I, too, Speak: "Female" Discourse in Carballido's Plays*

Sandra Messinger Cypess

Yo también hablo de la rosa, Carballido's one-act play, has one of the more provocative titles of the many suggestive works by Mexico's well-known contemporary playwright. It serves as a good example of Julia Kristeva's "croisement de surfaces textuelles."[1] The title refers not only to Villaurrutia's poem and to Sor Juana's famous sonnet, but suggests a polysemy of the image of rose, and a multiplicity of signification in general. Margaret Sayers Peden calls it the most important one-act play written by Carballido and one of his best works of any length.[2] I would like to play with this title in order to initiate an examination of the speech act as Carballido has shaped it for his female characters, since one aspect of his central theme of social criticism is his treatment of the status of women in Mexican society. On the thematic level, I shall also relate female discourse to *La rosa's* philosophical exploration of the meaning of existence and the nature of reality as a union of reason and emotion.

Mexican society can be considered a patriarchy, since it is a society whose driving principles are those of Fatherness, which is power, authority, discipline, maleness.[3] In this scheme, women are generally silent figures, submissive to the patriarchal powers which govern their lives, whether it be the fathers of the family, of the Church, or of the body politic. Since the one who has power in society controls discourse, men have been portrayed in the active role of speaker or director of action, with women generally the listeners or receivers of directions. In focusing on the particular ways Carballido's women characters relate to discourse, I shall refer to the concepts developed by the French social historian Michel Foucault.

The multiplicity of elements which come into play in various discursive practices are elaborated by Foucault in "The Discourse on Language," found as an appendix to *The Archaeology of Knowledge.* In that coherent analysis of the

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conventions which govern the production of discourse, Foucault names three principles—exclusion, limitation and appropriation—which are active on the exterior level for the control and delimitation of discourse. Let us consider Foucault's description of the rules of exclusion since they pertain to the sexual and political spheres of discourses that are the focus of this paper:

> In a society such as our own we all know the rules of *exclusion.* The most obvious and familiar of these concerns what is prohibited. We know perfectly well that we are not free to say just anything, that we cannot simply speak of anything, when we like or where we like; not just anyone, finally, may speak of just anything. We have three types of prohibition, covering objects, ritual with its surrounding circumstances, the privileged or exclusive right to speak of a particular subject; these prohibitions interrelate, reinforce, and complement each other, forming a complex web, continually subject to modification. . . . In appearance, speech may well be of little account, but the prohibitions surrounding it soon reveal its links with desire and power.[4]

Foucault reminds us that this system of rules within which discourse is enclosed is an expression of a culture and handed down from generation to generation. For Mexican society, as has been noted above, women are not usually privileged to be speaking subjects, but rather, are objects described or manipulated. Carballido explores the restraints placed upon women in their exercise of the speech act as well as their rebelliousness against the rules of exclusion. It is important to note that among Carballido's women characters there are individuals whose discourse breaks the rules of prohibition and exclusion, just as there are traditionally submissive Latin females. Woman as object is clearly personified in Emma's treatment by Mario in *Felicidad,* or Juana's role in *Te juro, Juana, que tengo ganas,* or in Margarita's treatment by her mother and aunt in *Las cartas de Mozart;* an examination of any number of other works shows that patriarchal exploitation of women is present to varying degrees and is related to Carballido's overall concern for social reform. It is also thematically and structurally significant that Carballido does not treat patriarchal exploitation in a stereotyped way. Rather, in consonance with the polysemous nature of signification, the patriarchy is diversely represented: by the traditional father figure—a Mario or a Diógenes—as well as by females who accept and transmit patriarchal values by their own actions, as represented by the mother and aunt of *Las cartas de Mozart* or the aunt in *El día que se soltaron los leones.* In this study, I have chosen to focus on the discursive practices of two of the women who appear to rebel actively against society's accepted patterns of female discourse: Rosalba of *Rosalba y los Llaveros* and Ana of *El día que se soltaron los leones.*

In one of the only articles to date to focus on linguistic function in *Rosalba y los Llaveros,* Solomon Tilles explores the manner in which words are utilized by the female protagonist as an instrument to stimulate change in the lives of others. Tilles mentions the question of communication, or "el choque entre el hablar de Rosalba y el no hablar de los demás" as one of the themes of the play.[5] In my reading I would say that discursive practices within the context of Mexican society are one of the major subjects of exploration in the play. The

Llaveros as a family have accepted totally the rules of exclusion, as described by Foucault above, and have refrained from entering into discourse because of the constraints of prohibition. Rosalba's use of discourse, on the contrary, breaks the rules of exclusion and forces a change in their silence which then leads them to the use of words and actions. In the contrast between Rosalba and the Llaveros, Carballido draws attention to the system of rules within which discourse is enclosed in Mexican society, and its links with desire and power. The following analysis of dialogue will verify this hypothesis.[6]

In examining the discourse of the female protagonist, Rosalba, it becomes immediately evident that her speech is characterized by none of the traditional restrictions and prohibitions surrounding female vocal behavior. She is not afraid to speak about anything, from the sacred—her own mother—to the sexual, including the illicit relations of members of her family. The unorthodox nature of her speech patterns is verified by the shocked reactions of her listeners, whose responses remind us of the rules and restrictions that society generally applies to female speakers. It is not only that Rosalba uses forbidden words, such as "prostituta" (208), but that she dares to ask questions unbecoming to a young woman:

> ROSALBA—Tía, ¿Lázaro y Lucha, son amantes?
> LOLA—Rosalba, ¡qué preguntas para una señorita: No sé como tu madre te permite! (195).

Rosalba's mother, however, has no control over her daughter, a situation more in consonance with typical mother-son relationships than with mother-daughter ties. Indeed, Rosalba's discourse, as it relates to the systems of exclusion and constraints outlined by Foucault, identifies her use of language with accepted patterns of masculine behavior. That Carballido is consciously encouraging this aspect of Rosalba's characterization is evident from the following comment of Rosalba to Lázaro: "Es muy fácil que te olvides de que soy una muchacha" (174). While that line provokes laughter, since on the visual level it is not easy to forget that Rosalba is a young woman, nevertheless, on the level of verbal discourse, Rosalba does indeed speak the language associated with maleness and power in her society. A careful examination of the text reveals that until the final scenes, Rosalba is identified with patriarchal class structure and values. As she tells Lázaro: "Soy gente 'culta,' ves? Así estoy clasificada" (173). Also, Lorenzo, the father of the family, identifies Rosalba with his own pattern of behavior: "Casi en todo he visto que pensamos muy similarmente" (208). To think similarly to the head of the family is to be identified with the patriarchy. It is pertinent at this point to remember that previously Lorenzo had been called "un viejo tirano" (171) in his role as patriarch of the family. Although this phrase may apply ironically to Lorenzo, it seems clear that Carballido is exploring the nature of the family as a microcosm of the patriarchal system. In addition, Rosalba is identified with logos, or speech, a traditionally masculine characteristic:

> LÁZARO (a Rosalba)—Hablar. Eso te gusta siempre (219).

Furthermore, Rosalba comes from the city, a place associated with masculine power, as opposed to the country, or rural area, traditionally considered

feminine space.[7] Thus, Carballido has created the rather unusual situation that the masculine characteristics of authority, reason, and analysis are personified in a female figure; Rosalba as signifier may be female from the visual perspective, but from the auditory aspect—how she sounds and her use of discourse—she is marked as masculine.

It is interesting to note that in their analyses of Rosalba as a character, both Tilles and Eugene Skinner identify her as a "liberated modern woman."[8] It is this characterization that I would like to oppose on the basis of Rosalba's use of discourse which is associated in the text, as I have shown, with patriarchal discursive practices. While Skinner associates Rosalba with "excessive rationalization," he does not identify that characteristic as traditionally "masculine"; nevertheless, he does note that Rosalba is linked with Nativitas, observing that the latter "functions as a grotesque mirror for Rosalba" (24). In that regard, it should be remembered that when Nativitas first appears on stage in Act I, scene 5, she is dressed in men's clothing, a semiotic device that leads us to consider that there are discrepancies in normal signifier/signified relations. In other words, Nativitas as a visual sign here signifies male, though her content is female; conversely, Rosalba as a visual signifier is female, though her content (discourse) is male.

Tilles also identifies Rosalba with the word, and equates her with Lázaro in that both are rational creatures, while he contrasts Rosalba with Rita on the basis of Rita's feminine behavior: "Rita, como mujer, es esencialmente irracional y obra sobre la base de las emociones. Sus palabras no representan ni una profunda verdad psicológica ni un hecho sino un estado de ánimo. Rosalba, porque no comprende esta distinción, se equivoca al obrar enérgicamente sobre la base de los desahogos de Rita" (Tilles, 43). Tilles' observation seems to support the distinction Rosalba-rational-masculine, on the one hand, and Rita-emotional-female on the other. Yet his final commentary stresses that Rosalba is "una muchacha cualquiera" (43). The conclusion I would suggest, however, is that Rosalba's way with words for most of the play is patriarchal, and in that vein works neither with Lázaro nor Rita. As long as Rosalba used the discourse of patriarchy, she did not accomplish her goals: neither Rita nor Lázaro nor Rosalba appear satisfied with the results of her interference in their lives.

Rosalba's discursive practices are criticized because she usurps the rights of others; she speaks to Felipe about Rita's feelings instead of giving Rita the opportunity to face Felipe directly; she assumes Lázaro is the father of Luz's unborn child instead of facing him directly, posing the question and listening to his response. In order for Rosalba to find her own individual voice, instead of mimicking the patriarchy, she first has to detach herself from the realm of the Fathers, and unite with the realm of the Mothers, or the emotions, because it has been the female aspect of her self that she has denied. As Rosalba finally admits to Lázaro, she has not acted true to her own inner voice, but imitated another pattern: "Hago teatro para los demás, a veces para mí sola, no puedo evitarlo" (223). Once Rosalba recognizes, however, that the voice she has been accustomed to using is "theatrical" or contrived, then her subsequent use of discourse works in a positive way. Instead of serving as the instrument of separation for Felipe and Rita, Rita and Felipe

are encouraged to meet together. When Felipe and Rita do communicate with each other, instead of having Rosalba as an intermediary, they reach a state of union. When Rosalba faces Lázaro in the final scene, she is a changed woman, a reborn individual who no longer speaks to exercise power. She is conscious of the need to speak as a form of communion, not confrontation: "Estoy contenta y quiero hablar bien, lucirme" (228). She now shines, and fits into her name "Rosalba," or rosy dawn, because she has transcended the limits imposed by analytical rationalization of human existence (to paraphrase Eugene Skinner's analysis of *La rosa*).[9] In Rosalba, then, as in *La rosa,* Carballido affirms that a holistic approach, a union of the "masculine" and "feminine" in traditional terms, or of reason and emotion, succeeds while a mono-thematic perspective leads only to failure.

Rosalba as a character is not a mere catalyst, but instead undergoes a process of transformation herself through the experiences of discourse. Her usurpation of masculine discourse and patriarchal values, which transformed her into a false androgyne, shows how language can trap—not liberate—us.[10] The dominance of the patriarchy imposes male values on females, creating images of women that are male-oriented, as Rosalba symbolizes so well. Rosalba's disavowal of her previous discursive practices and her espousal of "lucid discourse" ('quiero hablar bien, lucirme' [228]), marks the shift from authoritarian, patriarchal values to liberating, life-affirming values.

Still energetic and active at the play's end, Rosalba has shed the old stereotypes and has been rejuvenated, as noted in her last comment: "Todo mundo es joven en realidad. Vámonos" (228-229). Her call to action is cast in a plural form, and refers to herself and Lázaro, whose hand she holds, as well as to the other newly formed couple, Rita and Felipe. The formation of these couples signifies that there has been a shift from individual separations to a union of opposites: Rita, the Hispanic with Felipe, the Indian, Rosalba of the Word with Lázaro the silent one. As Carballido has emphasized in the majority of his dramatic works, the polarities of reason/emotion, universal/particular, objective/subjective, male/female should be united. Rosalba's final "vámonos" can be considered a call to a new social order in which discourse is not used to control others, but to unite with others. *Rosalba y los Llaveros* ends, not only as a humorous and entertaining play, but it also offers a provocative social critique of patriarchal discourse.

The same quest for liberating discourse which Rosalba experiences can be found in *El día que se soltaron los leones.*[11] In contrast to Rosalba, Ana is a woman in her sixties who never strayed beyond the confines of her socially accepted role as submissive niece to the head of her family, in this case the Aunt. In the process of the play's development, however, Ana, like Rosalba before her, ultimately represents a new pattern of discourse.

Initially, Ana experiences language as a form of oppression and enslavement because she is considered the inferior member of the discursive dialogue and is forced to always agree with her aunt. In acquiescing to her aunt—"diciendo siempre que sí"—Ana has a fixed role in what Foucault termed the fellowship of discourse (225). Within that closed society, "the roles of speaking and listening were not interchangeable" (265), just as they were not in the aunt's home. The aunt, who is identified with "gobiernos, jefes, teorías"

(226), is thus another signifier for patriarchal society. When Ana escapes from her aunt's home—or the world of patriarchal values—into the forest of emotions and fantasy, Ana discovers that she has the power to exercise discourse without repeating the words and actions of her past models. Ana realizes the destructiveness of her previously submissive role in discourse: "Yo he perdido tanto diciendo siempre que sí" (265). In rejecting the patriarchal values of the rationalist world Ana steps beyond the limits of restrictive, stereotyped patterns of female behavior. She rejects her aunt's world and chooses to live with the lions in the zoo. As Peden comments: "It is inevitable that Ana would elect to live among the 'caged' lions and devote the remainder of her life to educating children who only think they are free to be wholly free. It is appropriate, too, that it is the search for her beloved pet that leads her from the confinement of the spiritual cage of her aunt's apartment to the freedom of the literal cage of the big cats" (133). Carballido has once again pointed to the ambiguity of appearance and reality, or the polysemous nature of the signifier. Just as Rosalba-woman signified male discourse, Ana caged with the lions signifies freedom of discourse. For the first time, she is beyond the control of the patriarchy with its rules and restrictions; she is free to speak, to direct her discourse to others.

As Peden has observed above, Ana has chosen to educate children "who only think they are free to be wholly free." Yet an examination of her discourse shows that it is characterized by invective; she yells at the children, calling them "niños tarados, niños idiotas," and "niños gusanos, niños imbéciles" (273). One might well question how the use of such words will raise the consciousness of the children to whom they are directed. Her verbal attack against the children shows that Ana functions outside the systems of rules and societal restrictions governing the production of discourse. By hurling insults at the children, Ana attacks the proprieties of the society from which she has escaped. Perhaps Luis Rafael Sánchez' comment on the use of vulgarities (lo soez) is also pertinent here: "Lo soez es la transgresión del cultivo social, es el desprecio o la ignorancia del repertorio de normas, gentilezas, gracias y respetos, que integran la convivencia."[12]

Ana's abusive words are equivalent to "lo soez" as described by Sánchez in that both are signs of transgressive acts for the speakers. Ana had previously been the victim of a manipulative, authoritarian moral code and its concomitant restrictive discursive practices. Her present discursive transgressions now reveal her disdain for that society and her liberation from it. As Foucault reminds us in his "Conclusion" to *The Archaeology of Knowledge,* "To speak is to do something other than to express what one thinks . . ." (p. 209). When Ana speaks to the children, her discourse breaks the rules and procedures whereby speech is traditionally controlled, selected, organized and redistributed (See Foucault, 216), thereby bringing to light the existence of these rules and their restrictions. She brings to the level of consciousness for the children, and for the reader, the generally unconscious system within which discursive practices function. Ana's comment about her verbal attack against the children reveals she is conscious, too, of the role of her discourse:

ANA—Les grito así para que aprendan. ¿Usted cree que entiendan por qué les grito?

EL HOMBRE—Ahora no. Más tarde.

ANA—Mejor . . . (273)

Ana, freed from patriarchal values, uses her discourse to liberate others, to lead them to the realization that it is possible to break the rules of restriction, prohibition, and exclusion. Ana in the lion's cage, speaking freely, is an audiovisual sign that contradicts the patriarchal rules which were outlined in my initial citation from Foucault's study: "We know perfectly well that we are not free to say just anything, that we cannot simply speak of anything, when we like or where we like; not just anyone, finally, may speak of just anything." As we have seen in the discursive practices of Rosalba and Ana, however, this traditional system which has been institutionalized and authorized through generations of use can be challenged and transgressed, or, in more positive terms, transformed to allow for a liberation of restrictions. In that way, new speakers, new circumstances, new ideas are possible. Like Ana, we may have to wait for this message to be understood, and for discursive practices to change. In the meantime, Carballido's humanistic dramatic world will help lead the way. He acknowledges the presence and reality of social conventions, yet with humor and insight, shows the inherent arbitrariness and stereotypic nonsense of past generations regarding these discursive practices.

State University of New York at Binghamton

Notes

1. Kristeva, "Bakhtine, le mot, le dialogue, et le roman," *Critique* 239 (avril, 1967), 439.
2. Peden, *Emilio Carballido* (Boston: Twayne, 1980), p. 50.
3. For a discussion of patriarchy, see Sheila Ruth, "Sexism, Patriarchy, and Feminism," in *Women and Men: The Consequences of Power,* ed. Dana V. Heller and Robin Ann Sheets (Cincinnati: Office of Women's Studies, 1976), p. 56. See also Lynne B. Iglitzin, "The Patriarchal Heritage," in Iglitzin and Ross, eds. *Women in the World: A Comparative Study* (Santa Barbara and Oxford: Clio Books, 1976), pp. 7-24.
4. Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge,* trans. A. M. Sheridan (New York: Pantheon, 1970), p. 216.
5. See "La importancia de la 'palabra' en *Rosalba y los Llaveros,*" *Latin American Theatre Review,* 8/2 (Spring 1975), 40.
6. All references in the text to *Rosalba y los Llaveros* are based on the edition found in Emilio Carballido, *Teatro* (México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1965).
7. Sherry Ortner, "Is Female to Male as Nature is to Culture?" in *Women, Culture, and Society,* eds. Michelle Rosaldo and Louise Lamphere, (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 1974). For other developments of these polar associations of masculine and feminine, see Jungian works, such as Jung's own *Man and his Symbols,* as well as Erich Neumann, *The Great Mother: An Analysis of the Archetype,* Bolingen Series XLVIII, trans. Ralph Manheim (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963); Ernesto Sábato, "Fin de una era masculina" in *El escritor y sus fantasmas* (Buenos Aires: Aguilar, 1963); Hernán Vidal, *Maria Luisa Bombal: La feminidad enajenada* (Gerona: Colección Aubi, 1976).
8. See Tilles, note 5; Eugene Skinner, "The Theater of Emilio Carballido: Spinning a Web," eds. Leon Lyday and George Woodyard, *Dramatists in Revolt* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1976), 19-36.
9. See Skinner's interpretation of *La rosa,* 31-35.
10. For some critics, like Carolyn Heilbrun in *Toward a Recognition of Androgyny,* androgyny means a reconciliation of masculine and feminine characteristics to create a whole or complete individual. Recently, feminist critics have rejected the term on the basis that "masculine" and "feminine" have both been defined by patriarchal culture, so "androgyny" does not refer to a true union of opposites.

11. All references to *El día que se soltaron los leones* are based on the edition found in *Teatro,* note 6 above.

12. "Apuntación mínima de lo soez," *Literature and Popular Culture in the Hispanic World. A Symposium.* ed. Rose S. Minc. (Gaithersburg, MD.: Hispamérica, 1981), 14.

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ATINT
Asociación de Trabajadores e Investigadores del Nuevo Teatro
P.O. Box 1792 FDR Station
New York, N.Y. 10150