is relevant that Rodoreda, originating from the Catalan lower-middle class, produces *El carrer* with her literary reputation at last established through the extraordinary success of *La plaça del Diamant*, after years of financial hardship and difficulties in writing. Apart from distinct parallels that can be drawn between aspects of Cecília's life and Rodoreda's,[20] *El carrer* proves especially interesting, in its form and content, for its possible links with the so-called "low" genre of the weekly serial novels. Published in the 1920s and 1930s by late modernist authors who establish the model of the committed revolutionary writer, they are described by Enrique Ucelay-Da Cal as "un subgénero de cuento corto, con pretensiones tanto literarias (el

17 The association of the prostitute with the writer in Rodoreda's work is also alluded to by Nichols, who sees her as exemplifying the "triomfadora": "writers, women who have seized control of the signifier" (171). The relevance of the *flâneur* to Rodoreda's texts is suggested, albeit in passing, by Bou, "Exile" 37.

18 For an analysis of *El carrer* in terms of the picaresque, see Glenn. Graham points to the dramatic return of the picaresque in the 1940s as a symptom of a widespread "social brutality" whereby "culture for vast swathes of the population—but especially for the urban poor—came to be synonymous with the struggle to achieve, by whatever means, the basic necessities of life: food, shelter, and work" ("Popular Culture" 239).

19 In a sense, then, Cecília can be seen as a continuation of Aloma, in that she takes up Aloma's untold, inconclusive life-story on the Barcelona streets.

20 See the two biographical studies of Rodoreda to date, by Ibarz (*Mercè*) and Casals i Couturier respectively. The most salient features are Rodoreda's being censured as the "other woman" due to her long-standing relationship with the married Armand Obiols and her eking out a living sewing clothes, just as Cecília initially does. In terms of temporal context, Cecília's state of homelessness on the streets coincides with Rodoreda's initial traumatic years of exile in a war-torn France and with her first visit, in 1944, back to a Barcelona devastated by the Civil War, where she would have been able to observe first-hand the hunger and poverty of a Catalan population singled out as particularly deserving of Nationalist repression (Richards 44-45).

ser 'novela') como espirituales, que podría describirse como 'moralina de burdel' y que estaba a medio camino entre la narración sentimental ('para el consumo de criadas,' se decía en la época) y la pornografía" (328). Rodoreda's *El carrer* also exhibits aspects of the sentimental novel, has a fragmentary structure typical of the serial novels, and can indeed be classed as pornographic in the etymological sense of the word in that it writes about a prostitute. Nevertheless, it also bestows greater literary status on a disdained genre, turning a "subgénero" into a high-quality novel that denounces the hypocrisies of upper-middle-class Catalan society.

Cecília's story, however, is rescued from its Mills-and-Boon-like typology through Rodoreda's emphasis on the abuse, violence and degradation to which the protagonist is systematically exposed. Through her, Rodoreda demystifies the prostitute, traditionally portrayed by male writers steeped in a Naturalist tradition as either an embodiment of vice or as a misguided soul awaiting redemption by a noble-spirited lover. Rather, repeatedly emphasised in *El carrer* are the material conditions, especially the picaresque trait of hunger, present in Spain in the 1940s that lead to Cecília's first steps as a "carrerista" or streetwalker: "Les bruses no eren pagades ni bé ni malament, però se n'havien de fer sis cada dia per poder menjar i jo només vaig arribar a fer-ne tres.... em moria de gana i no podia caminar de tant mal que em feien els nervis del darrera de les cames i tot el ventre" (64, 66),[21] and "el fondista no em va agradar mai. Però jo tenia gana" (82). The narrative voice speaks of the disadvantages faced in attracting custom because of poor attire, of the emotional difficulty experienced in having to hunt men, of her inability to treat the sexual act as a purely economic transaction, of the shame felt when accepting money for services rendered, of the physical and psychic trauma suffered from abortions, of having to work when ill and menstruating, and of her attempted suicides. It is clear that prostitution barely enables Cecília to survive until she meets up with a friend Paulina, whose lover, a factory owner, obtains for her a position as kept woman or "noia de confiança" (73).

Cecília's situation parallels that faced by many women in the years of indigency following the Civil War, who turn to prostitution out of dire necessity.[22] *El carrer* abounds in female characters whose only source of income is derived from relationships with men, such as the two twin cousins of Cecília's adoptive family, Maria-Cinta and

21 These words cannot help but recall Rodoreda's in a letter to Anna Murià in 1945: "He fet bruses de confecció a nou francs i he passat molta gana" (65).

22 See Graham, "Gender" 189. Carr also refers to the fact that in the 1940s and early 50s, "poverty turned prostitution into a respectable profession" (742).

Raquel. Their acceptance within so-called respectable society demonstrates that such figures are commonplace in this context, informing a masculine hegemony dependent on women's sexual service as "a generalized means of... initiation for males and an escape from, or tolerated addition to, later married life" (Alvarez Junco 88). Explicit reference to such a scenario is made in *El carrer* through Paulina, the seventeen-year-old servant to the Rius family, used by the three sons "com si fos la seva promesa" (39), who later becomes the mistress of the "senyor de Tarragona," a wealthy gentleman who makes her dress up as a maid when he visits her. The prostitute, then, ensures the virgin/whore dichotomy essential to patriarchal interests, while functioning as commodity or pleasure-toy to uphold the status of the upper-middle-class male.

To be the subject or object of the gaze marks the distinction between *flâneur* and *flâneuse*, and by extension, between a writer envisioned as masculine and his material experiential world, conceived of as feminine. On the one hand, the *flâneur* longs to "prendre un bain de multitude" (Baudelaire, "Les foules" 57-58), to be incorporated by a feminised entity represented within a masculine modernist economy as a generous prostitute (Benstock 27).[23] On the other, the promised relaxation of rigid gender and class distinctions is countered by a detached observation which preserves these same differences. As Pollock declares, "the flâneur/artist is articulated across the twin ideological formations of modern bourgeois society—the splitting of private and public with its double freedom for men in the public space, and the pre-eminence of a detached observing gaze, whose possession and power is never questioned as its basis in the hierarchy of the sexes is never acknowledged" (71).

Thus the feminine, whether as crowd or woman, is positioned as available object within a consumer economy. A spectacle, its transformation into a cultural artefact so as to enhance the reputation of its writer or "owner" requires its subjection to a régime of intense surveillance.[24] In *El carrer* this commodification of the other is embodied by Cecília, whose progression from streetwalker to kept woman is accompanied by her increasing objectificaton by a masculine gaze. This becomes most dominant within the bourgeois domestic sphere, thus critiquing the gender politics at stake in a world

23 According to Vidler, such a premise is exemplified by Zola, who "had personified the city of Paris... as a woman: sometimes fallen, sometimes a whore,... yet always full of heart for those needing comfort" (97).

24 I here build on Pollock's thesis that "[w]omen do not enjoy the freedom of incognito in the crowd. They were never positioned as the normal occupants of the public realm. They did not have the right to look, to stare, scrutinize or watch... They are positioned as the object of the flâneur's gaze" (71).

where the patriarchal observation of woman is an experience common to both lady and prostitute: to "safeguard" female honour in the first instance, and to compromise it in the second. Authorial condemnation of the bourgeoisie sees Cecília's relationships with marginal male characters in the shanty-town on Barcelona's outskirts characterised by a greater equality. Once in the city centre, however, the gradual improvement in Cecília's economic situation is concomitant with her increasing lack of subjectivity. While a Mallorcan sailor imprisons her in his pension for three days and wants to live with her "voltada d'aigua" (68), Cosme, the restaurant-owner, attempts to keep Cecília always indoors, does not want her to wear makeup and refuses to give her money when she will not comply (82). That Cosme perceives Cecília as a possession that can enhance his own image is evident from the detailed description of the black satin dress and shoes bought for her so that she might promenade with him on a major public festival (83); although designed to cover every inch of flesh, the creation is so expensive that it attracts as much attention as if Cecília were naked.

In Cecília's next relationship with the wealthier Marc, a married man representative of an idle, propertied class, he has her watched within her apartment as well as on the street. The psychic abuse to which Cecília is here subjected is extended to physical abuse in her ensuing relationship. This is with Eladi, a historian friend to whom Marc passes her on in an arrangement which foregrounds the sexual contract at the heart of modern, civil fraternity (Pateman 113). It is at this point in the narrative that Cecília's progressive destitution and stripping of identity become most extreme, metaphorically indicating the damage caused women by a masculinist History. After initially winning her confidence Eladi keeps her perpetually drugged and naked, significantly discouraging her entry to the study and confining her to the bedroom, where he and Marc regularly submit her to all kinds of indecencies. This episode culminates in the pregnant Cecília being beaten by Marc, Eladi and the tailor employed to watch her, in being almost drowned by them at the docks, and in her abandonment in the street with a prostitute's cross placed around her neck.

Although the context of the Franco dictatorship is only fleetingly alluded to, through isolated incidents such as the killing of Maria-Cinta's dissident lover and the lengthy prison sentence passed on Eusebi, of anarchist leanings (71, 74), the surveillance and exploitation to which Cecília is subjected becomes symbolic of the repression of dissident or "deviant" citizens by a totalitarian state. Rodoreda's descriptions, then, of the difficulties and dangers faced by streetwalkers not only constitute a searing indictment of a régime founded on a hierarchised social order which does not officially outlaw prostitution

until 1956 (Scanlon 322). They also present patriarchy and dictatorship as analogous, both participating in a gendered politics that objectifies and punishes those categorised as other.

Such images of degradation and violence problematise the positioning of both writer and reader. If the male writer is equated with the detached *flâneur*, recording modern existence in cities mapped as feminine, the question here arises as to the difference it makes when the writer is a female who represents the lives of working-class women. Will she identify with the gaze of the *voyeur*, characteristic of a masculine *curiosité*, and so objectify her subject matter; or, will she reveal the mechanisms of violence inherent in such depictions? The dilemma is apparent in Rodoreda's own research methods, marketing strategies and narrative techniques, caught up in a dialectic of objective observation and empathetic identification. On the one hand, while writing the manuscript Rodoreda cannot draw on first-hand knowledge of the subject of prostitution. On the contrary, she must garner her information from other texts no doubt written by men, whether literary or factual, and from the personal experiences of her lover, Armand Obiols and editor, Joan Sales (Casals i Couturier 274).[25] Consequently, her own narrative is filtered through masculine representations of the prostitute, while her desire for veracity evokes the image of the *flâneur* as detective, obsessed with detecting the "truth" underlying the fictitious appearances of modern life.[26]

This process of objective observation is partially supported by Rodoreda's narrative techniques. At times chapters can seem no more than a dispassionate series of snap-shots which present case studies of women, or descriptions of the dwellings successively inhabited by Cecília: characteristics that reinforce the picaresque connotations of the text. On the other hand, many representations of Cecília's experiences are governed by a poetics of ellipticism, testifying to the repression of traumatic memories. At its most harrowing, and most notably in her dealings with Marc and Eladi, the narrative assumes a strong surrealist quality which highlights the nightmarish situation undergone by the protagonist (Chs. XXXVI and XXXVII especially). At the same time as this divorcing of the narrative from "reality" partially shields both writer and reader from the rigours of a more overtly realistic account, it also paradoxically collapses any distance between reader and text by

25 In this sense, Rodoreda's situation is analogous with that faced by middle-class female Impressionist painters, in that "decorum made such places [cafés, bars and brothels] out of bounds for respectable women and thus made it impossible for women artists to paint them at first hand" (Smith 67).

26 For an excellent discussion of the *flâneur* as detective, see Smith, *Impressionism* 36-40.

encouraging a greater emotive identification with the first-person narrative voice. Thus Rodoreda's narrative strategies problematise the position of the writer/reader as voyeuristic subject by placing the reader successively as seeing subject and seen object. In this sense, her text adopts techniques deployed by certain modern painters who invite "the spectator to assume the physical and psychological standpoint of the *flâneur* implicitly present in and surveying the scene represented in the picture, only to make any identification with this viewpoint morally unbearable, and impossible to proceed with" (Smith, "Le Peintre" 92). This iconoclastic unsettling of perspective exposes the prejudices of class and gender which underpin *flâneur* and *flâneuse*, the upper-middle and lower classes, the propertied and dispossessed. In this way, *El carrer* participates in a debate over conservative visions and innovative change that is the very essence of modernity and its representations.

Split vision has been identified as characterising the patriarchal construction of woman herself, who watches herself being looked at (Berger 47). Such self-fragmentation is carried to an extreme in the figure of the prostitute, in that she depends for her livelihood on an intense observation of self in order to best attract a potential clientele. The self-damage caused by this process is intimated in *El carrer* by the narrative emphasis on Cecília's clothes.[27] While with Marc, for example, she wears constricting, revealing garments that literally make her a marked woman, as exemplified in the following passage:

> Però alguna cosa havia de fer per poder dur aquell vestit rosa que a l'últim m'havia comprat i que em venia tan just que m'ho marcava tot... Me la vaig deixar [la cotilla] per dormir i em vaig ficar al llit pensant que aviat em podria posar el vestit rosa... Em vaig despertar com si anés amb una armadura... es veu que la cotilla m'havia anat estrenyent i me la vaig haver de treure com si m'arrenqués una pell... Tenia a la pell el dibuix de les branques i les fulles de la goma. No se'm va fondre del tot fins a l'endemà. (107-08)

Caught between her desire to attract male attention and yet not be seen to be actively seeking it, Cecília originally purchases the corset so that her body cannot be perceived so easily through the pink dress. Nevertheless, the undergarment makes manifest the hidden violence inherent in the cultural writing of woman as a "naturally" seen object.

27 Rodoreda's stress on clothes in *El carrer* not only points to her own gift for fashion, visible in the fact that she considers opening her own boutique (*Cartes* 64). It also raises questions as to what extent Cecília's clothes connect her with another figure contemporaneous figure with the *flâneur*—the dandy—and also how this intersects with the textile industry, serviced by working-class women, on which Barcelona's middle class is largely constructed.

Encasing the body in an armour-like prison, it becomes "second nature" or a second skin, continuing to exert pressure on the body long after its removal. Cecília's objectification increases with Eladi, who forces her to parade and eat naked.[28] She thus becomes pure surface exposed to the gaze of the world, a text all too readily consumed by anyone.

Her transition from sexual object to subject is accompanied by the self-conscious donning of a circumspect, elegant attire that conceals the body and erases the boundaries that separate lady from prostitute: "...en vaig agafar unes quantes [violetes] i me les vaig plantar a la banda de cabells on havia dut el passador que m'havia regalat l'Eusebi. Em vaig posar un vestit gris i vaig agafar el portamonedes de cobra tenyida de verd, com les sabates" (153). It is the appropriateness of this attire, symbolic of an idiolect which permits the skilful enactment of a fiction, that allows Cecília to move about the city unmolested, ultimately leading to her attainment of personal status and wealth.[29] It also points to the development of a sense of private self or introspection particular to modernism, epitomised by a gaze that, directed inwards, disregards and disempowers the voyeuristic *flâneur*.

The dynamics of the *flâneur*'s gaze are further deconstructed by Rodoreda's narrative in a series of episodes that privilege female self-contemplation in intimate settings featuring the self-reflexive motifs of bath and mirror. Similar scenarios are common in works by modern male artists such as Emile Zola and Edgar Degas (Krell 145-46), which depend on a so-called 'keyhole' perspective or scopophilic vision in which the spectator views a feminine other unbeknownst to her. Such an illicit looking reveals a masculine concern with an feared feminine narcissism, equated with a threatening female self-containment and independence. It also points to the bourgeoisie's preoccupation with appropriating the other's secrets so as to police better the boundaries that separate subject from object, man from woman, upper from lower class, clean from unclean, lady from prostitute. These masculine precepts are challenged in *El carrer* through the deployment of certain tactics that prevent the reader/viewer from adopting the stance of the *flâneur*, demanding that s/he identify with the perspective of the

28 As Berger emphasises,: "To be nude is to be seen naked by others and yet not recognised for oneself. A naked body has to be seen as an object in order to become a nude" (54).

29 It is relevant that it is this desired freedom of movement that is identified by another modern female artist, Marie Bashkirtseff, as being absolutely essential to her cultural development: "What I long for is the freedom of going about alone... of stopping and looking at the artistic shops, of entering churches and museums, of walking about old streets at night; that's what I long for; and that's the freedom without which one cannot become a real artist" (347).

woman as active seer. That Rodoreda's work reveals such an intense observation of differences of perspective is not surprising, given her considerable artistic production dating from the 1940s in Paris, where she spent eight years.[30] Influenced by cubism, surrealism and naïf art, and especially by Klee, Rodoreda states that "aunque parezca mentira, me he pasado más horas en el Louvre que delante del espejo" (Porcel 293). Artistic production, then, like literature, constitutes an exemplary cultural mirror, forming the interface between the self and its world.

One scene that illustrates these points occurs within the bourgeois home gifted to an adult Cecília by one of her lovers, the wealthy, kind-hearted Esteve. It constitutes a revisioning of an earlier episode when Cecília, then a young innocent girl, is bathed in Maria-Cinta's house and inducted by her into bourgeois ideals of femininity: "...mentre m'eixugava amb una tovallola grossa em va fer ensenyar les mans de totes dues bandes. Netes i boniques. Després em va empolvar i... va treure aquella creu de brillants d'una capsa vermella i me la va posar" (31). These sociocultural norms are condensed in the cross, an ostentatious piece of jewelry symbolic of the patriarchal fragmentation of woman as surveyed object into untouchable virgin and available whore. Seduced by this sociocultural signifier, Cecília's self-contemplation is impeded by its presence, resulting in a gaze which transforms seer into sight, subject into object: "Em va fer mirar al mirall: anava de terra al sostre i m'hi vaig veure de dalt a baix; però els ulls de seguida se me'n van anar cap a aquella creu de brillants..." (31).

In Rodoreda's subsequent rewriting, Cecília, having just bathed, dons her prostitute's cross and contemplates herself naked, seated in front of the mirror, in what is and is not a typical representation of the prostitute:

> ... vaig treure la creu de brillants del calaix i me la vaig penjar al coll. Aleshores vaig posar la cadira amb el respatller contra el mirall i m'hi vaig asseure cama aquí i cama allà.... vaig preguntar al mirall què devia valer cadascun dels meus ossos. El ventre no compta, el pit no té preu, el cor a desar.... Em vaig aixecar tan alta com era i vaig dir a la Cecília del mirall que havia de fer alguna cosa si no volia morir en un llit d'hospital i acabar mal enterrada. (152)

Although there is a split here between seer and seen, Cecília is the subject of her own gaze and the above description subverts the

30 Ibarz indicates that painting constitutes a vital means of expression for Rodoreda in a period in which she could not write, hampered by a psychosomatic paralysis of the writing hand, emotional stress and lack of adequate financial resources.: "Perquè efectivament, els mecanismes alliberadors que ella va aplicar a la pintura són els que, en definitiva, li van permettre de tornar a escriure, a partir de 1959, i de ser la Mercè Rodoreda que coneixem" ("Mercè Rodoreda, pintora" 61).

precepts of a masculine gaze in several ways. Firstly, rather than presenting the woman fully exposed to public view, the author has Cecília seated facing the mirror, with her private parts protected from the spectator's/reader's gaze by the back of the chair. Thus, as Pollock has indicated with regard to Berthe Morisot's painting, *Psyche*, the woman "is not offered for sight so much as caught contemplating herself in a mirror in a way which separates the woman as subject of a contemplative and thoughtful look from woman as object" (81). Secondly, Cecília is engaged in a critical self-appraisal whereby she evaluates her body and accords it value herself. In this display of self-esteem, Cecília exemplifies the scenario identified by Janet Feindel in which "the prostitute... by naming her price... is breaking the 'silent' exchange of women. By naming it and defining it and consciously bringing into light what has traditionally been repressed she is no longer a passive participant in the [economic] exchange" (qtd. Bell 91).[31] At the same time as she names her price, however, Cecília also positions herself beyond reach, hence placing herself both within and without the purview of a market economy: "El ventre no compta, el pit no té preu, el cor a desar."

It is significant that this episode marks the point in the narrative from when Cecília assumes full control of her bodily economy and destiny. The following day she returns to the apartment block where she used to meet Marc, deliberately places herself on display in front of those who formerly spied on her, Constància and the tailor across the street, and formally employs Constància to procure her rich lovers, although later she will handle her business arrangements herself. It is through 'contracting in,' as Pateman terms it (Ch. 1) and taking control of the sexual encounter that Cecília can be read as claiming the right to participate equally in modern civil society, declaring herself the owner of a property inalienable from her person.[32] In this sense, Rodoreda's text questions Pateman's categorical statement that "[w]hen women's bodies are on sale as commodities in the capitalist market... male sex-right is publicly affirmed" (208). However, the narrative also indicates that certain material conditions must first be fulfilled in order for women to be able to name their price themselves. Self-governance in the public

31 Kirkpatrick has remarked on a similar process regarding Emilia Pardo Bazán's modernist protagonist, Lina, from her 1911 novel *Dulce dueño*: "She maintains the feminine position of *being* the sign, that the man will *have*. But she constructs her subjectivity in terms of controlling to *whom* she will signify" (126).

32 I here draw on Locke's declaration that "every Man has a *Property* in his own *Person*" (287), as well as on Shrage's statement that the prostitute as sexual equal has "the authority to determine what services the customer could get, under what conditions the customer could get them, and what they would cost" (197).

sphere is fully effective when one already possesses some capital goods. Only when Cecília has a house, car, chauffeur and maid, all self-administrated, can she feel, like the *flâneur*, at home on the streets: "Caminava a poc a poc... A sota dels til·lers em sentia com si fos a casa meva" (165-66).

The metatextual implications of the *flâneuse* as the embodiment of the modern female artist or writer are further confirmed through the presence of other *flâneur*-like characters in Cecília's trajectory. One of these is Eusebi, Cecília's first lover and a ragpicker by trade. Associations between the ragpicker and the modern artist, especially the writer, are commonplace in writings by Baudelaire and his contemporaries, as well as in Impressionist paintings, where the ragpicker is seen as a street-philosopher, a variant of the *flâneur*.[33] Within the spectacle that is the modern city, both ragpicker and *flâneur*/writer feed off the lives of others, creating something out of nothing. Like the prostitute, the ragpicker inhabits the fringes of civilised society under constant vigilance by the authorities (Krell 140-41). The potential danger symbolised by Eusebi is annulled when he is placed in prison by Francoist authorities for stealing, as well as for political "crimes" during the Civil War (74-75). Artistic connotations also characterise Cecília's second lover, Andrés, who dies from tuberculosis. Although Cecília initially understands that he is a "marbrista" or worker of marble headstones, he turns out to be only a "guixaire" (48): a profession with lesser artistic pretensions. The textual removal of these men may be read as a rejection by Rodoreda of the unviable art that they represent: a censured lack of originality on the one hand, and a sickly, obsolete realism on the other. At the same time, these figures share with Cecília a sociocultural marginality that places them in opposition to an established status quo.

In terms of character, however, it is tellingly only Cecília who resembles the concept of the *flâneur* as philosopher poet, engaged in extracting the poetic from the historical, essence from experience, the eternal from the contingent. A peripatetic wanderer, it is his self-critical and self-reflexive capacity which enables him, so Baudelaire's contemporary Louis Huart states, to "[rise] above the culture of the commodity" (qtd. Smith, "'Le Peintre'" 84). His curiousness or *curiosité*, then, produces a newness of vision characteristic of the child. Genius, as Baudelaire affirms, is hence equated with "'l'*enfance retrouvée* à volonté, l'enfance douée maintenant, pour s'exprimer... de l'esprit analytique qui lui permet d'ordonner la somme de matériaux involontairement amassée" ("Le Peintre" 368).

33 Examples are Baudelaire's poem "Ragpickers' Wine" from *Les Fleurs du mal* (1857) and Edouard Manet's painting *The Absinthe Drinker* (see Smith, *Impressionism* 45).

Such strands of thought bring more contextualised nuances into play when evaluating Rodoreda's work. Her childlike figures need not be attributed solely to the exigencies of characterisation or to a stylistic naivety on the part of the author, but concur with a modern perception of the artist/writer.[34] Aligning *El carrer* with the premises governing the *flâneur* might also help explain its final chapter, incongruous in comparison with the rest of the text for its rambling philosophical tone. On the pretext of Cecília's visit to the night-watchman who found her, these final pages delve back into her past in an unsuccessful attempt to clarify her unknown origins: a mystery that in the end takes on even greater proportions than at the beginning. This undecidability of the text positions both Cecília and reader as detective whose quest for the truth can never be fulfilled, no matter how great their powers of observation.[35] The symbol of the prostitute turned philosopher also returns to the origins of philosophy itself, in that the prostitutes or *hetairae* of ancient Greece figure among the sophistic philosophers, constituting part of "high" discourse while infusing it with the truths of the body (Bell 1, 185).

As a child, Cecília's lack of origins leads others to imagine her parents in terms of stock characters from popular literature. The one reference to the possibility of an aristocratic mother—"Un altre dia deien que devia ser una marquesa que m'havia anat a tenir lluny" (12)—can be read as a subliminal allusion to the writer's desire to simultaneously affirm and deny an inherited literary canon. Conversely, the predominance of anarchists and bohemian-like artists suggests Rodoreda's wish to create a revolutionary, avant-garde literature grounded in the people: "...deien que la meva mare devia ser una artista de les que canten cançons..." (12); "El senyor Jaume sempre deia que devia ser músic... Deien que el meu pare devia ser d'aquells homes que volen matar la reina, dels que posen bombes quan ella passa amb tren, i que roben, dels que només viuen per cremar-ho tot" and "Segons ella el meu pare devia ser un pobre estudiant i la meva mare una pobra noia posada a servir a catorze anys" (13-14). As with its protagonist's imagined origins, *El carrer* presents a similar mix of "high" and "low" literary traditions, with Cecília's success story

34 Rodoreda herself emphasises with regard to the protagonist of *La plaça del Diamant*: "Veure el món amb ulls d'infant, és un constant meravellament, no és pas ser beneit sinó tot el contrari; a més, la Colometa fa el que ha de fer dintre de la seva situació en la vida i fer el que s'ha de fer i res més demostra un talent natural digne de tots els respectes" (*La plaça* 7).

35 In this sense, *El carrer* is similar to the "in/conclusion" of Edgar Allan Poe's "The Man of the Crowd," where "the world, and its story, have become illegible" (Smith, "'Le Peintre'" 82-83). It is no coincidence that Poe is acknowledged by Rodoreda as one of her literary influences (McNerney and Enríquez de Salamanca 326).

owing as much to the conventions of a canonical picaresque genre as to her Mills-and-Boon-type rescue from the streets by Esteve. It is this use of sensationalist elements and fairy-tale scenarios, together with complex modernist techniques, that contributes to the subversive ambiguity of Rodoreda's text. In the sense specified by Sieburth, it is an example of a "mass cultural novel": a text which "directly confront[s its] own relationship with mass culture" (11).

Making "high" culture out of "low" literature and legitimising the illegitimate, while simultaneously affirming a lack of origins, intersects with another variant of the *flâneur*. This is the unclassifiable stranger who may blend in with the multitude and so observe undetected.[36] Such a representation acquires different resonances when analysed in the context of the female modernist author. On the one hand, the writer-as-stranger paradigm points to her desire to attain the same privileges as her male counterparts within the sociocultural *polis*, to be accepted as one of the crowd and not perceived as an oddity. Through her narrative corpus, however, the writer also wishes to stand out from the crowd, to escape from anonymity by foregrounding a lack of identifiable origins, synonymous with originality, that differentiates her work from mainstream currents. Although men may have felt the need, in the words of Richard Sennett, "to escape to public privacy" or "privatised freedom" in the midst of the crowd (68), it is debatable whether middle-class women, pressured to remain within a private sphere lacking in freedom, would approach the city with similar sentiments. Given that it is from this very anonymity or invisibility in public life that modernist women artists wish to escape, the figure of the prostitute represents a means of becoming a marked woman and standing out against the crowd. The metaphorical embodiment of this seeming paradox of wishing to be seen and not seen becomes, in Rodoreda's work, the prostitute turned courtesan, the fallen woman made good.

This equation of Cecília's advancement from a low to a high status with the writer's desire to form part of a reputable canon is also manifest in the increasing emphasis in *El carrer* on the space of the garden as opposed to the street. A prominent symbol in Rodoreda's production, the garden is the subject of many suggestive critical studies,[37] and resonates with artistic nuances. To a considerable

36 Such a figure is best embodied by Poe's "Man of the Crowd," commented on by Baudelaire in "Le Peintre."

37 These range from Arnau's classic reading of Rodoreda's production in terms of a "mite de la infantesa" or nostalgia for the lost Edenic world of childhood, to Bieder's identification of the garden as a "source of identity or self-renewal" (354). Other critical analyses that foreground the garden are those by McNerney and Vosburg, Scarlett,

degree, it intersects with the Romantic concept of culture as an organic process, as a cultivation of natural elements or faculties held, however, by a privileged few. At the same time, the garden as artefact also draws on a notion of "high" culture as "intellectual perfection, an ultimate standard for valuation," contrasted with a materialist civilisation envisaged as "potentially corrupting"(Sieburth 3).[38] These concepts are implicit in *El carrer*, where Cecília's own garden suggests an apparently natural continuity and self-renewal in comparison with rapid urban and technological changes. Seen in relation to the aspirations of the female writer, the garden stands for a distinctive literary Arcadia which will outlast the inconstant vagaries of the marketplace, for the creation of a "high" culture that has escaped being mere commodity. Neither inside the home nor out on the street, it constitutes an extension of both: a space that, by bridging the contexts of bourgeois woman and her working-class counterpart, evokes the ambiguity of the female writer's situation.

In terms of cultural politics, the garden can be read as vindicating a "domestic" literature elaborated in Rodoreda's native language, Catalan, and hence easily accessible by all Catalan speakers.[39] Consequently, Cecília's cultivation of her garden here serves also as a metaphor for the fomenting of a Catalan literature and national identity that challenges the centralising forces of the Franco dictatorship.[40] Such a push becomes stronger in the 1960s, an epoch that reinstates as an important component of this new eclectic identity a formerly repudiated *modernisme* (Ucelay Da Cal 335), whose poets made frequent use of the symbol of the garden to represent Catalonia (Bou, "'Silenci'").[41] The garden is a cogent symbol of this rebirth of

González, and Varderi, not to mention numerous studies on the symbolic value of plants in Rodoreda's work.

38 It is interesting that it is in a Barcelona-published dictionary (1890-1895) that the first definition of culture as an intellectual state appears (Sieburth 4).

39 In this respect, the following remark by Resina is very relevant: "The language employed differs noticeably from the literary Catalan used by other writers of her generation; it is a speech that... reflects the vocabulary and even the grammatical competence of the working and lower-middle classes, metropolitan and provincial, of pre-World War II Catalan society.... [Rodoreda] has produced a popular idiomatic tone intelligible to the whole Catalan linguistic area" (230).

40 As Rodoreda herself states in 1962, "En català es pot escriure, també, per un cert esperit de revolta" (qtd. Ibarz, *Mercè* 99).

41 Charlon also emphasises the importance of the 1960s: "En els Països Catalans l'oposició al règim va passar per la resistència lingüística i cultural. En els anys seixanta, el moviment generalment anomenat 'La Nova Cançó' serví de catalitzador i de coagulant a les reivindicacions polítiques i catalanistes" (118-19). Moreover, it is not until this same decade of industrialisation, Sieburth maintains, that modernist techniques become fully integrated into the Spanish novel (232).

Catalan culture led by the novel: a modern version of the nineteenth-century *Renaixença* which, epitomised by the poet Jacint Verdaguer,[42] aims to educate the Catalan working-classes (*Catalunya* 158-59). All these are factors which surely impact on the simultaneous consolidation of Rodoreda's literary reputation and the publication of her most acclaimed novels, among them, *El carrer*. At the same time, however, literature written in Catalan is produced for a reduced community and market, and in this sense recalls the elitism of the bucolic Parnassus inhabited by the select poets of old. Such circumstances also mean, as Robert Hughes signalled in the early 1990s, that "[n]o serious imaginative writer can make a decent living from the sales of his or her books in Catalan alone" (32): a statement that recalls the precariousness of Cecília's existence until she becomes established.

Forging a literature of own's own that might be distinct from but also identified with a Catalan identity principally elaborated by male writers constitutes an important subtext of Cecília's story. Her reclaiming of the right to walk the streets unmolested is a testimony, on one level, to the desire of a dissident people to forge their own independence from a hegemonic power and see materialised the ideals of a lost Republic.[43] On another, but interconnected level, it refers to the struggle of the woman writer to access the avenues of consumerism and success. Today, at the turn of the twenty-first century, these goals have been realised: Catalonia regained autonomous status in 1979, while women's writing in Spain, and especially from Catalonia, is on the bestseller lists and obtains major literary prizes.[44] Cecília's story, however, still has currency in an age defined by increasing urban growth, anonymity and violence against

42 It is hardly coincidental that Verdaguer was a friend of Rodoreda's grandfather, who erected a monument to him in the garden of Rodoreda's family home, originally intended as the centre of the *Renaixença* (Ibarz, *Mercè* 24-25; Casals i Couturier 26). Rodoreda herself wins, in 1947, 1948 and 1949, the *Jocs Florals* for Catalan poetry, inaugurated in the *Renaixença* (Casals i Couturier 147-59).

43 Consequently, there is the tendency to appropriate Rodoreda's work so as to enhance a sense of regional identity. One instance of this is in the early 1980s, when her protagonist Colometa from *La plaça* is specifically depicted in Francesc Betriu's film of the novel as a Catalonia that triumphs over Francoist repression (Hart 43). The result is the elimination of the textual critique of a Catalan middle- and upper-class so as to stress regional unity against outside forces. In this way, a homogeneous national space is created that disregards Rodoreda's contention that the homeland does not shelter all its citizens in an equal manner (see also Navajas).

44 The most recent example of this is the acclaim received by Carme Riera for her novel, *Dins el darrer blau* (1994), awarded, among others, the Premio Nacional de Narrativa (1995). Similarly, Rosa Regàs has received the Premio Nadal for *Azul* (1994) and the Premio Ciutat de Barcelona de Literatura en Lengua Castellana for *Luna lunera* (1999).

feminised others. As Pollock declares: "Modernity is still with us, ever more acutely as our cities become in the exacerbated world of postmodernity, more and more a place of strangers and spectacle... The spaces of femininity still regulate women's lives —from running the gauntlet of intrusive looks by men on the streets to surviving deadly sexual assaults" (89). Until women, together with other discriminated groups, effectively do feel at home on the streets, Cecília's narrative will continue to be theirs.

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