

THE ANNUAL JOAN GILI MEMORIAL LECTURE

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*The English Experience*

THE ANGLO-CATALAN SOCIETY  
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### **The author**

Narcís Comadira was born in Girona on January 22, 1942. He studied Romance Philology at Barcelona University where he graduated in the History of Art. During the academic years 1971-73 he was *lector* in the Spanish Department at Queen Mary College in the University of London. He now divides his working time between painting and writing.

Since 1970 Narcís Comadira has published numerous books of poetry, subsequently incorporated in compilations, beginning with *La llibertat i el terror (Poesia 1970-1980)* in 1981, and subsequently *Enigma* (1985), *En quarantena* (1990) and *Usdefruit* (1995). He has also published work in prose: *Girona, matèria i memòria* (1989), a portrait of his native city; *Fórmules magistrals* (1997) a gastronomico-cultural essay, and *Sense escut* (1998), a collection of essays on culture and aesthetics.

In addition four dramatic works of his have been published and staged: *Neva* (1992), *La vida perdurable* (1992), *Lhora dels adéus* (1995) and *El dia dels morts. Un oratori per a Josep Pla* (1997).

Noteworthy among his output as a translator are a substantial anthology of Italian poetry (1985), a collection of ancient Christian hymns originally composed in Latin (*Himnes cristians llatins antics*, 1988) and a brief anthology of poems by WH. Auden, *Digue'm la veritat sobre l'amor* (1997). For the stage he has done Catalan versions of *The Rocky Horror Show*, the Bernstein-Sondheim-Wilbur musical *Candide* and Luigi Pirandello's / *giganti della montagna*.

## THE ENGLISH EXPERIENCE

It is an honour for me to be here today, at this conference of The Anglo-Catalan Society to deliver this year's Joan Gili Memorial Lecture, in honour of a founder-member of the Society of which he was President (1972-75) and subsequently, for many years, Honorary Life President. Regrettably, I did not know Joan Gili personally, nor do I know all the details of his career as translator and publisher. When I was in London, as Spanish *lector* at Queen Mary College, from 1971 to 1973, it never occurred to me that I might try to make his acquaintance, among other reasons because I was a shy, provincial young man, an unknown novice poet, rather lost in the big city and disinclined to knock on the doors of important people. Later, as I have grown older, I have come to see that sometimes visits of this kind might not be unwelcome or cause any inconvenience, and that they might even give pleasure, as they can make one conscious of belonging to a tradition—especially so, as in the case of Joan Gili, when you are living outside the territory of your own culture. I later learned that Joan Gili was an hospitable and cordial person, very easily approachable, but by then I was already back at home. Life, after all, is full of missed opportunities. What I do want to say is that, in those earlier years, when I attended some sessions at one of the Society's conferences, held at Westfield College in Hampstead if I remember correctly, I would never have imagined that I would find myself, years later, speaking at another such Conference and in a commemorative session dedicated to the Oxford translator, publisher, bookseller and bibliophile whom I had earlier missed the chance of meeting. Perhaps all of this, though, simply confirms that the years go by and that the unknown, or virtually unknown, poets of one particular time come to achieve at least a minimal fame and to occupy—perhaps through simple biological succession—the seemingly inaccessible place occupied previously by other poets. The fact is that I am here, through reasons of biology or of merit—or a combination of both, as I would like to think—and that, as I have already said, I consider it to be an honour.

I only recently received this invitation. Given my relative unfamiliarity with the biography and the work of Joan Gili, to attempt to speak here today, in a fitting and worthy way, on an aspect of Catalan poetry directly related to him, would have called for an intensive preparation on my part. This would have demanded an amount of time that was not at my disposal. To improvise would have been an unforgivable temerity. And so, being kindly asked to give a reading of some poems of my own, I considered that it would perhaps be appropriate to the setting and to the occasion to make the contents of this reading what we might call my 'English poems', in the sense that they were written during my stay here, more or less inspired by themes

or pretexts from English life or literature. I likewise thought that a review of my personal Anglo-Catalan poetic hybridization would certainly be, however humble, the best tribute to a person like Joan Gili who successfully lived his life within this fertile duality. And so as not to give just a straight recitation, I settled on the idea of working an explanatory commentary around the texts themselves, if it is allowed that poems, particularly one's own, can be 'explained'. Since the ones in question, however, were written so many years ago, they are now sufficiently distant from me, sufficiently objectivized, that they can be considered not totally mine. That is to say, almost as though they had been written by someone who is no longer me, at least not entirely. Thus a second idea mentioned in the invitation, which was to say something about poetry in general and about Catalan poetry in particular, could also be covered by talking about these things through a focus on my own poems.

In fact, I have already started talking about poetry in general, as you will have observed, because by saying that my poems from some years ago were not totally mine—which is like saying that poems, at least in my case, depend upon a personality and a moment in time: upon a lyric self (which is always changing), and upon its circumstances (which are always transitory)—I have already set out my stall in favour of a particular view of poetry. A view which links it to life and does not limit it to being a purely linguistic construction set apart from the living self of the poet. This 'living self is what I once called the 'mortal self, and it does not necessarily coincide with the 'autobiographical self: and even less with the 'lyric self, that is with the 'voice' of the poem. But a poem is a work of art, or at least it aspires to be so. And every work of art is *aform*. Without form there is no art and, consequently, even if for me the poem issues from life and is bound up in it, it needs form, its own form, in order to be a poem; and this form can only come from a deliberately organized verbal construction which is controlled by a specific craft. This is something that today's young poets find it hard to accept, because they want to be free of what they look upon as chains, without realizing that this feature is the indispensable warrant for the future freedom of the poem. Educated as they are in the schools of out-and-out creativity and of innate individual genius, today's young poets believe that absolutely any effusion of their hearts is ipso facto a poem, because each one of their lives is a poem. Certainly, I hold that worthwhile poetry must issue from life, but I also hold that a poem is a meaningful artefact constructed with the tools belonging to a distinct craft. An artefact that is rooted in a tradition—which the poem may endorse, extend, fine-tune, erode or even totally destroy, but always, in the latter case, with a full awareness of what is being destroyed. You will understand, from all of this, that I am inclined to seek the shade of those branches that emerge from Thomas Hardy, rather than those that fan out possibly from Blake and are broadened in Yeats the visionary. Even so, sometimes, a little bit of the visionary aesthetic, well administered, may be efficacious.

When in 1971 Professor José Manuel Blecua recommended me for the post of *lector* at Queen Mary College, he was bestowing one of the best gifts I have ever received and for which I can never thank him enough. At that crucial time for Catalonia and for Spain, in the last—but no less bloodily destructive—dying throes of the Franco

regime, the opportunity to get out of the country for a couple of years was immensely fortunate. Especially the chance to go to England and, on top, to be able to spend the two years in London, at that time enjoying a very special phase of its glory.

In Catalonia, the dreadful school system and the whole atmosphere of clandestine struggle had induced young poets to confuse a poem with a denunciatory pamphlet. Everything to do with tradition was set aside, through ignorance or through a distorted scale of values, and everything that entailed craftsmanship was ruled out, through incompetence, urgency or a misconceived modernity. Traditional verse forms, prosody, rhyme were looked upon as bourgeois and conservative if not thoroughly reactionary, at a time when to be reactionary amounted almost to being a fascist. I have explained very often that it was José Mana Valverde and Gabriel Ferrater who set a few apprentice poets like myself on the way to understanding what a poem really was. I shan't go over the story again here. But what I will say is that, when Dolors Oiler and I went to say our farewells to Ferrater, before we left for London, he stressed the importance of a period of residence abroad, because, he said, it's a way of getting rid of home-grown tics. Perhaps with this in mind and also because of the impact made by the big city—that breath-taking whirl of so many different attractions and possibilities—I made no effort to make contact with the world of those Catalans living there in varying versions of exile (in fact, as far as Catalonia and Spain were concerned, what I wanted was to be away from them) and this as much as anything explains why I did not get to know Joan Gili.

At that time, Francesc Parcerisas was *lector* in Bristol, Salvador Oliva in Nottingham, Jordi Castellanos in Durham, Joaquim Nadal (temporarily substituting for Joan Lluís Marfany) in Liverpool. Parcerisas handed on his position to Montserrat Roig; Oliva was succeeded by Marta Pessarrodona. The convergence prompted Parcerisas, a couple of years later, to publish an article in the daily *Tele-exprés* proclaiming the presence of a certain 'English tradition' in Catalan poetry of the time. Oliva, Pessarrodona, myself and Parcerisas were, according to the latter, the examples of this presence. Oliva, Pessarrodona and I, under the guidance of Gabriel Ferrater, were discovering Auden, Arnold, Graves, and Lowell too. Parcerisas, in line with directions taken in his own life, was perhaps open less to the English writers than to the fertile influence of the American beatniks. But no matter: this was still poetry in the English language, and realist poetry. In those days 'reality' was what counted. The primacy of the material world was asserted—*Discurs sobre les matèries terrestres* (Discourse on Terrestrial Matter) is the title of a collection by Parcerisas—as was rationality. And regarding the crafting of the poem, Oliva and I favoured metrical discipline and traditional forms, whereas Parcerisas and Pessarrodona were, to quote a comment by Gabriel Ferrater, 'rather devil-may-care about prosody'. But all of us were writing 'English poetry', as we might say.

I have announced that I would read some of my 'English' poems, and this is what I shall now do. During the two years that I lived in London I wrote a dozen or so short poems, which make up the second section of my book *Les ciutats* (Cities), published in 1976, and one long poem, *Un passeig pels bulevards ardents* (A Walk down the Burning

Boulevards), which appeared in the first number of *Els Marges*, in 1974, and then in *Desdesig* (Undesire), 1976, and *La llibertat i el terror* (Freedom and Terror), 1981.

In the book *Les ciutats*, apart from the English poems—making up the second chapter or section entitled 'Cap al nord' (Northwards)—there is a poem placed at the very beginning, which carries the book's main title and which serves as a sort of prologue. This piece, also, is one which was written in London. The pretext was something I had read at the time of a visit to the British Museum, more precisely to that marvellous room where the Elgin Marbles, the Parthenon frieze, are displayed.

## LES CIUTATS

He llegit que Morosini,  
general ambaixador  
de Venècia, volgué  
endur-se les escultures  
del frontó del Partenó.

Va fer muntar una bastida,  
hi va fer grimpar els esclaus  
i, en el moment més difícil,  
algun puntal va fallar.  
Caigueren homes i estàtues.

Decebut, el general  
va abandonar el seu projecte.  
Ell les volia senceres.  
Els trossos allà escampats  
varen servir per fer cases.

Molts savis han meditat  
sobre el sorprenent misteri  
de poder crear bellesa  
a partir d'un bloc de marbre.  
Pocs sobre el camí contrari:

treure un carreu escairat  
del tors d'algun déu antic,  
convertir en grava una Venus,  
poder trepitjar llambordes  
fetes de membres sagrats...

Així s'han fet les ciutats:  
construïdes lentament  
amb pedres que ahir van ser  
vides humanes: amors,  
sofriments que ningú no recorda.

## CITIES

I have read that Morosini,  
A General, Venetian Ambassador,  
Wanted to take away  
The sculptures from the frieze  
Of the Parthenon.

He had a scaffolding raised,  
Made slaves clamber up,  
And at the hardest moment  
A support failed.  
Men and statues fell.

Disappointed, the General  
Abandoned his project.  
He wanted his statues whole.  
The fragments scattered all around  
Were used for building houses.

Many wise men have pondered  
The surprising mystery  
Of being able to create beauty  
From a block of marble.  
Few the contrary:

To shape a squared-off block  
From the torso of an ancient God,  
To convert a Venus into gravel,  
To tread on flagstones  
Made from sacred limbs...

Thus were cities made,  
Slowly constructed  
With stones that yesterday  
Were human lives: loves,  
Sufferings that no one now recalls.

This poem is, in a way, a manifesto for my view of the sort of poetry that some—relatively few—of us in those days stood for. A carefully structured text, with a strict

metre, based on something real, which could be either contemporary or historical, and which would serve to formulate an observation with a moral import. In this particular case, the poem discloses the contradiction between art and life, or, at least, discrepancies between them. However, it also declares that every single life, if one's reading is attentive and sensitive (something which in itself is a formalizing operation), can be converted into art and into beauty. The poem's modernity resides in acceptance of the smashing up of art—the statues—if the broken pieces can be put to the positive service of 'real life'. The point is also made that our contemporary cities, of which we can sometimes feel so proud because we consider them to be works of art, have been constructed out of a life-flow which is anonymous, day-to-day, sometimes optimistic and always touched by suffering. Life versus the Academy, in short. Still, the whole discourse in favour of the breaking up of art is presented in a form which, far from fractured, is precise and strict.

Another poem, entitled 'Museu', deals with the same theme, but in a different form. Written after another visit to the British Museum, one drab rainy afternoon, this piece comes across as more prosaic, less solemn. The syntax is more narrational and there is even an implicit reference, a passing wink, to Josep Carner and his *Els fruits saborosos* (Sweet Fruits).

## MUSEU

Potser no ho sap el déu, absort en  
el seu marbre,  
que un altre déu de carn altivament  
se'l mira.  
És molt més poderós: és viu i  
es mou i,  
malgrat que moridor, molt més  
perfecte.  
Si les formes del cos, són quasi  
les mateixes,  
per què preferiríem el cos del déu antic?

Tot això s'empescava Licini, quan  
la Musa,  
a cau d'orella, així, el sorprengué  
per dir-li:  
-Mira-t'hi bé, que el noi se'n va a  
prendre's un te,  
sortint d'aquí, a un Wimpy, i a dormir  
amb la *girl-friend*,  
potser per Camden Town...

Als darreres del British una pluja menuda  
relliscava plorosa per canals i teulades.

## MUSEUM

Perhaps he doesn't know, the God  
absorbed in his marble,  
That another God, of flesh, looks  
on him haughtily.  
This one is much more powerful:  
he lives and moves  
And though he is mortal, is much  
more perfect.  
If the bodily shapes are almost  
the same,  
Why prefer the body of the ancient God?

Licinius was turning all this over,  
when the Muse,  
Whispering in his ear, so, surprised  
him saying:  
-Don't be fooled: this boy will  
go straight from here  
To a Wimpy, for tea, and to sleep  
with his girl-friend,  
Maybe in Camden Town...

Behind the British Museum a thin rain  
Slid tearfully down spouts and slates.

The Muse, obviously, had to defend the work of art, the god sculpted in marble, and, in the mind of poor Licinius the poet, to demythify the figure of that young man, exuding vitality and handsomeness, who quite unconsciously dared to set life above art, through his mere physical presence. In those days—perhaps still, for all I know—a Wimpy bar was an appalling place and Camden Town a not altogether refined district. Nature's tears—embodied in the sleek rain drops—simply underlined the particularity of the problem: the fact that it is insoluble. To make eternal, that is to make perfect, something that is transitory almost by definition, such as the beauty of a young body, to give it definitive final form, can only be achieved through death. Life is never perfect; only art can be; but art is never alive. The problem is insoluble.

From my comfortable little office in Queen Mary College—which I used to enjoy likening to a cabin on a transatlantic liner—you looked out onto an inner courtyard with four large plant-pots, each one containing a shrub that I cannot now be precise about. What is more definite is that when I wrote the poem I shall now read for you, 'College', I was already in the second of my two years in London, since I knew for sure that under the soil in the plant-pots there were daffodil and crocus bulbs. The corridors had recently been painted, in a shiny gloss finish—back then, in London, they were always painting something or other; nowadays I don't know—whence the reference to the smell of paint hanging in the air. Also, as you will see, in this poem it is raining again.

## COLLEGE

Sobre el pati tancat hi cau la pluja,  
amorosint la poca terra, els testos  
on floriran els *daffodils*, els *crocus*.

Pels corredors, joves absents segueixen  
carreres que els duren no massa lluny,  
*central heating* per una llarga vida.

Noietes adormides que somriuen  
a les ombres llunyanes d'un desig,  
als *blue-jeans* qualssevol d'una abraçada.

I Arribarà, per fi, la primavera  
a alleugerir aquest aire massa dens  
de papers, de pintura, de mirades?

Sobre el pati tancat hi bat la pluja.

## COLLEGE

On the inner courtyard falls the rain,  
Softening what soil there is, in pots  
Where daffodils and crocuses will flower.

Along the corridors, abstracted youths pursue  
Studies that will not take them too far,  
Central heating for a long lifetime.

Sleepy girls who smile  
At the distant shadows of a desire,  
At any old blue-jeans of an embrace.

Will it come, at last, the Spring,  
To lighten up this atmosphere too dense  
With papers, painting, glances?

On the inner courtyard beats the rain.

Basically, the poem highlights, with very different means from those of the previous one, the same counterpoint between the physical beauty of the young bodies and the fleetingness to which this beauty is condemned, inevitably to be devoured by the everyday mediocrity to come. The tension is between desire, always idealized, and the prosaic dullness of comfortable living. Between youth and adulthood.



A trip to Cambridge, with Spring in the air, provided me with the backdrop for 'Primavera anglesa'. Here the beauty of the surroundings, the richness of the landscape, contrasts with the only happiness possible, which is (despite its transitoriness) that of life itself. The poor student is cut off from this because he wavers on the edge, precisely because his head is full of prejudices that immure him, cultural prejudices—this is the point—that have revealed to him the perfection of art, the perfection of death, and that prevent him from living intensely the single moment of plenitude which so rapidly ends in disillusion. The young man is immobilized by a transparent curtain of moods and feelings which cuts him off from reality, the curtain of intellectual preconceptions in favour of art and beauty, among other ones.

## PRIMAVERA ANGLESA

No és que un sol massa feble,  
filtrant-se entre aquests oms de  
fulla tendra,  
pugui fer-me enyorar primaveres  
més clares:  
aquí l'herba esplendent i el vellut de la molsa  
tenen llum permanent  
i bé poden  
recolzar passions amb perfum de jacint  
o amb els pètals alats dels narcisos.  
Lent, el canal discorre, quasi immòbil,  
com si volgués quedar-se  
la imatge pacient del pescador,  
la trèmula frisança del bedoll,  
o el núvol.  
Res del món no existeix fora d'això,  
fora d'aquesta lentitud aparent  
amb què se'n van les coses.  
(Que punyent ens semblarà el dolor  
amb aire nou i ocells entre els lilàs.)  
Però el món va seguint el seu camí.  
L'estudiant  
ha tancat el seu llibre i es distreu  
sembla que amb un bri d'herba.  
Però és tot el món que el distreu,  
la transparent cortina de sentiments  
i afectes  
que li priva  
de llançar-se al somriure esplendorós  
d'uns instants que sap breus i que, amb tot,  
són els únics feliços.

## ENGLISH SPRING

It isn't that too weak a sun  
Filtering through these elms,  
their tender leaves,  
Could make me long for Springs  
that are more clear:  
Here the brilliant grass and velvet moss  
Keep a lasting light  
And they can well  
Sustain passions with the scent of hyacinth  
Or with the winged petals of narcissi.  
Slowly, the river flows, almost still,  
As if it wanted to retain  
The patient image of the angler,  
The impatient quivering of the birch,  
Or the cloud.  
Nothing in the world exists apart from this,  
Beyond this seeming slowness  
In which things drift away.  
(How bitter will seem the pain  
With spring air and birds among the lilacs.)  
But the world goes on its way.  
The student  
Has closed his book and is distracted  
It seems by a blade of grass.  
But it's all the world that distracts him,  
The transparent curtain of sentiments  
and feelings  
That prevents him  
From throwing himself into the splendid smile  
Of moments he knows are brief, and after all,  
Are the only happy ones.

For the first of our two years in London, following the advice of my Head of Department, Professor Harvey, we found accommodation near to where Dolores worked, close

to Westfield College, that is, in Hampstead. Thus one of us would be spared long to-ing and fro-ing on the underground. In this case, her. For me, going from Hampstead all the way to Mile End Road, it meant almost three quarters of an hour of subterranean journey. Hampstead—and now we are talking about a refined district: Richard Burton and Elizabeth Taylor were neighbours of ours, but we never saw them—with its fine houses and gardens, with gigantic trees and comfortable interiors that I glimpsed on my way home from the station, this was the setting that I used for a poem which aimed to describe not just the physical ambience but also, and above all, the spirit of it.

## LONDON NW3

Tots els arbres de Hampstead degoten  
quan el vent els remou. Ha plogut.  
Rere blanques finestres s'encenen  
càlids llums de domèstics capvespres.

Del somort univers que m'envolta,  
no m'arriben sorolls. Un neguit  
es presenta innocent als meus ossos  
com la molsa suau a l'escorça

d'aquests arbres que emparen les cases.  
Flors marcides de l'últim estiu  
es podreixen. La nit que s'acosta  
em du un aire on bateguen presagis.

?Dorm el nen que al migdia jugava,  
o bé escolta com passen les hores,  
com degoten els arbres, com moren,  
amb les flors, les naixents esperances?

Per ell fades teixeixen corones,  
primaveres de tendres mirades.  
Jo m'endinso en la humida tenebra.  
Lladra un gos, i no puc restar en calma.

## LONDON NW3

All the trees of Hampstead drip  
When the wind stirs them. It's been raining.  
Behind blank windows glow  
Warm lamps of households at dusk.

From the muffled universe around me  
Not a sound is heard. An unease  
Creeps innocently into my bones  
Like the smooth moss on the bark

Of these trees that shelter the houses.  
Last summer's withered flowers  
Decompose. The night coming on  
Brings me an air where premonitions beat.

Is he asleep, the boy who played at noon,  
Or is he listening to the hours pass,  
How the trees drip, how they die  
With the flowers, hopes as they are bom?

For him fairies weave garlands,  
Springs of tender glances.  
I plunge into the damp gloom.  
A dog barks, and I cannot stay at peace.

The following year we changed districts. Hampstead was very pretty, but it was enormously boring. And flats were extremely expensive. We moved further south, towards Chelsea, but not right into Chelsea, which was also very expensive. We ended up on the lower side of Fulham Road, quite close to the Earls Court tube station. To be exact, Coleherne Road, a quiet street, with a pub on the corner. In fact it was a famous pub in those days because it was the meeting place for gays, the motor-bike faction that rode powerful machines, with extraordinarily short hair (when most of us had hair that hung over our collars) and black leather jackets covered in steel studs. It must be said that they never gave me any bother. I suppose that was because they were nice boys and because I, being as short as I am now and much thinner, could in no way be the object of desire for those great strapping fellows. The Coleherne Road flat had a first-floor gallery overlooking the street, above a

basement protected by its typical black iron railings, while at the back there was a French window leading into a little garden which the downstairs tenant looked after.

'Interior' is a poem written behind the bow-windowed gallery of our flat.

## INTERIOR

Un sol tendre de març embolcalla  
el piano i el gust de caramel.  
Assegut darrere la tribuna,  
escric a màquina i miro gent que passa.

Anemones, narcisos, dins del gerro,  
comprats fa uns dies, ja s'han esllanguit.  
Se me'n va el pensament cap a altres dies,  
altres flors i altres sols em somriuen  
al cor.

Passa un vell carregat de diaris,  
una velleta ranquejant  
que a cada pas s'atura i parla amb  
les veïnes,  
una noia que torna de comprar.

Al lluny, sento un soroll fosc de paletes.  
Passa un cotxe amb sordina, passa un gos.  
Mentre espero que tornis de la feina,  
m'abandono al sol nou i als vells  
records.

## INTERIOR

A tender March sun envelops  
The piano and the taste of toffee.  
Sitting behind the gallery,  
I type and watch the passers-by.

Anemones, narcissus, in the vase,  
Bought some days ago, have already wilted.  
My thoughts go to other days,  
Other flowers and other suns smile  
in my heart.

An old man passes with a load of newspapers,  
A little old lady, unsteadily,  
Pausing at every step to talk with  
the neighbours,  
A girl coming back from shopping.

Far off, I hear a dark sound of builders.  
A car passes silently, a dog passes.  
As I wait for you to return from work,  
I abandon myself to new sun and old  
memories.

Not everything was so idyllic in Coleherne Road, of course. From there you felt the presence of the city more intensely than from Hampstead, which reminded one rather of a spa. I wrote a short poem, dedicated to our new district, in which I tried to capture something of its tone.

## LONDON SW10

Només perfums excitants  
els cinemes i les cuixes  
la pols la pols les formigues  
tovalloles i miralls:

carrers de rajola escretlles  
de llums de gossos diaris  
arbres velles negres reixes:

per tots els segles dels segles  
semen i somnis conviuen.

## LONDON SW10

Only exciting perfumes  
Cinemas thighs  
Dust dust ants  
Towels and mirrors:

Brick alleyways cracks  
Of lights of dogs dailies  
Trees old women black gratings:

Through all the centuries of centuries  
Semen and dreams combine.

'Doctor's Garden' also tries to reflect a small piece of life's cruelty that sometimes substitutes for—and very often anticipates—our dreams. There is a dual pretext here: the little garden behind our flat, tended to near-perfectionism by the civil servant who was our downstairs neighbour, and the garden belonging to a surgeon that I always used to see, the year before, on my way back to our Hampstead home. From these two gardens, in the poem, I made a single one. I liked the idea of a surgeon pruning roses, naturally, but I never managed to see how he did it. On the other hand, I did see how the civil servant did it. We are talking about tricks of the poet's trade, ways of hopefully getting the poem to take shape in an almost bodily sort of way and of the poem 'demanding' to be written. The idea of a surgeon pruning rose bushes was not enough; it had to be seen, even if the gardener was not a surgeon. This was one of the preconditions of realism, as I understood it, just like the other 'English poets' of the time, I still suppose.

## DOCTOR 'S GARDEN

Set iardes per set iardes.  
La terra humida i negra.  
La tan sabuda gespa.  
L'esquelet d'uns rosers.

Sota el vidre entelat  
del mínim hivernacle,  
dos geranis esquàlids.  
Sis mesos de tenebra.

Tot moll i endormiscat  
dins d'una llum opaca.  
Els cucs a sota terra  
i les lleus teranyines.

Cirurgià, quan podes,  
unes gotes de sang.  
Únic vellut per ara  
al teu somni de pètals.

## DOCTOR 'S GARDEN

Seven yards by seven yards.  
The earth humid and black.  
The so familiar lawn.  
Rose bushes skeletal.

Under the misted glass  
Of the tiny greenhouse,  
Two squalid geraniums.  
Six months of dark.

Everything soft and dozing  
In a glaucous light.  
Worms underground  
And weightless cobwebs.

Surgeon, as you prune,  
Some drops of blood.  
The only velvet for now  
In your dream of petals.

I have said already that one of the poets 'recommended' in those days by Gabriel Ferrater—and also by Jaime Gil de Biedma—was Auden. Thus both Salvador Oliva and I, once installed in England, he in Nottingham the year before I went, set about translating him. In my case, with a rudimentary knowledge of English, if only to try to understand him. We exchanged our translations by post. Sometimes we worked on the same poem, other times not. This devotion to Auden gelled, years later, in a book by Salvador Oliva entitled *Poemes de W.H. Auden* (1978). And in my case, relatively recently, in *Digue 'm la veritat sobre l'amor* (Tell me the Truth about Love), published in 1997, which contains two or three of the poems I had attempted to translate all those years ago, including the one made famous on the big screen,

'Funeral Blues', which both Oliva and I had translated long before *Four Weddings...*, with certain differences in our versions, both unrhymed. Anyway, the reason why I am explaining all this is because Auden was a significant influence in the composition of one of my poems from this period. The poem in question is 'El dia passa depressa' (The Day Goes Quickly By), inspired by Auden's lyric which begins:

Now the leaves are falling fast,  
Nurse's flowers will not last,  
Nurses to their graves are gone,  
But the prams go rolling on.

## EL DIA PASSA DEPRESSA

El dia passa depressa.  
És fosc, és fosc, quin neguit.  
Darrere els vidres, les ombres,  
a dins les cases, l'oblit.

Crema el gas a les estufes,  
se'm fa un nus a dins del pit.  
El veí que estossejava  
ara de sobte ha emmudit.

Del pub de la cantonada  
surt la gent. Se sent un crit.  
Una sirena llunyana  
es filtra per l'aire humit.

Ploren gossos, criatures,  
temen les pors de la nit.  
Passen cotxes, passen cotxes,  
duen cadàvers al llit.

La nit serà llarga, llarga.  
Quin udol, no l'has sentit?  
Un regust de cosa amarga  
se'm menja el cos adormit.

## THE DAY GOES QUICKLY BY

The day goes quickly by.  
It's dark, it's dark, what unease.  
Behind the panes, the shadows,  
In the houses no memories.

The gas of the stoves flares up.  
A knot has formed in my chest.  
The neighbour who racks himself coughing  
Has suddenly stopped for a rest.

At the street corner people emerge  
From the pub. There's a shout.  
In the damp air the sound of a distant siren  
Is partly filtered out.

The dogs are whining, and children  
Fearing the night time dread.  
Cars pass, cars pass,  
Bringing cadavers to bed.

The night will be long, will be long.  
Didn't you hear those screams?  
An aftertaste of something bitter  
Eats me up in my dreams.

My devotion to Auden, however, did not stand in the way of my reading other poets nor of them then working their way into my own poetry. Thus, in 'Golders Green Crematorium' there is a deliberate merging of a specific English pretext—the view of a plume of smoke emerging from the crematorium chimney—merging with an image from a sonnet with an English setting by the great Catalan poet Josep Carner. A real English pretext and a literary one.

GOLDERS GREEN  
CREMATORIUM

No hi pensis més en el xarol dels cotxes  
ni en les flors de colors amuntegades,

bons records i rutines de parents.  
El foc tenaç es va empassant cadàvers  
i no hi fa res que el sol desperti  
el món

i cantin els ocells i lluí el cel.  
Si el pal·lid fumerol dalt de la torre  
se't queda pres a dins i se't fa un nus,

vés més depressa, mira a l'altra banda  
on hi haurà cases amb els seus jardins,  
cridòries d'infants, fresseig de branques  
i, darrere el filat, com cada dia,  
dues noies de blanc jugant al tennis.

Then too the reading of John Keats—the laborious reading of Keats- and the proximity of Wentworth Place, the house where he lived and where memories of him are stored, gave rise to my sonnet 'Visita a Wentworth Place (Keats House)'.

VISITA A WENTWORTH PLACE  
(Keats House)

Tot el dolor del cor ara m'arriba  
amb la pluja que cau i el verd tan verd.  
Sobre aquests vells papers res no fa viva  
la lletra trista que amb el temps es perd.

Buides de tu contemplo les estances  
i m'assec al teu lloc al reading room.  
Ja no res m'apaivaga les recances.  
Dels teus anys ja no sento cap perfum.

^Foren en va les teves malalties  
i tantes hores dolces d'aquells dies

amb els amics i Fanny pel jardí?

Ja no hi ha rossinyols a la prunera.  
La llum del sud serà la llum darrera  
-no espero millor sort-també per mi.

GOLDERS GREEN  
CREMATORIUM

Think no more about the cars' shiny gleam,  
Or about the flowers, their colours  
heaped together,

Good memories and the family routines.  
Tenacious fire is swallowing up cadavers.  
It means nothing that the sun may  
wake the world,

That birds may sing and skies turn bright.  
If the pale cloud above the smoke-stack  
Gets caught inside you and starts  
to form a knot,

Get a move on, look to the other side:  
There will be houses with their gardens,  
Shouts of children, rustling of branches  
And, behind the wire fence, as every day,  
Two girls playing tennis, dressed in white.

VISIT TO WENTWORTH PLACE  
(Keats House)

All the heart's pain is upon me now  
With the falling rain, the green so green:  
In these old papers nothing to allow  
The sad letters to live again, be truly seen.

In this emptiness I tour the exhibits  
And take your place in the reading room.  
Nothing can still my own regrets.  
Of your years I cannot catch the  
least perfume.

Were they in vain, your maladies,  
And those sweet daylight hours in  
the company  
Of friends in the garden, and with Fanny?

No sound of nightingales from the plum trees.  
The Southern light my last, I await  
-I cannot hope for better-the same fate.

I have referred more than once to Gabriel Ferrater in this paper. I have mentioned how we said good-bye before leaving for London, and also the advice he gave us about 'getting rid of home-grown tics'. I come now to talk about the time of his death, in relation to the short poem that I dedicated to him, urgently and still deeply upset, and then to the long poem that I wrote the following winter, a poem which represented an emancipation from the sort of poetry that we had set out to produce following his recommendations. It is a poem which, I must say, seen now at a distance, seems to me to mark a significant turning-point in Catalan poetry of that period. But let us first take the short poem. Gabriel Ferrater committed suicide at the end of April, 1972. We were living in Hampstead, as I have said, and our surroundings at that moment were in prodigious array. The great elms in their full greenness, laden with fresh foliage, the branches of cherry trees sagging with thick white or pink blossom, lilac hedges with their pale scented blooms, wisteria draped with heavy flowers, and, on the ground, the yellow carpet of daffodils, patches of ruffled hyacinths and multicoloured tulips. And birds whistling and singing as they hopped among the branches, and squirrels skipping everywhere with a strange restlessness. That is to say, we were surrounded by a springtime that was almost excessive, as I have only seen it in London, after the months of winter gloom. News of the death of Gabriel Ferrater reached us by post and it came as a savage blow: a contrast, too powerful to bear, with all the plenitude of the reborn life of Nature. A plenitude that we wanted to repulse. Thus this poem, a very simple one, confines itself to pleading for a never-ending winter: perennial snow above all, trees and memories.

## DESPRÉS DE LA MORT DE G.F.

Petita primavera,  
esponerosa d'arbres,  
?Què fas que te m'emportes  
els somnis d'un amic?

? Què fas amb l'herba nova,  
les fulles delicades,  
les flors esplendoroses,  
sinó augmentar el dolor?

Són buides les paraules,  
desertes les ciutats,  
ombrívols les hores,  
tristíssims els jardins.

No avancis, toma enrere,  
despulla't de la glòria.  
Que neus eternes colguin  
els arbres i els records.

## ON THE DEATH OF G.F.

Little Spring,  
Luxuriant with trees,  
What are you doing, taking  
From me the dreams of a friend?

What are you doing with new grass,  
Delicate leaves,  
Flowers in their splendour,  
If not adding to the pain?

Words are empty,  
Cities deserted,  
Hours shadowy,  
Gardens infinitely sad.

Do not advance, turn back,  
Cast off all your glory.  
Let eternal snows bury  
Trees and memories.

A simple poem, as I have said. But two things perhaps need to be explained. The first is that the word 'petita/little' with which it begins may seem to be in contradiction

with 'esponerosa d'arbres/luxuriant with trees' of the second line. The thing is that this particular spring was anything but 'little'. Here the term is an affectionate designation, almost divested of its etymological meaning, a kind of coaxing gesture aimed at awakening sympathy, at achieving a kind response, a *captatio benevolentiae*. The second thing to remark on is the faint presence of another English poet: Wordsworth. As I have said, my reading went beyond those poets that had been recommended. The two traces here of the Romantic poet come from the famous line from his 'Intimations of Immortality': 'Of splendour in the grass, of glory in the flower', with splendour now attributed, in my poem, to the flower, and glory attributed to springtime in general. The point is that both *glòria* and *esplendor* derive from Wordsworth. (It is perhaps worth recalling here that Wordsworth's poem has an epigraph which ends with the words 'by natural piety', the title precisely of a poem by Gabriel Ferrater.)

Notwithstanding these English allusions, which then rebound in the direction of Ferrater, this is an unsophisticated poem which could in no way satisfy me as a homage to the Catalan poet, to whom I was indebted for so many things. The following academic year, then, after the Christmas vacation, I began to write *Un passeig pels bulevards ardents*. The experience was almost one of being possessed. Obsessively, I devoted all my time to it. Then, when it was completed, I realized that it was a kind of poetry which broke with the basic tenets of realism, which was shot through with a mood of as-it-were visionary inebriation, full of direct or indirect quotations, the sort of poetry that Gabriel Ferrater would not have liked at all. For me it produced an extraordinary sense of release: moving out of apprenticeship, the first free acrobatic move after all the training, the discovery of a voice that was more truly mine. It occurred to me that here was the best homage that I could offer to the memory of Gabriel Ferrater, and I dedicated the poem to him with a preliminary inscription:

G.F.  
VITAE LETERAEQUE  
AMICO ATQUE MAGISTRO  
IN MEMORIAM  
D.D.D.

It was my coming of age, an attainment that I owed to him: my new anti-Ferrater stance was a repayment to him, since, as Nietzsche said, 'you give scant reward to your teacher if you continue always as his pupil'.

The poem bears the noticeable imprint of Eliot's *The Waste Land*, but also strains from many other poets, not all of them English: Baudelaire, Dante, Montale, Jordi de Sant Jordi, Yeats, Apollinaire, Rosalia de Castro, Melville, and even the prophet Isaiah or the architectural historian Nikolaus Pevsner, a long quotation from whom is used as an epigraph:

The twentieth century is the century of the masses: mass education, mass entertainment, mass transport, universities with twenty thousand students, comprehensive schools



for two thousand children, hospitals with two thousand beds, stadia with a hundred thousand seats. That is one aspect; the other is speed of locomotion, every citizen being an express-train driver on his own, and some pilots travelling faster than sound. Both are only expressions of the technological fanaticism of the age, and technology is only an application of science.

And it is also full of visual allusions: Hero delia Francesca, Mantegna, Seurat (whose magnificent *Une baignade à Asnières* I often used to call into the National Gallery to see on my way home from Queen Mary College). Musical allusions too: Bach, cryptically, and Schubert, very much overtly, with the inclusion of a stanza from his *Winterreise*.

The poem begins still in the realist mode: a journey on the London underground, which then takes us into the real *fourmillante cite* and also into the subjective *unreal city*. Confusion of two versions of the metropolis is the correlative of confusion in the spirit of the lyric self, and both versions are told or sung in a sequence of narrative and textual displacements, forming a texture which, while tending towards collage, does follow an original thread of story-line and evocation. Also present, of course, is the insoluble problem, the contradiction between art and life. 'Només l'ordre de l'art et donarà el repòs/Only the order of art will give you respite', says one line. And the whole piece ends with an invocation to Beauty, as the only force that can disrupt the monotony of life, as a liberating power against that 'central heating' of bourgeois mediocrity, as a palliative for all suffering and all misfortune.

Once the poem was finished I sent a copy of it to Pere Gimferrer who was just beginning to write in Catalan and who had been kind enough to publish an article about me in *Destino*. There Gimferrer was most complimentary about my excellence in the composition of 'minor' poems and in the art of pastiche. By sending him my *Passeig...* I wanted to show him that my sights were set higher. A few days later he wrote to me, returning my typescript with annotations and suggestions; some of these I took account of, others I did not, like his comment that never, in poetry, should scientific terms be used (aimed at my 'artròpode/arthropod' in the final canto). And he ended by acknowledging that 'although you are at home with classical poetic models and although undertakings like this one are for really heavy guns like Pound, the poem works'. There was no need for him to tell me; I knew well enough that the poem 'worked' and that, to some degree, it was a challenge to him particularly, officially instated as he was in the avant-garde. In fact, three years later, Gimferrer himself blithely served up a long poem, likewise reminiscent of Eliot, likewise divided into cantos. I am referring to *Lespai desert*, of course. But my *Un passeig pels bulevards ardents* had been in print for two years (since the first number of *Els Marges*, 1974) when his poem appeared.

UN PASSEIG PELS BULEVARDS  
ARDENTS

1  
 Van tancar-se amb neguit les portes  
 corredores,  
 darrere les muralles protegíem  
 somnis encara dolços de llençols,  
 olor de matinada, de taronja,  
 esma, instint i basarda de llum.  
 El dòlar s'ensorrava entre tipografies.  
 Cada pausa era una surt a la memòria,  
 cada rostre un parany, cada ull, estrany,  
 esfumats pensaments i pells boiroses,  
 només mitges paraules. Tanca't, tanca't  
 al món com una porta corredora,  
 preserva el teu sofrir del sofriment  
 dels altres  
 i desa't ben desat, llibre entre pols,  
 ganivet al calaix, lluny de les xarxes  
 més fines, conductores de corrents ignorats.  
 i, O t'obriràs l'abric, la pell, el cor,

grapat de sal a la carn com un foc  
 i correràs a l'encalç dels que fugen,  
 parats, rendits en hermètics vinils,  
 surant eterns sobre mars de neguit?  
 Deixa al corrent el camí de la vida,  
 segueix endormiscat darrere la muralla,  
 repassa els titulars de la crisi del dòlar  
 i, dins del cau nocturn on els homes  
 són ombres,  
 espera la parada on et duran amunt  
 escales grimpadores i un trepig apressat,  
 mentre cada ull és un rellotge i corren  
 sense ales missatgeres els turmells  
 i els angles de les broques. Abandona't.

*Fourmillante cite. Design, music composed,  
 Sound and make-up. Quantes tones  
 de rimmel,  
 carbonissa subtil al desert dels meus ulls.  
 Hypocrite lecteur, ricordi lafarfalla!  
 Cada pas un sotrac, cada cotxe un taüt.  
 Quina frisança a l'escorça dels cors,  
 quin formigueig al pellatge del riu,  
 quanta falsa alegria als moviments*

A WALK DOWN THE BURNING  
BOULEVARDS

1  
 The sliding doors drew shut uneasily,  
 Behind the walls we cling to  
 Dreams still soft from sheets,  
 A morning smell, the scent of oranges,  
 Instinct, sixth sense, the fear of light.  
 The dollar collapsed among the small print.  
 Each pause was a jolt to memory,  
 Each face a snare, each eye a stranger,  
 Blurred thoughts and foggy skins,  
 Only half-words. Shut out, shut out  
 The world as with a sliding door,  
 Preserve your suffering from the  
 others' suffering,  
 And keep yourself well stored,  
 a book in the dust,  
 Knife in the drawer, far from the finest wires  
 Conducting unknown currents.  
 Or will you undo your coat, your skin,  
 your heart,  
 Handful of salt in the flesh like a fire,  
 And run in pursuit of those who flee,  
 Stopped, reduced to hermetic vinyls,  
 Floating eternally on seas of angst?  
 Leave to the current the road of life,  
 Stay dozing behind the wall,  
 Take in the headlines of the dollar crisis  
 And, in the cave of night where men  
 are shades,  
 Wait for the stop where moving stairs  
 And hurried steps will take you up,  
 Where every eye is a clock, and  
 Ankles and minute-hands go past  
 Without the wings of messengers. Let go.

*Fourmillante cité. Design, music composed,  
 Sound and make-up. How many tons  
 of mascara,  
 Fine coal-dust in the desert of my eyes.  
 Hypocrite lecteur, ricordi lafarfalla!  
 Each step a shock, every car a coffin.  
 How urgent the surface of the hearts,  
 What tingling on the river's skin,  
 What false rejoicing in the movements*

del *bassotto festoso che latrava*  
 dins de les venes dels passants. Dolor.  
 Tant que se'ns desfigura la paraula.  
 L'abril és el mes més cruel, barreja  
 memòria i desig. Veus les ribes del riu?

[*Veus* guspines de llum diminutes de groc  
 modulant els perfils i els vapors de la joia?  
 El món és moviment i tot ordre impossible

Només l'ordre de l'art et donarà el repòs,  
 vas dir-me castament mentre em besaves  
 i te m'enduïes lluny, de matinada.  
 Fes-me veure la llum que reverbera,  
 fes-me veure les ombres transparents,  
 mostra'm la plenitud de les esferes,  
 vaig repetir delejant impossibles.  
*Per me si va tra la perduta gente,*  
 una veu repetia des d'un arbre.  
 Vaig mirar-te anhelant per si somreïes.  
 Somriueres. I bé, vaig dir-me, llança't.

Sota la pell d'aquest món que cobreix  
 una pell més subtil, delicada,  
 on formiguegen continents de por,  
 tots desitjant i fugint el contacte,  
 no vaig trobar el paisatge, tanmateix,  
 gens estrany.

M'has enganyat, et vaig dir, i el retorn  
 és del tot impossible. Baixava en dolç  
 pendent  
 la prada cap al riu. Al lluny, la factoria,  
 fumejava boirosa i es reflectia en l'aigua.  
 Eren les onze del matí. La gent,  
 ajaçada indolent damunt de l'herba,  
 esperava tan sols un punt dolç de calor.  
 Què fan tots tan vestits? Vaig dir- te amb  
 la mirada.

No és el cos el vestit més decent?  
 Vas riure'm a la cara i te n'anaves.  
 Vine, corre, em cridaves des de lluny,  
 jo et mostraré el paradís de la calma.  
 Vas despullar-me tot en un moment,  
 amb les puntes dels dits tan febrores  
 com flames.

Cal ésser pornogràfic i innocent, em  
 vas dir,  
 mentre em baixaves l'eslip transparent

Of the *bassotto festoso che latrava*  
 In the veins of the passers-by. Grief.  
 So much it disfigures our words.  
 April is the cruellest month, mixing  
 Memory and desire. Do you see the  
 river banks?

Do you see the tiny specks of yellow light  
 Changing the outlines and the mists of joy?  
 The world is movement and all order  
 impossible.

Only the order of art will give you respite,  
 You said chastely as you were kissing me,  
 Bearing me far away, one morning.  
 Make me see the light which resonates,  
 Make me see the transparent shadows,  
 Show me the fullness of the spheres,  
 I repeated, seeking the impossible.  
*Per me si va tra la perduta gente,*  
 A voice reiterated from a tree.  
 I looked at you and wanted you to smile.  
 You smiled. All right, I said to myself, go on.

Under the skin of this world which conceals  
 A finer, more delicate skin,  
 Swarming with continents of fear  
 All desiring contact and fleeing from it,  
 I didn't, though, find the landscape strange.

You've deceived me, I said; to return  
 Is completely impossible. The meadow  
 sloped  
 Gently down to the river. Far off, the factory  
 Smoked in a haze, reflected in the water.  
 Eleven o'clock in the morning. People,  
 Idly stretched upon the grass,  
 Were waiting only for a gentle warmth.  
 Why so heavily dressed? I asked you with  
 my eyes.

Isn't the body the most decent of clothes?  
 You laughed in my face and went away.  
 Come, hurry, you cried from the distance,  
 I'll show you the paradise of calm.  
 You took my clothes off in an instant,  
 Your fingertips as feverish as flames.

We must be pornographic and innocent,  
 you said,  
 As you pulled down my filmy briefs

que em cobria desigs i basardes  
 d'una ànima impotent que amb  
 manaments  
 i amb vells mites morals tu m'excitaves,  
 sense sang ni raó ni un plaer mínim.

Vaig escolar-me als teus braços. Després,  
 veient-me inútil, vas abandonar-me.

Van recollir-me uns catalans astuts  
 que anaven mont enllà. Jo, malferit,

tentinejava en penombres confuses.  
 Doctes doctors em cosiren a píncoles.  
 Mireu-lo des de baix, algú va murmurar,  
 cabria tot sencer en un pam de paper.  
 Quina miraculosa perspectiva:  
 primer les plantes dels peus i les benes

que l'embolcallen li fan com de túnica.  
 Veus els plecs dels genolls? <sup>^</sup>El turonet  
 que fan els genitals i al capdavant  
 la testa lacerada branda i branda  
 mentre segueix el trontoll del camí?  
 Què et recorda? Aquell sol sostingut,

aquell sol sostingut que posa un bri  
 d'angoixa  
 al concert de les veus. Pensava una  
 altra cosa.

Pensava en el bandit sicilià  
 sobre el marbre glaçat de la comissaria.  
 Sempre penses imatges, mai sorolls.  
 Cal pensar pensaments, algú recomanava.  
 I em vaig endormiscar amb aquell trontoll  
 i amb l'escalfor i el perfum de les martes.

*Un cors gentil m'a tant enamorat,*  
 cantava el cor de les dames. Venien  
 a poc a poc sota l'ombra dels arbres.  
 Una llum irreal, més que cap d'aquest món,  
 tornava els cossos del tot transparents  
 i es veia el políedre on estaven inscrits.

Tot anava avançant, dames, geometria,  
 cap a l'antic cobert, antic sempre  
 novíssim.

Which concealed the desires and fears  
 Of an impotent soul you aroused,  
 with commands  
 And with old moral myths,  
 Without blood or reason or the slightest  
 pleasure.

I sank into your arms. And later,  
 Finding me useless, you left me.

Some shrewd Catalans picked me up  
 As they came over the mountain.

I, badly wounded,  
 Was groping in confused half-light.  
 Skilled doctors restored me with pills.  
 Look at him from below, someone murmured,  
 He'd fit on a slip of paper.  
 What a miraculous prospect:  
 Start with the soles of his feet and  
 the bandages  
 Wrapping him like a tunic.  
 Do you see the folds of his knees, the mound  
 Of his genitals and, below,  
 The damaged head which sways to and fro  
 To the rise and fall of the road?

What does he remind you of? That constant  
 sun,

That constant sun which imposes a touch  
 of angst  
 On the concert of voices. My mind  
 was elsewhere.

I thought of the Sicilian bandit  
 On the cold slab in the police station.  
 You think always of images, never of sounds.  
 Best to think thoughts, someone proposed.  
 And I fell asleep with the swaying,  
 With the heat and the scent of the marten.

*Un cors gentil m'a tant enamorat,*  
 Sang the ladies' choir. They came  
 Slowly under the shade of the trees.  
 An unreal light, never seen in this world,  
 Was making the bodies quite transparent,  
 Revealing the polyhedron where they  
 were inscribed.

All was advancing, ladies, geometry,  
 Towards the ancient shelter, ancient  
 always new.

Un ventijol suau només servia  
 per dur flaires d'espígol, xeringuilla,  
 roses vermelles, llessamí i lilàs  
 que amagaven, llunyanes, altes tanques.  
 Jo, cavaller, m'estava allà, badoc,  
 meravellat de la claror del dia  
 i ni tan sols gosava respirar  
 ni mirar-me els cavalls darrera meu.  
 L'ample capell em donava bona ombra.  
*Mere dreams, mere dreams!*,  
 una alosa cantà.

I vaig tornar a sentir els plors dels  
 adamites.

Van començar a barrejar-se les formes.  
 Van començar a esgrogueir-se els jardins,  
*gardens where the peacock strays  
 with delicate feet upon old terraces.*  
 I un remolí m'engolí en un moment  
 entre salmons i verats que saltaven,  
 fins que, abraçat al taüt del meu cos,  
 vaig albirar l'esplendor de Bizanci.

*Unreal city.* Blanc i fred palau.  
 Heures que es mengen antigues drassanes.  
 Tigres que salten enmig de bambús,  
 fugint dels ulls d'una lluna llunyana.  
 A prop del riu hi passegen soldats.  
 Uns, asseguts sota fràgils acàcies,  
 llegeixen cartes d'amor, al solem,  
 mentre s'estira mandrosa la tarda.  
 Sortint del pont hi ha un ciclista aturat,  
 quan jo m'hi atanso, s'ha tornat de marbre.  
 Vaig i el despullo del seu gec pelfut,  
 miro amb tristesa els seus membres d'estàtua.  
 Li beso els llavis encara calents.  
 Fujo de pressa abans que vingui un guàrdia.  
 On aniràs que no et trobin els folls?  
 Quin coll de llum et durà a l'altra banda?

Vols amagar-te al jardí del convent?  
 Ara és obert i repiquen campanes.  
 Pujo pel marge agafant-me als matolls,  
 fa un vent que talla i que glaça les basses.  
 Miro si em miren i veig ben gebrat  
 el monument als caiguts per la pàtria.

Sento musiques que vénen de lluny.  
 Val més que et fiquis a dins d'una escala.

A gentle breeze served only to convey  
 The scent of lavender, mock orange,  
 Red roses, jasmine and lilac  
 Hidden in the distance by tall fences.  
 I, a knight, was standing there, distracted,  
 Amazed at the day's brightness,  
 Not daring even to breathe  
 Or look at the horses behind me.  
 My broad hat gave me good shade.  
*Mere dreams, mere dreams!*,  
 a lark was singing.

And once more I heard the tears of the  
 Adamites.

The forms began to melt into one another,  
 The gardens to turn yellow,  
*Gardens where the peacock strays  
 With delicate feet upon old terraces.*  
 And an eddy engulfed me in a moment  
 Among leaping salmon and mackerel,  
 Until, clasping my body's coffin,  
 I glimpsed the splendour of Byzantium.

*Unreal city.* Cold white palace.  
 Ivy consuming ancient shipyards.  
 Tigers leaping among bamboos,  
 Reeing the eyes of a distant moon.  
 Beside the river soldiers are walking.  
 Some, sitting beneath frail acacias,  
 Are reading love letters, in the sun,  
 While the afternoon lazily stretches out.  
 At the end of the bridge a cyclist has stopped;  
 When I approach him, he has turned to marble.  
 I go and take off his velvet jacket,  
 Sadly I look at his statue's limbs.  
 I kiss his lips still warm.  
 I run away before a policeman comes.  
 Where will you go to avoid the fools?  
 What pass of light will take you to the  
 other side?

Do you want to hide in the convent garden?  
 It is open now and bells are ringing.  
 I climb the bank, clinging to the scrub,  
 There is a biting wind which freezes the ponds.  
 I look to see if I'm watched and see all frozen  
 The memorial to those who fell for  
 their country.

I hear music coming from the distance.  
 Better to go inside some staircase.

Són els soldats que se'n van cap al front,  
amb els fusells i una tendra rialla.  
A matar moros, eslaus i jueus?,  
crido, poruc, desviant la mirada.  
Cent ulls de fera se'm claven ardents  
i el cos em pesa de tanta metralla.

*Que Paris était beau à la fin de septembre.*  
Corria un aire tebi com de final d'etapa

i ens estàvem, xerrant, a la llum del  
migdia.  
Aviat cadascú fugiria content  
pel seu camí secret, irreal de tants somnis.

Ah, dolor, contingut lleopard,  
endormiscat al redós dels til·lers.  
Aquell món s'esfumava. Potser tots ho sabíem  
i ens estàvem tranquils, somrient  
mansament,  
immortals dins l'instant que fixàvem  
per sempre.

*Que Paris était beau à la fin de septembre.*

Quin és el teu secret, quin és el teu  
secret?, m'anaves repetint. Traçàvem  
figures a la sorra, teoremes  
tan antics com nosaltres. Jo callava.  
Qui sap quines tempestes s'amagaven  
dins d'aquell caparró, quins desitjós incerts,  
quins viatges remots saltant d'un arbre  
a l'altre

amb el teu cos elàstic. Quin secret?

*Am Brunnen vor dem Thore,*

*Da steht ein Lindenbaum.*

*Ich traumt' in seinem Schatten*

*So manchen süssen Traum.*

Ah, dolor meu, sempre a l'aguait, pantera,  
aquell món s'esfumava, s'esfumava.

Quin és, el teu secret?, només vas dir-me.

Corria un aire tebi com de final d'etapa.

*Que Paris était beau à la fin de septembre.*

Hauríem perseguit, junts, la Balena Blanca?

Corre la sang dins de les nostres venes,  
nits com udols, feres sense carnassa,

They are the soldiers going to the front,  
With rifles and gentle laughter.  
To kill Moors, Slavs and Jews?,  
I cry fearfully, turning aside my gaze.  
A hundred wild beasts' eyes burn through me  
And all the shrapnel weighs my body down.

7

*Que Paris était beau à la fin de septembre.*  
There was a warm breeze like the end of a  
season

And there we were, chatting, in the light  
of noon.

Soon each would flee quite happily  
Down his secret road, unreal with so  
many dreams.

Ah, grief, discreet leopard  
Sleeping in the shelter of the limes.  
That world was fading. Perhaps we all knew it  
And took it calmly, smiling gently,

Immortal within the instant we fixed  
for ever.

*Que Paris était beau à la fin de septembre.*

What is your secret, what is your secret?

You repeatedly said. We traced

Figures in the sand, theorems

As old as ourselves. I was silent.

Who knows what storms were hidden

Inside that little head, what uncertain desires,

What remote journeys leaping from tree  
to tree

With your elastic body. What secret?

*Am Brunnen vor dem Thore*

*Da steht ein Lindenbaum.*

*Ich traumt' in seinem Schatten*

*So manchen süssen Traum.*

Ah, my grief, panther always on the alert,  
That world was fading, fading.

What is it, your secret? you simply said to me.

There was a warm breeze like the end of  
a season.

*Que Paris était beau à la fin de septembre.*

Would we, together, have hunted the  
White Whale?

Blood flows within our veins,  
Nights like howling, beasts without carnage,

ullals i ulls, guspises a la fosca.  
 I vam cercar l'amor, l'abril corria  
 amb els seus tremolors i amb perfum de lilàs.  
*D'a sede que m'abrassa, crarasfantes*  
*apagad o queimor...* Madame, madame...  
 Missenyora fugia pels jardins  
 deixant entre les branques filagarses de gasa.  
*Valets de chambre* em seguïen voraçes.  
 Adolescents, donzelles, roses roses de seda  
 aparegudes al corall dels somnis.  
 Els pètals dels teus ulls, com papallones  
 sobre la pell, sobre les fulles, sobre...  
 Com un bosc sobre un bosc, en tempesta  
 perpètua,  
 fòsfor i estels i la saba dels llavis.  
 Jo, terbolí, fosc corrent de la mar,  
 Gulf Stream d'amor desfent-me sobre illes,  
 agitant les palmeres, enduent-me  
 cases, poblats, destrossant els sembrats,  
 esbullant cabelleres sobre platges i aromes.  
 Madame, madame, plaer meu, vida meva,  
 goig i desfici, cruel Penthesilea.  
 Lluna del Iemen, Tigre de Bengala,  
 Torre de vori, Card entre lliris, dona'm  
 la darrera punxada verinosa  
 que se'ns endugui llac endins i ens perdi  
 entre ruïnes del teu cos, del Temple,  
 Monestir transparent, Balena blanca,  
 Aspid sagrat, Amor, *ora pro nobis*.

Caravanes que fugen, ploroses, arrosseguen  
 uns farcells prou pesats. I masos  
 cremen lluny.  
 Ara torno endarrere, veig cares conegudes  
 que ja no em reconeixen. Basarda i por  
 els empeny.  
 Fam i pesta desola tots els poblats d'Europa.  
 Hi ha exèrcits que saquegen, pagesos  
 revoltats,  
 clergues que es venen l'ànima a irrisoris  
 dimonis.  
 Corre, cavall, oh corre! Quin verd tan clar  
 té el faig!

El salitre rosega el fons de les pintures,  
 un artròpode es menja el text dels manuscrits.  
 Amor, amor, i et beso, porta'm braços .  
 de roses

Tusks and eyes, flashes in the dark.  
 And we looked for love, April rushed past  
 With its tremors, the scent of lilacs.  
*D'a sede que m'abrassa, crarasfantes*  
*apagad o queimor...* Madame, madame...  
 Milady was fleeing through the gardens,  
 Leaving threads of gauze upon the branches.  
*Valets de chambre* greedily followed me.  
 Youths and maidens, pink silk roses  
 Appearing in the coral reef of dreams.  
 The petals of your eyes, like butterflies  
 Upon the skin, upon the leaves, upon...  
 Like a wood upon a wood, in perpetual  
 storm,  
 Phosphorus and stars, the juices of the lips.  
 I, vortex, dark current of the sea,  
 Gulf Stream of love breaking upon islands,  
 Shaking the palm trees, bearing away  
 Houses, villages, destroying the crops,  
 Tangling hair over beaches and scents.  
 Madame, madame, my solace, my life,  
 Pleasure and angst, cruel Penthesilea.  
 Moon of the Yemen, Bengal Tiger,  
 Ivory Tower, Thorn among Lilies, give me  
 The last poisonous bite  
 Which will take us into the lake and lose us  
 Among the ruins of your body, the Temple,  
 Transparent Monastery, White Whale,  
 Sacred Asp, Love, *ora pro nobis*.

Escaping, weeping caravans are dragging  
 Heavy loads. And farms burn in the distance.  
 Now I turn backwards, see faces I know  
 And know me not. Distress and fear  
 drive them on.  
 Hunger and plague lay waste the cities of Europe.  
 There are armies plundering, peasants  
 in revolt,  
 Priests selling their souls to ridiculous  
 demons.  
 Gallop, horse, gallop! How bright is the  
 green of the beech

Saltpetre eats at the background of paintings,  
 An arthropod gnaws at the manuscript texts.  
 Love, love (and I kiss you), bring me  
 armfuls of roses.

Com el fenc, com el fenc, són els dies  
de l'home,

com les flors del camí, així, de pressa  
es mor.

Amor, amor, i et beso, porta'm braços  
de roses.

Fugissera Bellesa, sempre incontaminada,  
vine tu amb el fuet d'un somriure  
o d'uns ulls.

Sacseja'ns en la fosca de la monotonia,  
desafia el passat, el present i el futur.

Vine enmig de la fúria d'aquest món  
que s'acaba,

de confusa tenebra, de mentida i oblit.

Fes sagnar els nostres ulls que, en terra  
de ningú,

en el cor de la guerra, es debaten insomnes.

Like grass, like grass are the days of man,

Like the flowers of the field thus he  
quickly dies.

Love, love (and I kiss you), bring me  
armfuls of roses.

Ephemeral Beauty, never corrupted,  
Come with the whip of a smile or of eyes.

Unnerve us in monotony's darkness,  
Challenge past, present and future.

Come mid the fury of this vanishing world,

Of dark chaos, of lies and oblivion.

Make our eyes bleed, as, in no man's land,

At the heart of war, they sleeplessly strive.

The poem is dated 'London, February 1973'. The 'dollar crisis' of the first canto was to reach its climax that July with the so-called oil crisis. That July was precisely when I returned home. The England that I had known, 'swinging London', supplying fresh surprises all the time, overflowing with cultural vitality, would soon be at an end. On the horizon there loomed, like a threatening storm-cloud, Mrs Thatcher, with her privatizations and neo-liberal cuts. But this no longer formed any part of my English experience. Spain and Catalonia still had three years of Francoist horror in front of them. And then the excitement, quickly followed by disappointment, of the 'transition to democracy'. But that, as they always say, is another story.