

WORLD LITERATURE TODAY

FORMERLY BOOKS ABROAD

A LITERARY QUARTERLY
OF THE UNIVERSITY
OF OKLAHOMA
NORMAN, OKLAHOMA
73019 U.S.A.

FROM THE

WINTER 1980

ISSUE

Miguel Àngel Riera. *L'endemà de mai*. Barcelona. Edicions 62. 1978. 231 pages.

Na Andreeva and En Cosme discover that even one baneful event is more than enough to obliterate the advantages derived from their wealth and social prestige and from the sheer splendor of their Majorcan habitat. The suicide of their only son commits them to an atmosphere of never-ending gloom. For them—to borrow a line from Gerard Manley Hopkins—“no worst, there is none.” Beset by countless frustrations and anxieties, both gradually become islands unto themselves: she, a soul akin to Lorca's Yerma, withers in the throes of the annihilation and anguish which gnaw at the very fibers of her being; he, a close semblance of Cela's Pascual Duarte, is compelled by a sinister, atavistic drive toward self-assertion and ego gratification.

The ambitious scenario of Riera's novel may prove somewhat overwhelming to the reader. While focusing upon Andreeva's and Cosme's obsessive brooding over their bereavement, the author expatiates upon the depiction of a Goya-like backdrop which evokes, in general, nightmarish visions of man's inhumanity to man and, in particular, spine-chilling incidents of the Spanish Civil War. Despite the impressive master plan of *L'endemà de mai*, Riera's omniscient narrator falls short of working out a convincing articulation between individual and communal tragedy, between the breakdown of a marriage and the deterioration of the social order. The protracted, meticulous psychoanalysis of the two protagonists produces an effect of ponderousness which the author is unable to counterbalance by any of the stock-in-trade measures: the occasional heightening of suspense, the injection of an element of shock as a counterpoint to practically every major episode, or even the exploitation of an uncommon flair for language.

The strained cohesiveness of his narrative notwithstanding, Riera musters the resources of his art in order to illustrate an intuition of existence as a paradoxical conjugation of guilt and innocence. True to Segismundo's desperate dictum in Caldern's *La vida es sueño* to the effect that “the greatest crime of man is to have been born,” at the heart of Riera's paradox lurks the perception of life itself as a nemesis visited upon a society sustained by *machista* values and governed by the law of the jungle—a society which gives the Cosmes of this world free rein to sow the seeds of internecine discord and to perpetrate their abuses and atrocities with the impunity which must be accorded to a ravaging beast.

But isn't Cosme himself a victim as much as a victimizer? After repeated, long dives into the stagnating pool of the protagonist's soul, Riera and his narrator attain a disconcerting insight: even the most virile of men is nothing but a helpless pawn of the vitality which courses through him, of his blind urge to procreate and of his pointless will to survive.

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