

Time of Silence

Tiempo de silencio

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Tiempo de silencio (*Time of Silence*), published in 1961 by Spanish psychiatrist Luis Martín-Santos, follows don Pedro, a young scientist engaged in cancer research. Written and published under the Francoist dictatorship, the novel portrays the social and moral reality of postwar Madrid during late 1940s. Experimental form of the novel critically reexamines Spanish literary tradition and, at the same time, managed to hide the subversive nature of its social and political commentary from the state censorship. Through the use of intertextuality, parody, and multiperspectivism, Martín-Santos challenges conventional narration and constructs a disruptive representation of Spanish society.

Tiempo de silencio rejects subjectivism and, consequently, employs a series of narrative strategies that introduce multiple perspectives. The protagonist of the novel is a young, promising scientist who dedicates his time to researching a cure for cancer. Nevertheless, his laboratory is deeply affected by the socioeconomic conditions of postwar Spain. Don Pedro's interactions with members of different social classes of Madrid in the late 1940s constitute the main axis of the novel, beginning with his visit to the lower class neighbourhood of his supplier of laboratory mice. Meeting the supplier's family profoundly affects Don Pedro's life, as a few days later he is called to save the life of a young woman during childbirth. The woman dies, and the abortion performed by don Pedro is reported, leading to his arrest. Although he is eventually released, the novel ultimately presents an irredeemably tragic outcome. The woman he intends to marry is murdered in an act of revenge against him. The novel concludes with don Pedro leaving Madrid to work as a doctor in a small town, passive and lost in a trance.

The novel formally and thematically addresses the miserable socioeconomic and moral conditions of postwar Spain. While deplorable living conditions and malnutrition constitute the clearest evidence of a society marked by poverty, male and sexual violence expose its profound social problems. The parody of narrative traditions and of specific discourses, particularly scientific discourse, constitutes one of the most distinctive formal strategies in *Tiempo de silencio*. Grandiloquent vocabulary characteristic of chivalric romances is employed to describe precarious housing (*chabolas*), while elaborate scientific terminology is used to depict the mice-breeding business run by one of the characters. In doing so, the novel suggests that traditional narrative forms are fundamentally inadequate for representing life in the aftermath of Spanish civil war. Intertextuality serves not only to critically reexamine literary traditions but, above all, to draw attention to the dehumanizing living conditions under Francoist regime.

Strong political component of Martín-Santos novel lies in the uncovering of stagnation of upper class and intellectuals. Through grotesque characterization, Martín-Santos discredits the imperial nostalgia of impoverished, backward-looking elites. The protagonist's landlady is portrayed as a Moira who presides over a *tertulia* in a decaying boarding house, embodying both decline and

fatalism. At the same time, her character introduces another intertextual reference: to Pedro, she appears as one of the Moirai, the Fates of Greek tragedy who determine the destiny of individuals and entire peoples. A recurring trope in Spanish culture (see, for example, Francisco de Goya's *The Fates*), the Moirai constitute an element of the Spanish imaginary that Martín-Santos regards as particularly apt for representing the society after civil war. The symbolism of the fates highlights the incapacity of don Pedro to shape either his own destiny or the society around him.

LANGUAGE: Spanish / Español

This title was not censored before publishing