

## *The Strategies of Silence* in *Réquiem por un campesino español*

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Lo que está sucediendo en el pueblo... es horrible y no tiene nombre.  
Ramón J. Sender, *Réquiem por un campesino español*

Los múltiples silencios en *Réquiem por un campesino español* evocan lo indecible, un horror tan mayúsculo y tan fuera de la experiencia vivida por el pueblo que la palabra no lo abarca. La neutralidad narrativa respecto a la culpabilidad de Mosén Millán constituye uno de los silencios textuales; el narrador no enjuicia a Mosén Millán, sino que obliga al lector a decidir la cuestión de la responsabilidad moral del cura. La ausencia del movimiento y de los ruidos de la vida cotidiana es contrastada en la novela con la algarabía de antaño, ya presente sólo en los recuerdos de Mosén Millán. El romance de Paco funciona a base de varias estrategias del silencio: la versión truncada del romance y su casi constante interrupción, tanto por el cura como personaje cuanto por el narrador; la memoria imperfecta del monaguillo que lo recita; los errores que puede contener, sean de la versión que se ofrece en la novela o de una posible versión completa, en parte callada; la omisión de algunos trozos, el desorden temporal de su evocación por el monaguillo. Al «callarse» el texto novelístico tantos elementos, evoca la represión y un horror tan grande que faltan las palabras para expresarlo.

*Réquiem por un campesino español* is exemplary of Ramón J. Sender's best fiction: with an appeal that transcends the time and place in which it occurs, this poignant story has generated numerous printings, student texts, study guides, bilingual editions, and translations into many languages.<sup>1</sup> The novel relates the tragic story of the death of a young peasant in Aragón; its economy of presentation (it is barely over one hundred pages) and simple, straightforward style prompted one critic to

1 A brief publication history of this novel may be seen in KING (13-14).

speak of it in terms of «la retórica de la desnudez» (Peñuelas, «Estilo», 267). Paradoxically, the apparent simplicity and directness are quite deceptive: they complement an intricate web of cause and effect, of hidden motives and behaviors that are simultaneously specific, universal, historical, and mythical. To convey this effect, Sender employs a powerful device—silence (and variations such as negativity, absence, repression)—to underscore a situation so dreadful that it is «unspeakable». Devices such as allusion, ambiguity, and understatement enhance the feeling of anxiety that emanates from the text, involving the reader in what cannot be articulated and alluding to betrayal and bad faith on religious, political, and human levels.

Silences in *Réquiem* range from the obvious lack of noise to more subtle manifestations. Words related to silence or silencing appear with frequency: admonitions to keep quiet, avoidance of speech, unarticulated thoughts, and constant references to silences which undergird religious ceremonies, secrets kept, and emotional states (shock, fear, resignation, etc.). Gaps in the narrative, fragmentation, ambiguity, and other textual strategies suggest the possibility of deliberate omissions or suppressions in the novel, either on the part of the characters or the narrator. Real and symbolic silence underlines tactics of repression and so permeates the novel's discourse that it can be considered equally a theme and a technical strategy.<sup>2</sup>

Of the several narrative strands that comprise the plot, three principal viewpoints are immediately apparent, each converging around the death (and life) of Paco. The reflections of Mosén Millán, the village priest, offer a personal account of Paco's life. This «biography» filters silently through his memory, which therefore controls and presents events selectively. The second «version» is a short *romance* recollected

2 Sender knew the effects of silencing on a tragically personal level: his wife and brother were executed; his subsequent exile was a form of silencing; the novel itself was prohibited in Spain until 1974. For brief comments on the publication history, see PÉREZ CARRERA (25).

piecemeal and in nonchronological order by the young acolyte who is to serve during the forthcoming requiem mass. These two discourses intertwine and separate as the story progresses, forming a countertext to the narrative present, which is simply the waiting period before the mass begins. A third objective narrative voice supplies details and comments that supplement the first two perspectives.

Underlying these complementary discourses are several alternative or variant representations of the «truth» which do not emerge overtly, for example, the question of the priest's responsibility and/or guilt in the death (and on a symbolic plane, that of the Church)<sup>3</sup> or the historical context (never openly disclosed, yet crucial to understanding the motives). Even Paco's «version» offers yet another variation on silence and silencing: he is unable to speak on his own behalf, so his survivors have the privilege of «editing» his biography.<sup>4</sup> Although these several coexistent stories are never articulated (i. e., openly acknowledged), they bleed through the written accounts, breaking the silence with the help of narrative strategies that alert the readers to the subtext.<sup>5</sup> By the end of the novel, the cumulative facts have penetrated the silence of the unnamable, revealing betrayal and self-deception in a small rural village that could be a microcosm of the post-war Spanish situation or, in a wider sense, of mankind's unfortunate condition.

The central focus of *Réquiem* ostensibly involves the «silencing» of Paco. Through a complicated strategy of analepsis in which past event sengerge the present, Paco's story (and by implication, that of his region

3 HENN (106-111) discusses this aspect.

4 In an excellent article on the functions of silence, PÉREZ (123) notes that «Another special form of silence is found in narratives involving a dead protagonist, unable to state his or her own case, whose personality and actions must be reconstructed by the reader from partial and conflicting accounts and perspectives of survivors».

5 Patricia McDERMOTT (36) states that «It is a fluid narrative of multiple perspectives in which the principle of relativity of point of view undermines the authorised version of history of an absolutist National-Catholic Regime proclaiming itself to be the Way, the Truth and the Life».

and his country) is evoked through the mechanism of personal and collective memory. Mosén Millán kneels to pray in preparation for the requiem mass (which he will celebrate one year after Paco's assassination) and for the brief space of the narrative present (less than half an hour), he recalls episodes from the dead man's life: always precociously aware of injustice in his village, Paco tries to rectify this situation. His most important activities coincide with the Second Republic and the Civil War; the latter, never specifically identified in the novel, is ushered in symbolically with the arrival of the *señoritos*, who puzzle the villagers with high-flown speeches and terrorize them with random executions: «Los campesinos creían que aquellos hombres que hacían gestos innecesarios y juntaban los tacones y daban gritos estaban mal de la cabeza, pero viendo a Mosén Millán y a don Valeriano sentados en lugares de honor, no sabían qué pensar» (87). Already suspect because of his liberal views, Paco goes into hiding. Mosén Millán discloses his whereabouts and Paco is subsequently captured and executed.

Ironically, the only ones to appear for the requiem mass are the three men whose conservative allegiances implicate them in the repressions and deaths; later, the intrusion of Paco's horse in the church wordlessly validates his memory. Refusing their offer to pay for the mass, Mosén Millán thinks, «Ahora yo digo en sufragio de su alma esta misa de réquiem, que sus enemigos quieren pagar» (105).<sup>6</sup> But the priest's thoughts have unwittingly revealed his direct or indirect responsibility in Paco's death, although the context in which he remembers it suggests that he was a victim of circumstances beyond his control.

Whether this priest should be included in the list of «sus enemigos» is only one of the implied questions left unresolved; with no further direction from the narrator, the readers must decide the true version for themselves. The villagers, however, silently turn in their verdict by refusing

<sup>6</sup> GODOY GALLARDO (68) believes that the priest's refusal to allow any of the three to pay for the mass is a silent form of protest, «la única protesta que puede tener».

to attend the mass. Thus, absence as well as silence emphasizes the unspeakable: time and again the reader learns that, with the exception of the three men, none of the villagers has arrived to participate in the mass. This information punctuates the priest's memories as regularly as the tolling of the bells and is so repetitious that it seems like a refrain to the ballad: «Aún no ha venido nadie, Mosén Millán» (42).<sup>7</sup> First the acolyte, then the men who enter the church, and finally the narrator, confirm that «En la iglesia no había nadie, con la excepción de don Valeriano, don Gumersindo y el señor Cástulo» (104).

To enhance the symbolic role of silence, Sender adds contrasting sounds which often have their own transcendent function. The peal of church bells regularly punctuates the novel: they form a leitmotif that stresses the Church's place in the life of the village. Bells ring at the baptism (13-14), at the wedding; they announce the services (42, 46, 91); now they toll for the requiem mass. A description of the Holy Week celebrations that so impressed Paco transmits sounds that emphasize the lugubrious aspects: «Las cadenas [...] sonaban sobre losas o la tierra apelmazada de un modo bronco y terrible. [...] canciones de beatas sobre aquel rumor de hierros [...] ruido de cadenas [...] sonaban las matracas» (48-49). Instead of the joyful celebration of Resurrection, these sounds link the Church with death and the sacrifice of the innocent, subtly foretelling a similar role in the fate of Paco, whose death is closely linked to the Passion.

A contrastive technique opposes sound and silence from the opening page of the novel, where all is still, in every sense of the word: Mosén Millán kneels alone, silently praying. Outside, activity and sounds («rumores humildes», the whinny of Paco's horse) foreground the quiet within the room and invite an incursion into the past. Many celebrations which Mosén Millán now recalls were filled with noise (laughter, jokes,

<sup>7</sup> See also pp. 11, 12, 18, 23, 64, 92, 105.

conversations at the baptism and wedding), offering a sharp contrast to the fearful, repressive quiet that now seems to pervade the village. The simple technique of emphasizing the silence that saturates the interval of Mosén Millán's wait forces the unstated conclusion that the joyous communal noises of earlier days have completely disappeared. In their place, varied silences betray the vacuum left by repression in every sense of the word: the silencing of freedom, of justice, and finally, of an entire way of life.<sup>8</sup>

Negative qualities of silence, absence (the minimal presence of other characters), and immobility introduce the reader to Mosén Millán as he kneels in the sacristy.<sup>9</sup> The lack of movement on all levels directs attention to the inner and past dimensions, which provide the narrative movement through a linear account of Paco's life as seen primarily through Mosén Millán's eyes. In addition to his pastoral activities connected to so many important milestones in Paco's life —baptism, marriage, death—, the two had an unusually close relationship («Quería al muchacho, y el niño le quería a él, también» [24]). However, Mosén Millán balanced this affection with annoyance when Paco dared to challenge the *status quo*. Paco's open and often rash defiance of authority in the face of injustice (he was the symbolic leader of the «opposition» when he took his place on the village council and was outspoken concerning needed reforms) demonstrates his reluctance to accept the unquestioned traditions to which the priest clings.

8 RIVAS (230-234) notes that in Sender's works silence exists «para señalar que la atmósfera está cargada con significados implícitos, son silencios elocuentes...». Adding that Sender needs a point of reference for these silences, she points to certain sounds that the author prefers to use, such as that of animals or a «ruidito mecánico», and states that «... los valores del silencio [...] están preñados de sentimientos inefables, por lo peligroso de romperlos. [...] estos silencios tienen un pequeño ruido, para que su eco haga resonar más la tensión del callar».

9 MARRA-LÓPEZ (391 ff.) describes the static qualities of the present tense. IGLESIAS OVEJERO, among others, develops the relationship between silence and absence in the opening pages of the novel.

Mosén Millán's association with Paco provides several telling examples of the interplay of articulation and repression and the subsequent effects of silence. In a humorous episode from Paco's childhood, the priest tries to cut off a conversation between Paco and the visiting Bishop, afraid (with good reason) that the boy will speak out of turn. But this amusing scene portends a more serious means of silencing—repression—exemplified in a momentous episode from Paco's youth. As an acolyte, he accompanies Mosén Millán to the *cuevas*, the poorest section in the village, to administer extreme unction to a dying man. Horrified by the stuffy, airless room, Paco is even more upset by the terrible silence which underlines the hopeless situation on the one hand, and the lack of compassion on the other: «El cura no dijo nada, la mujer tampoco» (35). The only sounds in the room are the tortured breathing of the dying man and the Latin phrases from the rite; when he finishes, «El sacerdote parecía ir a decir algo, pero se calló. Salieron» (37). However, Paco cannot contain his questions—«Paco no podía estar callado» (38)—but Mosén Millán doesn't know how to respond to the boy's innocent queries. He tries to silence him by resorting to religious clichés such as «Cuando Dios permite la pobreza y el dolor [...] es por algo» or «¿Qué puedes hacer tú? [...] Esas cuevas que has visto son miserables pero las hay peores en otros pueblos» (39) and advises him not to talk about this to the neighbors (39-40). The annoyed parents also remain silent, refuse to discuss the matter, and eventually forbid Paco to accompany the priest on similar expeditions. The event gains even more prominence when the village gossips exaggerate Paco's role (41), inaugurating the transformation of his «adventures» into popular mythology.

This crucial episode is a fine example of narrative understatement. The minimal, impassive description of the dreadful conditions in the *cueva* is limited to significant details, related with a notable lack of emotional or judgmental tone. The moral implications, however, become clear through the interaction of sound and silence. The emphasis on the death rattle and on the conspicuous absence of any expression of sympathy

betray the lack of compassion in the priest's uncharitable behavior, which is indirectly confirmed by this simple statement: «Mosén Millán tenía prisa por salir, pero lo disimulaba porque aquella prisa le parecía poco cristiana» (36-37). In addition, Paco links silence and the plight of the poor people with the crucifixion: «Paco recordaba que el enfermo no decía nada. La mujer tampoco. Además el enfermo tenía los pies de madera como los de los crucifijos rotos ya abandonados en el desván» (39).

The development of this episode foreshadows the speech/silence dichotomy which is played out in Paco's adulthood, when the dynamics of articulation (truth) and silence (suppression) take on increasing significance. Years later, Paco questions «ingenuamente» the justice of the Duke's charging rent for extensive land holdings that he never visits; Mosén Millán silences him with words reminiscent of the way he quelled Paco's protests about the *cueva* episode: «¿Qué miseria? —dijo Mosén Millán—. Todavía hay más miseria en otras partes que aquí» (45).

Although the heroic figure of Paco (reinforced by his parallels with Christ and his mythologization in the *romance*) is ostensibly the core of this work, equal—or greater—emphasis falls to Mosén Millán in his role as priest and as human being.<sup>10</sup> Here too, his function and personality develop in terms of silence, absence, and passivity. After the king abdicates, the priest refuses to leave the rectory for a considerable time («evitando hablar con nadie»); later, he declines to speak either personally or in an official capacity about the subject (69). At the time he should provide the village with leadership and direction, he chooses to do nothing, letting inactivity underline his silence. The villagers' reaction to his lack of guidance is also silent but pointed: they stop attending church services (69).

When faced with Paco's concerns about the poor, or with any factor which threatens the status quo, Mosén Millán takes refuge in pat phrases

10 More attention was called to this fact in the first edition, published under the title of *Mosén Millán*, México, Colección Aquelarre, 1953.



or religious truisms instead of discussing the issue openly. For example, he «protests» the unwarranted execution of innocent villagers by complaining that they were not allowed to confess before they died (81), an issue which the newcomers punctiliously rectify: «Las últimas ejecuciones —decía el centurión— se han hecho sin privar a los reos de nada. Han tenido hasta la extremaunción. ¿De qué se queja usted?» (88). Even when speaking to the villagers, he cannot openly acknowledge what is happening and suppresses the awful truth by silencing it: «Lo que está sucediendo en el pueblo... es horrible y no tiene nombre» (85). These evasions fall within the category of silence: according to Mosén Millán's «behavior», they are subjects so unspeakable that he can only address them indirectly through circumlocution, euphemisms, or total avoidance.

Even the priest's implication in Paco's tragedy unfolds within silences and allusions. By *not* revealing his ignorance, «Mosén Millán dio [a la familia] la impresión de que sabía dónde estaba escondido Paco» (85). Now in possession of this dangerous information, he plays a «game» with silence to prove that he has the necessary moral fiber to protect Paco: «Y le gustaba, sin embargo, dar a entender que sabía dónde estaba escondido. De ese modo mostraba al alcalde que era capaz de nobleza y lealtad» (87-88). However, when a pistol is wordlessly displayed during the questioning, Mosén Millán does not respond to the queries aloud, but «... bajando la cabeza. Era una afirmación. Podía ser una afirmación» (89). At this crucial period, his psychological make-up emerges subtly through deliberate understatement. Mosén Millán's silence and the absence of narrative commentary reveal the complexity of a situation in which duty, loyalty, fear, and self-interest mingle.

In this way, Mosén Millán's moral, religious, and personal motives in this novel remain deliberately unclear. No categorical statements fix the blame or exonerate his actions; with few exceptions, the narrator maintains a neutral position. This supposed absence of narrative direction—a textual silence—has understandably given rise to varied interpretations

of the priest's act, ranging from full responsibility to his own victimization.<sup>11</sup> When asked about Mosén Millán's guilt or innocence, Sender would not commit himself and declined to make a direct statement, thus reemphasizing the place of ambiguity in the text: «Las palabras del cura y lo que yo digo sobre ellas no representan una opinión del autor sobre la naturaleza moral del sacerdote ni de la Iglesia sino un hecho que dejo a la libre interpretación del lector. Es él quien condenará al cura. Pero el cura es también una víctima intelectual de una Iglesia como la española».<sup>12</sup> These words confirm the importance of narrative silence in *Réquiem*: ambiguity, textual gaps, and allusions reinforce the equivocal nature of a situation whose implications demand concealment. The subtlety of this novel derives from what is not stated explicitly, thus drawing the reader even further into the awful mystery of hidden meanings and motives.

Mosén Millán's personality exemplifies the destructive results of silence. Reticent to speak out on behalf of his parishioners, discouraging others from their right to protest, he remains enshrouded in the silences with which he is literally and figuratively identified during the narrative present. He represses his responsibility in Paco's death even to himself, but cannot help mutely dredging up a detail that his memory is unable to obliterate: bloodstains («La muerte de Paco estaba tan fresca, que Mosén Millán creía tener todavía manchas de sangre en sus vestidos» [104]).

Even more significant evidence appears in Mosén Millán's recollection of Paco's final words: «Creía oír su nombre en los labios del agonizante caído en tierra: "... Mosén Millán» (104). Since this dreadful scene

11 Most studies of this novel discuss Mosén Millán's role in Paco's death, a subject of extreme importance, since this priest also represents Church activities during this critical time. Opinions as to his actions range from condemnatory (COMPITELLO, 94) to the belief that «El gran error de Mosén Millán es el de confiar» (GODOY GALLARDO, 73). For a summary of opinions, see LARSEN (93-105) and particularly David HENN.

12 Quoted in MALINGRE (104). No source is given, but it is presumably from the same letter to Malingre mentioned in footnote 12, dated April 2, 1981.

appears only two pages before, it is easy to remember that something is missing from Mosén Millán's version. Covered with blood, Paco runs to the car in which the priest is sitting, only to be dragged away for the *coup de grâce*. Significantly, the priest's memory has silenced the beginning of the quotation whispered by the dying man: «Se oyeron dos o tres tiros más. Luego siguió un silencio en el cual todavía susurraba Paco: «Él me denunció [...], Mosén Millán, Mosén Millán [...]» (102-103). This fine example of «amnesia» has suppressed the most important detail linking the priest to Paco's demise, allowing him to erase (i. e., silence) his accountability in Paco's death and, by extension, in much of the tragedy of the village.<sup>13</sup> In addition, since this information immediately precedes the comment about Paco's «enemies», the proximity is enough to suggest the connection between «Él me denunció» and the list of enemies, to which Mosén Millán now might be added.

Mosén Millán's behavior is part of a pattern of evasions and silences that forms the basic structure of *Réquiem*. One of the most intriguing examples is the vacuum that surrounds the historical context of the novel. Studies of the literature of the Civil War often include *Réquiem* in the lengthy list,<sup>14</sup> but no mention of that war ever appears in this novel. «Se considera una obra sobre la guerra pero la guerra [...] ni siquiera se la nombra un solo momento» (Castillo-Puche, 77).<sup>15</sup> Clearly, the tragic circumstances escalate after the inauguration of the Second

13 IGLESIAS OVEJERO (231) interprets Mosén Millán's relationship with silence in the following way: «... en *Réquiem*, [el silencio] no es una circunstancia, sino una función, la que corresponde al confidente [Mosén Millán], cuyo papel consiste en saber callar. La transgresión de esta norma motiva la tragedia del amigo y en consecuencia, en la narración inmediata, el silencio tampoco conduce a la paz, sino a la soledad». In a very perceptive article about this novel, Malcolm COMPITELLO (99) points to the textual punishment meted out to Mosén Millán through his inability to forget this incident.

14 For example, PONCE DE LEÓN (111-112) mentions *Réquiem*.

15 RESSOT (87-98) discusses at some length Sender's refusal to speak directly about the Civil War in his literature (88) and how he employs it circumstantially, rather than as a subject. He also mentions Sender's historical imprecision, his absence of political terms, etc.

Republic, but the text provides minimal clues as to the precise time frame (remarks that the King left the country [69]; the departure of the Civil Guard and subsequent arrival of the *señoritos* [80], which signal the beginning of the Civil War). The identity of the *señoritos de la ciudad* is never clarified, although their behavior points to Falangist connections. For all practical purposes, Sender withholds or deliberately confuses historical reality.<sup>16</sup>

The possible reasons for this suppression are varied. One critic has speculated that Sender's refusal to deal directly with the Civil War responds to a desire to make this cataclysm less of an historical fact and more of a «fatalité ontologique» (Ressot, 95). In addition, the villagers are extremely naive in matters of political principles: the pitiless brutality and lack of discernible cause only confuse them. By suppressing the historical context that would have explained the philosophy behind these events, Sender allows the reader to experience the sense of isolation from political developments that makes the village's collective unsophistication all the more tragic. For example, when they learn that the shoemaker was shot because he was an «agente de Rusia», they are extremely puzzled: «Nadie sabía qué era la Rusia, y todos pensaban en la yegua roja de la tahona, a la que llamaban así. Pero aquello no tenía sentido. Tampoco lo tenía nada de lo que pasaba en el pueblo» (83). With one brief stroke, Sender manages to convey the innocence of the people and the pathos of a situation whose abstractness magnifies the horror even more. The villagers' collective sacrifice complements a web of biblical allusions which suggests Paco as a Christ figure and therefore Mosén Millán as his Judas.<sup>17</sup> This biblical subtext refocuses the events to a more universal plane and provides another motive for obscuring identifiable details.

16 HART (46-47) notes still another type of suppression: his silence concerning "uncomfortable historical facts" concerning Republican atrocities.

17 See, among others, Busette (482-486) and Pennington (22-24).

Despite the lack of precise historical references, Sender has portrayed the *intrahistoria* of a rural village at a crucial moment in its development. The silence which marks this moment has the power to change the course of their lives: the violent tactics of the *señoritos* serve to muffle objections and the stunned village retreats into silence —«un silencio temeroso» (98)—. Fear paralyzes the people: instead of protesting the terrible beatings and murders, «Nadie preguntaba. Nadie comprendía» (81). Thus, a façade of silence masks the terrible things that happen during the night: «Durante el día el pueblo parecía en calma» (82). Particularly in light of the noisy celebrations from earlier times, the contrasting absence of emotion is unusually poignant: «Nadie lloraba y nadie reía en el pueblo. Mosén Millán pensaba que sin risa y sin llanto la vida podía ser horrible como una pesadilla» (85). The repetition of «nadie» and «sin» reinforces the village's «lack» that these negatives imply: outside forces have so brutalized the people that they have silenced their natural expression of joy and sorrow as well.

While political repression is one powerful means of silencing, still further evidence of suppression is manifest in a cultural silencing which engulfs and stifles an entire way of life, symbolized by the microcosm of the village. This issue obviously concerned Sender, who mentioned it when asked about social problems in this novel: «El cuadro de la vida campesina es tan fuerte en sí mismo y tan conmovedor, y estaba yo tan lleno de intenciones de tipo humano elemental y de tipo también artístico, porque todo iba junto, que lo social se desprende solo. [...] No pensé en otra dimensión, sino en la expresión literaria directa de un problema en torno a una aldea» (Peñuelas, *Conversaciones*, 132).

The portrait of «la vida campesina» appears in two ways. The most obvious is the «artistic» version, which presents a charming and realistic portrait of rural Spanish society; the *costumbrista* details portray a people who are straightforward and down-to-earth, with an unsophisticated simplicity that complements their natural, even idyllic, way of life. The few evaluative comments in the text point to this: the «alegría primitiva»

which accompanies the interchange between the washerwomen and the naked boys (44) or the wedding serenade sung by «campesinos de manos rudas y corazón caliente» (60-61). With few exceptions, they are not loquacious, but express their thoughts in pithy sayings and proverbs. They attend mass irregularly, are not devout, and are even somewhat superstitious. They tend to view life in practical rather than theological terms. For the most part, *Réquiem* portrays these people as a group rather than as individuals, thus emphasizing the social and economic interdependence of the community.

La Jerónima, the village *ensalmadora*, is an eccentric old woman who symbolizes many of the natural—even primitive—qualities of this rural society. Her shameless allusions to sexual matters (her own and those of others) underscore her alliance with a natural, instinctual way of life which is noisily articulated in the face of more staid social customs.<sup>18</sup> La Jerónima is the main figure of the *carasol*, a meeting place significantly located outside the town, whose origins have primitive implications. There the old women sew and gossip; their collective voice chronicles the atrocities («repetían los nombres de los que iban cayendo» [83]), but more often, their *dijendas* smack of incantations.

Since their activities are harmless, the reaction of the *señoritos* to this inoffensive place is inexplicable. They spray it with machine-gun fire, wounding or killing many of the women. This action effectively silences the village's collective voice. Although la Jerónima survives, by the end of the Civil War she has lost her brashness, her voice, and her «powers». At the *carasol*, «daba voces cuando creía que no podían oírla, y otras veces callaba y se ponía a contar en las rocas las huellas de las balas» (104). This woman and the rural life she represents suffer the effects of political and cultural silencing.

18 «Frente al silencio y ocultamiento que la sociedad establecida impone a todo lo relacionado con la sexualidad, La Jerónima y las mujeres del *carasol* utilizan un lenguaje desenfadado y hasta procaz» (PÉREZ CARRERA, 46).

La Jerónima, symbol of rural tradition, loses the «war» against two forces with which she has a distinctly adversarial relationship and which must inexorably silence the primitive ways she represents. The first is the power of the Church: counterbalancing Mosén Millán's role as symbolic father of the community, La Jerónima is a type of earth-mother, guardian of pagan rituals and traditions so old that they have lost their original meaning (as when she finishes one of her strange *oraciones* with an incomprehensible «frase latina que sonaba como una obscenidad» [19]). Her colorful figure also appears at crucial moments in Paco's life, offsetting the religious solemnity with her humor and folk superstitions. Much to Mosén Millán's dismay, she places talismans under Paco's pillow at his baptism, and at the suggestion that one day the child may be another Saul, she rejoins, «El chico será lo que tenga que ser. Cualquier cosa, menos cura» (22). At the *carasol*, she dances to the sound of church bells and gathers pebbles to alleviate toothache as the bells ring on Easter Saturday (34). By the present tense of the narrative, it is clear that the forces in power have suppressed any practices antagonistic to Church or State, among them La Jerónima.

Another symbolic figure opposes La Jerónima's practices: the young doctor, representative of science and technology. At Paco's baptism, he humiliates her in front of everyone, admonishing her to not to touch the newborn child. As soon as he leaves, La Jerónima «comenzó a desahogarse. Dijo que con los médicos viejos nunca había tenido palabras, y que aquel jovencito creía que sólo su ciencia valía, pero dime de lo que presumes y te diré lo que te falta». (20)

Laureano Bonet's ethnographic interpretation understands *Réquiem* as «la historia anónima de una colectividad campesina, mundo diminuto con sus propias reglas [...] y un mundo desvinculado de la sociedad industrial, aunque, con el estallido de la guerra, lleguen a él las salpicaduras sangrientas y quede precisamente abolido en sus fibras más vivas» (437-444). This perceptive reading corroborates the process of silencing

which the village undergoes. Ecclesiastical opposition and the inevitable encroachment of the industrial world crush this fragile way of life.

A close scrutiny of the three narrative discourses discloses still other variations on silence. Mosén Millán's recollections are far from objective, so the reader cannot rely on him to provide a dispassionate account. In addition, critics have discovered inaccuracies or inconsistencies in his version of the text (particularly in calculating time): various explanations for these slips suggest authorial carelessness, a realistic portrayal of an old man's failing memory, or a more serious narrative ploy.<sup>19</sup> Both the narrator and the acolyte pointedly contradict references in the text, an unusual means of error correction that hints at the unreliability of the source or at the possibility of a different version. In this way, the writer alerts the reader to other silences, as in the example of the ballad.

The textual strategies of silence converge in the *romance*. Critics have acknowledged its crucial place in the novel, commenting on the multiple symbolic levels and functions of this discourse: it provides a logical point of departure for Mosén Millán's memories and directs reader attention exclusively to the horrible end of Paco's life.<sup>20</sup> This popular form of poetry confirms Paco's elevation to the status of local hero and complements the more universal implications of his passion and death (Paco and Christ have in common their sacrifice for others, the betrayal by a trusted friend, the execution between two others). Unlike Mosén Millán's memories, the *romance* appears in fragmented and non-chronological order, beginning with «Ahí va Paco el del Molino, / que ya ha sido sentenciado, / y que llora por su vida / camino del camposanto» (11). That is to say, the ballad begins as he is being taken to the place of execution.

19 For example, LUNA MARTÍN (135) attributes the errors to «extravíos de memoria [...] por tratarse de un anciano». Remarks by SKYRME view some of the inconsistencies as more deliberate narrative ploys.

20 See, for example, HAVAR (88-96).



The end of the novel coincides with what is probably the end of the ballad («Y rindió el postrer suspiro / al Señor de lo creado. —Amén» [104]). During the course of the narration, the ballad weaves back and forth with details of his capture and removal to the cemetery, his confession to Mosén Millán and assassination, interspersed with very few brief, lyrical descriptions of nature.

The sketchy background information on the *romance* is limited to brief facts about the time of composition and the authorship («Después de su muerte la gente sacó un romance» [11]); elaborations on the subject matter, point of view, or the timing of the composition are pointedly omitted. The combined information in the narrator's discourse, in Mosén Millán's retrospection, and in the poem gives the impression of a full account of Paco's life, but because the ballad is inserted piecemeal into a wealth of other information about Paco, it may not be immediately apparent that it deals exclusively with the circumstances connected with Paco's death—the death of a hero—. In effect, the alternation of voices and the fragmentation of the ballad allow gaps that may pass unnoticed as the several discourses intermingle. The ballad contains selective material that is as controlled as the priest's memories.

The fragmentation and temporal un-sequencing of the ballad cloud the absence of a possible fuller version, which could contain the birth and formation of the hero. The ballad form is traditionally episodic, but even if the first part of Paco's life were never part of this folk tribute, even important details of his death seem to have been omitted or suppressed (Criado Miguel notes that «no completa el romance la muerte», and speculates that perhaps «el héroe no debe morir asesinado por un pelotón [342]»).

Several pointed comments remind the reader that other parts of the ballad have been silenced. The narrator explains that the acolyte (who recalls all but one piece of the *romance* presented in the novel) «sabía algunos trozos» (11), thereby acknowledging the existence of others. He later states that the boy «no sabía todo el romance de Paco...» (18),

another implicit message that there is more to the ballad than the acolyte will recite. The names of other victims existed in the silenced portions: «El romance hablaba luego de otros reos que murieron también entonces, pero el monaguillo no se acordaba de los nombres» (76). The ballad also contains two errors, which the narrator is quick to rectify. The first contradicts the remark about Paco crying (a rather non-heroic touch): «Eso de llorar no era verdad, porque el monaguillo vio a Paco, y no lloraba» (11). The second paraphrases the information in the *romance* that tells about the death of others who had died «asesinados», but acknowledges that this word is unnamable: «Aunque el romance no decía eso [asesinados], sino ejecutados» (76). Both remarks suggest that the ballad has undergone a certain amount of editing, and in the process, has glossed over the truth. Still another inconsistency concerns Paco's handkerchief; according to the ballad, «En las zarzas del camino / el pañuelo se ha dejado» (92), but after Paco dies, the centurion gives Mosén Millán his watch and handkerchief (both of which presumably came from the dead man's pocket) for safekeeping (103).

The novel provides enough clues concerning the existence of more ballad material to warrant some speculation. Two questions arise: first, what are the «other» fragments of the ballad?; second, why have they been silenced? One possibility is to erase an heroic figure; the other is to protect the guilty. Even during his lifetime, Paco enjoyed a measure of heroic magnification —the women of the *carasol* (functioning as a sort of Greek chorus) exaggerate his charity, daring, concern, and manliness.<sup>21</sup> This may form the skeleton of the missing pieces of the ballad, or at least of the popular legend surrounding Paco to which the recited portion never alludes.<sup>22</sup> The second possibility concerns Mosén Millán, who

21 In addition to the *cueva* episode, his future sexual prowess is predicted and his defiance of authority is exaggerated (69).

22 BLY (100) connects these two popular versions when he states that «The inaccuracies of the ballad would seem to parallel the embellished version of events that the old washer woman [*sic*] under La Jerónima's leadership are always spreading».

appears in the tragic chain of events: «Aquel que lo bautizara, / Mosén Millán el nombrado, / en confesión desde el coche / le escuchaba los pecados» (65). His presence at the scene of the murder may implicate him, but no direct accusation makes him the responsible party. However, Mosén Millán himself sends the acolyte outside, ostensibly to check on attendance at the mass; in reality, «quería evitar que el monaguillo dijera la parte del romance en la que se hablaba de él...» (65). He thus succeeds in «silencing» the incriminating portions of the ballad, although they do surface when he recalls the lines to himself.

Seen in this light, the «suppressed» sections of the *romance* may offer further evidence of silencing and the unspeakable. The *romance* may exist only in fragmented form because of the overbearing presence of the victors, who would oppose the glorification of dissidents under any circumstances. However, this prohibition is even more stringent, since it silences even the mere account of the circumstances surrounding Paco's death, which presumably would elaborate on the guilty as well as the innocent. With even more overt intentions, don Gumersindo threatens the acolyte with dire consequences if he continues to recite the *romance*: «No lo digas todo, zagal, porque aquí, el alcalde, te llevará a la cárcel». After this, «se hizo un silencio penoso» (65). Robert G. Havard states that the ballad «is a very strong counterpoint to the Mass and it constitutes nothing less than the villagers' own secular requiem for Paco» (90). The incomplete version and the opposition's menacing reaction at its recitation offer proof of stifled collective expression, which includes even the censorship of memory.

It is possible that the fragmented ballad offers a direct parallel to the other examples of silence and constraint: the elimination of time-honored traditions and control of the voice of the people through fear and repression. There is no way to articulate the unspeakable, which ranges from the slaughter of innocent people to the cyclical sacrifice of a Christ-figure. The atrocities committed during this period do not fall within the experience of the villagers; their life discourse provides them

no vocabulary with which to express their horror. Given the political structure, any type of dissension would be foolhardy: a repressive power structure is very much in evidence, and the text provides numerous instances of innocent victims who serve as examples for others, now notably absent (except for their collective voice *via* the ballad). The old way of life has been silenced; heroes have disappeared. Only silence remains to fill the vacuum.

Formerly, the village was filled with the activity and the sounds of life: bells rang for baptisms, the townspeople sang wedding songs, the women at the *carasol* shouted good-natured insults to each other. But such descriptions clearly belong to the past: on the day of the requiem mass, Paco's heroism and sacrifice (whether in verse or in the exaggerations of the *carasol*) are glaringly absent, as are the family and friends who were invited to celebrate the mass with the priest. The town is deserted (94), no one gossips in the *carasol*; instead of noisy shouts and laughter, «Las grandes rocas desnudas parecían juntar las cabezas y hablar» (103).

The polysemic nature of silence encompasses an unusually broad range of conditions such as happiness, peace, awe, reverence. Significantly, silence receives no such positive values in *Réquiem por un campesino español*, but it does affect each level implied in this work (religious, popular, political, artistic, personal, social). Paco's murder symbolizes the destruction of an ideal—even the *romance* can only relate the betrayal and death of the hero—. The hopelessness of the aftermath is also symbolized by the death-like silence that enshrouds the living, a fitting comment on the effects of repression: «El pueblo entero estaba callado y sombrío, como una inmensa tumba» (104).

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