

THE ANNUAL JOAN GILI MEMORIAL LECTURE

FRANCESC PARCERISAS

The Irish Poet and the British Gentleman

THE ANGLO-CATALAN SOCIETY
2002

Produced and typeset by The Hallamshire Press Limited, Sheffield

This is the fourth in the regular series of lectures convened by The Anglo-Catalan Society, to be delivered at its annual conference, in commemoration of the figure of Joan Lluís Gili i Serra (1907-1998), founder member of the Society and Honorary Life President from 1979. The object of publication is to ensure wider diffusion, in English, for an address to the Society given by a distinguished figure of Catalan letters whose specialism coincides with an aspect of the multiple interests and achievements of Joan Gili, as scholar, bibliophile and translator. This lecture was given by Francesc Parcerisas at St Peter's College, Oxford, on 15 December 2001.

Translation of the text of the lecture and general editing of the publication were the responsibility of Alan Yates, with the cooperation of Louise Johnson. We are grateful to Francesc Parcerisas himself and to Iolanda Pelegrí for prompt and sympathetic collaboration. Thanks are also due to Pauline Climpson and Jenny Sayles of The Hallamshire Press for effective guidance throughout the editing and production stages.

Grateful acknowledgement is made of regular sponsorship of The Annual Joan Gili Memorial Lectures provided by the Institució de les Lletres Catalanes, and of the grant towards publication costs received from the Fundació Congr s de Cultura Catalana.

The author

The poet, translator and critic Francesc Parcerisas was born in Begues (Baix Llobregat) in 1944. He took a degree in Philosophy at the University of Barcelona and then went to Bristol University where he taught Spanish from 1969 to 1972. Parcerisas recalls those years as a time of extensive travelling, wild music and constant reading. He left Bristol to travel to southern Mexico and then returned to the island of Eivissa, where he settled for seven years working as a free-lance translator mainly of fiction and essays from English into Spanish. In 1979 he took the state examinations to become a teacher of Catalan language and literature and moved back to Barcelona. In 1986 he became lecturer in translation from English into Catalan at the Universitat Aut noma de Barcelona. He holds the degree of MA in Literary Translation from the University of Essex and a doctorate from Barcelona.

Since his first book, *Vintpoemes civils* (1966), Francesc Parcerisas has published a number of collections of poetry and literary criticism and he has contributed regularly to Catalan newspapers and journals. The volume of his collected poems, *Triomf del present*, includes all his poetry up to early 1992. Subsequently he has produced *Focs d'octubre* (1992) and his latest collection *Natura morta amb nens* (2000). Since 1998 Parcerisas has worked as Director of the Institució de les Lletres Catalanes, the Catalan Ministry of Culture's centre for the promotion of Catalan literature.

THE IRISH POET AND THE BRITISH GENTLEMAN

First of all I wish to thank the Anglo-Catalan Society for the invitation to participate in the conference here in Oxford and to deliver this lecture convened under the auspices of a name which is esteemed and respected by so many people present today: Joan Gili. The name of Joan Gili and the Anglo-Catalan Society itself together constitute a comfortable mantle which makes me feel at home, among close companions and friends.

I have to give some explanation regarding the title of my talk as announced in the programme, which I shall presently deliver. It is entitled 'The Irish Poet and the British Gentleman'. Although this might seem rather cryptic, the intention is for it to be clear and to the point, not concealing too many secrets; and, indeed, as you will see, it will contain very few secrets at all for most people in my audience here, except perhaps for the unfathomable secrets inevitably residing in every private evocation and recollection.

About eighteen months ago I received a telephone call from an old friend from school and university days, senyor Antoni Paricio, the director of Omega publications. Antoni Paricio belongs to an important line of Barcelona publishers: his family had been in charge of distribution for the Editorial Iberia, whose books were published by one of his relatives, a cloth-bound collection of literary masterpieces, well translated, among which were a number of surprising titles of oriental classics. Thanks to my friendship with the Paricio family I got access to some of those books, varied classics, in Castilian translation, both fiction and non-fiction, books which, although precarious as a commercial venture, gave us the happy opportunity to read Jakob Burkhardt's study on the Italian Renaissance, or Eckermann's conversations with Goethe, and where I encountered the first Castilian translations of Catalan classics like Jaume I, Bernat Metge and perhaps one or two others which, in those days (I am talking about the 1960s), were virtually unobtainable in Catalan. Moreover, the father of my friend, senyor Gabriel Paricio—who, because of his initials, G.P., used to be confused with Gabriel Plaza who was well-known, in my childhood years, as publisher of the famous series of *Libros Pulga*, who later acquired the publishing house of Josep Janés, to become thereafter Plaza & Janés—senyor Gabriel Paricio, returning to him, was extremely fond of the plastic arts and, by the 1960s, he had in place a series of books dedicated to modern painting, with studies by Juan-Eduardo Cirlot on *La pintura abstracta* (1954), *La escultura del siglo XX* (1956) or *Antoni*

Tàpies (1960). His Omega publishing house, though, is best known for its technical books on engineering, medicine and other applied sciences, and for its splendid Nature guides. I suppose many of you will know the marvellous *Guia dels ocells dels Països Catalans i d'Europa*, the Catalan version of *A Field Guide to the Birds of Britain and Europe* by Peterson, Mountfort and Hollom—a quite indispensable guide which enables us urbanites to appreciate that the call of the common nightingale ends in ‘*unprofund, bombollejant “txook-txook-txook” i un lent “piu-piu-piu” ascendent a un brillant crescendo/ a deep, bubbling “chook-chook-chook” and a slow “piu,piu, piu”*, rising to a brilliant *crescendo*’.

The publisher Paricio has made occasional incursions into other literary fields and I have had the pleasure, at irregular intervals, of collaborating with him. In 1993, for example, he asked if I would translate for him into Castilian a travel book about Provence by an English journalist. The resulting version of Peter Mayle's entertaining account of *A Year in Provence* became a best-seller and served, in fact, to initiate in Spain a series of translations of his books, into Castilian and Catalan, that still continues.

I am providing this description of the editorial nous of my friend Antoni Paricio so that you will appreciate how—when he 'phoned eighteen months ago to tell me he was planning to set up a collection of writers' biographies and that he wanted me to do one for him—I was completely taken by the idea. The plan was to follow the model to be found in other countries and create a popular collection of 'writers by writers', with the biographer being a living author and the subject of the biography a writer for whom the former would feel a particular closeness. According to the publicity, 'In *Vidas literarias* [Literary Lives: the name of the collection] the most prestigious contemporary authors write biographies of the classic figures of Hispanic literatures [...] No-one better than a writer to write the life-story of another writer, in a kind of creative dialogue that makes each volume a suggestive literary treasure.' The collection, as you can see, embraces the whole span of Hispanic literatures, with the consequent idea of including writers from Spain and South America and also some representatives of the Catalan repertoire. Julio Cortàzar, Fray Luís de León, Clarice Lispector, Lope de Vega, Teresa de Jesús and Calderón de la Barca are some of the titles already in print.

My friend Antoni Paricio's proposal, if I was prepared to supply 75-100 pages of biographical text on a writer from the past and a selection from his work, was that I should choose a favourite Catalan writer. The idea of the series is not at all scholarly, nor academic, but rather aimed at a more general public, intended to provide introductions to the writers through this curious symbiosis of past and present, on account of specific features that a present-day author might find especially relevant—for their intellectual importance, personal affinity or just

the appeal of the strange anecdote—in the life of his selected subject. So my immediate thought was to propose Jacint Verdaguer as my author (an extraordinary poet, a very controversial person, a most impressive figure, somewhere between a Dersu Uzala of the Catalan language and an Indiana Jones of religious psychoanalysis). But Verdaguer, as might have been expected, was spoken for: the poet and novelist Miquel de Palol had already been signed up to write his biography. As there was some urgency about deciding on my subject, I toyed with the names of Àngel Guimerà, Carles Riba, Joan Maragall, Salvador Espriu... but I had my doubts about the interest for me in working on the biography of any of these authors for whom my admiration is unreserved. It seemed to me, mistakenly perhaps, that I needed to find a life-story that was a bit more out of the ordinary, a bit more singular.

Present here today are some notable specialists in Catalan writing, and they know better than I do that Catalan literature has had men and women whose existences were thickened with adventure. Ramon Muntaner and Joanot Martorell are, clearly, paradigms of this from olden days, while, more recently, exile after the Spanish Civil War produced an equally noteworthy array of lives deeply changed by events and their consequent unpredictable hazards. Agustí Bartra and Anna Murià, Mercè Rodoreda, Joan Oliver, Pompeu Fabra, Pere Calders and Avel·lí Artís 'Tísner'... so many illustrations of the case. In any event, I felt that I was seeking something rather different: an author that I admired, like those just mentioned, solid and all of a piece but having a sort of 'secret' life, a life that, officially, always stayed in the background in relation to their work. What I was looking to do was to 'rescue' for biography some little known facets of a personality who, like all of us, had gone through all the entanglements of the passing years without converting this into a literature of an overtly autobiographical kind. So I did not want a character like Josep Pla, from the Empordà, nor a son of the Camp de Tarragona like Joan Puig i Ferrer—two authors who are so often the protagonists of their own writing and who are in themselves writing made flesh—nor did I want a character locked up in himself, which is how I imagine Salvador Espriu to have been.

The literary editor of the project, the novelist Núria Amat, suggested 'Wouldn't you consider doing Carner?' And I was left dumbstruck, because Carner is a figure that we Catalans hold so dear, who stands so far above discussion, that we have always felt that he could not be 'exported', who was difficult to explain—that he could not be projected beyond our language, because Carner weaves all sorts of spells with the language while at the same time turning it into a modern instrument of expression, absolutely suited to all purposes. And without a second's hesitation I immediately said that I would, that I would do a biography of Carner, of *my* Carner. A biography that would moreover enable me to explain, among

other things, my 'conversion' to Carner, my admiration for 'the Prince of Poets' as the supreme example of fusion or perfect fit between linguistic resources and a fine psychological sensibility dedicated to one of the most intelligent poetic explorations of human emotions that I have encountered.

Carner's life-story, moreover, is an extremely rich one, which has stayed in the shade, reduced to the schemata reproduced in literary manuals. The triumphant young writer, the Prince of Poets, who left Catalonia behind as soon as he embarked on his diplomatic career, who was forced into exile, stayed for a short time in Mexico, and lived out a lengthy period as expatriate in Belgium where he entered a second marriage with the eminent literary critic Émilie Noulet. But behind all this there are a thousand telling human dramas, of which I will here just mention a sample and which will constitute one of the main threads of my planned biography: the poet-critic who in the prime of life experiences a *coup defoudre* and goes off to Chile, in 1915, to marry a high-ranking young lady of whom he has caught a glimpse while strolling in Barcelona's Passeig de Gràcia; the dandy of the consular staff of the Spanish Republic; the husband suddenly stricken by the death of his wife while he is far away from home, left now with two young children; the mature man who has to go into exile, now with new matrimonial bonds, with a daughter away at school in France and an adolescent son fighting in the Civil War; the great recluse in Belgium, who finds consoling support only in his native language... The data which comprise Carner's biography, and which are now coming to light thanks to studies of particular facets and thanks to a substantial correspondence currently being published, represent one of the truly great intellectual adventures of the twentieth century.

Furthermore, I have a personal debt of duty towards Carner, a poet that I found difficult to understand and appreciate, whose work I had to explain in two or three classes at the University of Bristol without knowing quite what I was talking about: I found him superficial and insipid, he had no appeal for me and, all in all, I didn't understand what he was about. In fact, I had not been capable of reading him properly, and I did not have the necessary maturity to understand him. The opportunity, now, to write his biography, even if only a literary biography, and not a particularly scholarly one, enables me to make amends and to put things in their right place.

What follows is, then, a chapter of that biography on which I am working. It is the chapter entitled 'The Irish Poet and the British Gentleman', and it fits, together with the other sections, into a sequence of key moments that are symbolically or anecdotally important in Carner's life-history, 'flashes', as it were, or snapshots of instants in the poet's life that to me seem especially striking or essential for understanding the person and his work. In the case of this particular chapter, corresponding to the last years of Carner's life, two characters appear

who, from very different angles, become involved in a single Carnerian undertaking. The decision to make this my subject is due to the fact that the persons concerned, as you will shortly see, orbit close to the occasion which brings us together today.

The Irish Poet and the British Gentleman, 1962

Pearse Hutchinson is a sensitive, fragile man even though his physical presence seems rather tough, robust. This latter impression is perhaps produced by his raincoat, a garment with a 'lived-in' look, dating back to times immemorial, which has known many Dublin winters and in which he always wraps himself. In Ireland he will gain recognition and respect, especially from the late 1960s, as an excellent poet, both in English and in Gaelic, and as someone well-versed also in the literary traditions of various romance languages. For years his will be a signature that is assiduously present and well regarded in Irish literary journalism, and his a conspicuous silhouette in the regular gatherings and legends of certain Dublin pubs. Pearse Hutchinson has already visited Barcelona in the mid-1950s and now, in the early 60s, he is settled in that still drab city which is just starting to raise its head, economically and culturally, the Barcelona of the SEAT 600 and the department stores of El Corte Inglés.

Pearse Hutchinson lives a moderately bohemian life while subsisting on his income from teaching English at the British Institute. He spends most of his spare time in a hostelry called Ca l'Isidre, in the Carrer Sant Eusebi, almost on the corner of the Avinguda del Príncep d'Astúries and the Carrer Saragossa, where for just a few pesetas they still serve glasses of a nice white wine from the region of El Bruc. His first trip to Barcelona was in 1954. Although he had previously been travelling round Spain, he felt, like so many foreign hispanists, some slight misgivings about Catalonia, seen as a world apart, a bit 'outlandish', too complex and wealthy to be ignored and too different to be taken lightly. In the military slang still popularly used with eloquent prolixity in the years we are talking about, Catalunya was *un rancho aparte*, beyond the pale. This is what explains how, eight years earlier, on his way to Andalucia, he decided to stay for a couple of months in Barcelona, to do some English-teaching and to save up some funds. Before he knew it he had been living there for two years. He had been surprised by the vitality of the language spoken by people in the streets, so he determined to learn Catalan *par les textes*. The decisive moment in the awakening of this personal interest is when his friend Josep Maria Bordas, whom he used to bump into every lunch-time in Can Culleretes—a long-established and, in those days, still quite simple restaurant, in the old quarter of the city, just off the Rambla—translates for him three poems by Salvador Espriu. Pearse

Hutchinson is particularly enthused by one entitled 'El Ninot' which a good few years later he will translate into English and into Gaelic. Without further ado Pearse goes into a bookshop on the Rambla, the Llibreria Tasis, and manages to buy a Catalan grammar, first published during the dictatorship of Primo de Rivera, a grammar which Pearse notices still bears a republican flag on its cover. Meanwhile it is Salvador Espriu himself who sends him a copy of a homage volume dedicated to Josep Carner, published in 1959 by the Editorial Selecta, with contributions from seventy-two authors, Catalans and foreigners. Among the contributors there figure the names of Gabriela Mistral, Jules Supervielle, Giuseppe Ungaretti, Jean Wahl, Josep Pla, J.-V. Foix and Carles Riba.

So Pearse Hutchinson has learned Catalan, has read Maragall and is acquainted with the spirit of Barcelona as the 'fire-red rose' of Spanish anarchism. Out of solidarity, out of a sense of duty, out of enthusiasm, he translates into English various notable authors: Riba, Foix, Manent, Pere Quart, Espriu and some younger writers identified with the new realism like Francesc Vallverdú or Joaquim Horta. But he is also a fervent admirer of Poem of the Cid and of Galaico-Portuguese lyric poetry: *Tongue Without Hands* (1963) is the title of one of his own books of English poems, and it is a quotation from the Poem of the Cid. He came back to Barcelona last year—remember we are looking from the perspective of 1962—to stay for just one month. At this point in our story he has been there for a year already and little does he know that he will stay for another five. Pearse Hutchinson is a methodical man, within the spiritual cast of a Baudelaire, or even a Verlaine: he loves conversation, poetry, the secrets of Barcelona's eternal night-times, drink... a set of small panaceas which serve to raise the spirit and enable one to forget momentarily that the Dictatorship's repression is still implacable, that Franco's grey-uniformed police occupy every corner of every street in every city and that the henchmen of the regime are legion.

In fact these are a second generation of henchmen, even though they are mixed in with the familiar, long-standing gang of nutters who fancy themselves as *gerifaltes*, the regime's parasitic 'big-wigs'. This new lot have begun to grow rich, not on the official sinecures of the blue-shirts or of Franco's swaggering 'lieutenants', but on the new property speculation and the incipient tourist trade. This is the reason why Pearse Hutchinson drinks, talks and writes, and drinks some more, and the more he drinks the more he talks, and the more he talks the more he writes and the more he tears up and the better is the writing that he rescues from the process. And while he is waiting in some grim office to be paid for one of the commercial translations that help him to scrape a living, and while he is enthusiastically reading Joan Sales's Catalan translation of *Christ Recrucified* by Kazantzakis, he is mentally recording the lines that in years to come he will work into his poem 'Enriqueta Bru':

While I waited
 for ten minutes or half-an-hour
 in that bleak dazzling office I sometimes thought
 of men who'd never see their country again
 because they loved it so much as Enriqueta.
 I never spoke to her of them,
 there wasn't time -perhaps no need-
 perhaps she knew
 exiles at home,
 neither in exile nor at home. (from *Barnsley Main Seam*, 1995)

Pearse Hutchinson believes, like Carner, in the importance of humble things, in the importance of public spiritedness sustained in silence, of self-denying integrity. He sees in these virtues the symbol of life and of the beauty of existence. And, of course, he believes in their potency as decisive driving-force in the creation of the most authentic art, as driving-force of the ethical value in the Catalans' 'cultural resistance', here exemplified by Hutchinson in the figure of the secretary who is his model for describing the simple everyday heroism of the subjugated people.

Hutchinson quite probably gets particularly irritated at the sight of the colossal stupidity and banality imposed by the dictatorship of chancers, military men, con-men and cassock-lickers, but his grimaces of disgust are concealed behind his thick beard and the ironic twinkle of his small eyes. He observes the sins of hostility and folly in this world that he loves, barricaded by his thick lips, his tortoise-shell glasses, the bushy, beer-coloured beard, sheltered in the maternal protection of his perennial raincoat, and he drinks up one more glass of wine: just one more, never the last.

As was the case with other Anglo-Saxon writers who came before him (Walter Starkie, Langdon-Davies), he has made good contacts with the last bastions of the Catalan intelligentsia, and, thanks to these connections, he will come to translate Carner into English in the company of Marià Manent, 'that other great translator—as Hutchinson himself wrote—who at almost daily sessions over several months read these translations, compared, explained, re-read, and always with so strong an understanding of Carner's work and so wide, indeed shaming, a knowledge of English that many lines are as much his as mine'.

All this takes place in the Barcelona district of Sant Gervasi, with wisteria in bloom entwining the *modernista* wrought-ironwork of gardens and arbours belonging to villas which were once the pride and joy of the bourgeoisie but which now, with the slow, leaden passage of the long post-war years, display flaking walls, rockery fountains full of rubble and bathrooms modernized with cheap mosaic tiling. The year is 1962.

A few hundred kilometres from this Barcelona that is beginning to awake and revive, at the antipodes of the Spanish political and social panorama, in the England which is just about to launch the youth revolution of the 1960s, the contraceptive pill and the miniskirt, is to be found the other key character in this modest chapter of our Carnerian history: Joan Gili. As a character, Gili is, too, quite the opposite of Pearse Hutchinson. Gili is a British gentleman. The adjective is superfluous. He is a gentleman, *tout court*. A gentleman by birth, by descent, by pedigree. He is one of the first twentieth-century Spaniards to go into English exile; he doesn't even wait for the disasters of the Civil War. He goes off to live in England in 1934, attracted by the atmosphere of freedom that can there be breathed.

Joan Gili is an oval-faced man, with slightly angular features, thin lips and abundant hair which, with the years, will become immaculately and almost presumptuously white. He belongs to a most worthy Catalan family: his grandfather, his uncle and his father were all publishers. His father, almost at the same time that Joan was born, in 1907, sets up the Editorial Lluís Gili, renowned for its books on religion and its manuals of piety, and through which Carner will publish some of his early work. The uncle, Gustau Gili, is a major figure in the publishing world: he put out the 39 volumes of Pastor's History of the Papacy in 1911, the first edition of the complete works of Joan Maragall in 1913, then of Narcís Oller, the great patriarch of the modern Catalan novel, between 1928 and 1930.

The young Gili has grown up among books and publishers and has had dealings with Josep Carner at the office in the Carrer Clans 82, headquarters of the family firm, where Carner's *Les monjoies* [Boundary Stones] are published in 1912 and which is the venue of meetings between Carner, Father Frederic Clascar, Canon Carles Cardo and other mildly interesting literary personalities of the day. When he starts working for his father in 1932, Joan Gili is charged with editing Carner's *El veire encantat* [The Enchanted Goblet] and then, just before his departure for England, the first volume of the latter's Collected Poems, *Auques i ventalls* [Captioned Cartoons and Fans], published in the following year of 1935, this being the second edition, corrected and augmented, of the book which first appeared in 1914. He has conversed with Carner about English literature, and he himself has published articles in the daily *La Publicitat* on T.S. Eliot, Katherine Mansfield, D.H. Lawrence, etc. And it is Carner himself who speaks to the father to elicit permission for his son Joan to transplant himself to England. That Joan Gili is a man who does not quaver when confronted with a challenge is not difficult to demonstrate: not only will he continue to play a daily game of tennis, even after his ninetieth birthday (as some here today will recall), but also, despite what he has learned from his family experience, he begins his own business career by setting up a bookshop in London.

His partner is the writer C. Henry Warren and the shop they open is situated in Cecil Court, between Charing Cross Road and St Martin's Lane. This is the Dolphin Bookshop whose emblem is the lovely dolphin of Aldus Manutius—something much more than a mere typographical symbol—and the business, once it is in Gili's hands exclusively, will specialize in Spanish books. His destiny takes a gigantic leap forwards when Elizabeth McPherson, to whom he was married in 1938, gets to know by chance someone in New Hampshire who, in turn, is a friend of someone who has inherited the colossal library of the French hispanist Raymond Fouché-Delbosc. Elizabeth explains everything to Joan and Joan takes rapid steps, in May 1939, just before the outbreak of World War II, to hire a railway wagon in which to transport in 150 boxes, from Paris to London, the eight tons of books that comprise the collection. Gili will become the leading specialist dealer in Hispanic publications and he will be charged with creating collections for university libraries, some of them incorporating Catalan manuscripts. From 1938 onwards he also begins publishing Hispanic texts. This same year he translates with Stephen Spender a selection of poems by Federico Garcia Lorca, subsequently expanded and published in 1943 in the New Hogarth Library. (In 1960 Penguin Books produce his prose versions of the poet from Granada.) Gili is, in addition, the author of the first Catalan grammar in English—*Introductory Catalan Grammar* (1943)—a classic textbook which has served generations of students, and publisher of Joan Triadú's *Anthology of Catalan Lyric Poetry* (1953).

In the present context it is perhaps unnecessary to repeat that Joan Gili will become an institution of Catalan letters in exile: in 1954, together with the politician Josep Maria Batista i Roca and Dr Josep Trueta, he will be a founder of this Anglo-Catalan Society and he will lend his support to every democratic initiative made in favour of the liberties of the Catalans. His home will always be the port in a storm for the exiles (and, later on, for researchers, students, lecturers, Catalans passing through...). His contact with living Catalan writers has always been very direct: his sister Victòria was married for seventeen years, from 1931 to 1948, to the poet from Sarrià, Josep-Vicenç Foix (passing over here, as is proper, the mischievous literary gossip that has circulated about this marriage), and in London in 1939, Joan Gili will give hospitality to Carles Riba and Clementina Arderiu at one stage in the couple's wanderings in exile. The third of Riba's Bierville Elegies, indeed, is dedicated 'For Joan and Elizabeth'. But our story obliges us to advance in time and we must move on to the year 1962.

Pearse Hutchinson and Joan Gili were two extraordinarily disparate human types, but when we investigate the Carnerian biographical data corresponding to the year 1962 we find them united in a single, fine undertaking. Hutchinson, thanks to his gifts as a poet, his knowledge of Catalan and his relations with the

Barcelona intelligentsia, will be charged with translating into English the anthology *Poems*, which will appear in a handsome edition (printed, in fact, in Valencia, at the Tipografia Moderna) from The Dolphin Book Co. Ltd, Gili's publishing concern.

If Carner's poetry brings permanently together these two unforgettable characters it is on account of a complex and risky initiative which, promoted from Barcelona, with the complicity of Émilie Noulet in Brussels, endeavours to have Carner put forward as a candidate for the Nobel Prize for literature.

The proposal is intended as a mark of recognition of the poet to resound abroad and, particularly, as recognition of Catalan literature and of a people desirous of recovering their democratic liberties still subjected to the oppression of the Francoist dictatorship. Foremost is concern for cultural freedom and the right to public use of their language. Andre Billy, writing in *Le Figaro Littéraire* in December 1962, declares: 'Some months ago the Catalans proposed to the Swedish Academy, as candidate for the Nobel Prize, the most important of their living writers (...) This candidature, which enjoys the support of Francois Mauriac, Andre Chamson, Roger Caillois and Giuseppe Ungaretti, has lost none of its validity. It is high time that the Nobel accolade, which on other occasions has already given prominence to literatures of limited diffusion, should be awarded to a Catalan writer. This language, which has a glorious past and a brilliant present and which, for the last twenty years, has suffered a more or less overt persecution, is still deprived of official, international acclaim. To anoint Josep Carner, exiled but ever faithful to his origins, would be, regardless of any political considerations, a gesture that would be applauded by the entire intellectual community.'

Not everyone, as we shall see, shares this opinion, and there are, moreover, other stumbling blocks which will complicate this ultimately thwarted proposal. Another of Joan Gili's roles in this affair will be that of interlocutor in efforts to overcome one of the stumbling blocks. He has been in correspondence, at the beginning of the 1960s, with Carner in his Brussels exile. The exchanges are primarily of a practical nature, in which Carner requests Gili's help with certain bank transactions to enable him to receive payment, through a London account, of monies due to him from Barcelona. So when, in March 1962, with the campaign for Carner's Nobel candidature already under way, a delicate and uncomfortable situation arises, Gili, although not fully apprised of all the issues and all the sensitivities in play, is one of the people charged with making the poet aware of the difficulties facing them.

Towards the end of the preceding month, February 1962, Luis Jiménez de Asúa—now President of the Spanish Republic in exile, after the death of Diego Martínez Barrio—has asked the historian Claudio Sanchez Albornoz to form a cabinet. Sanchez Albornoz requests Carner's participation in the cabinet and the

latter's first reaction is to accept. However, the poet's political involvement with the Spanish government in exile puts great difficulties, in the eyes of those promoting it, in the way of the initiative to have Carner nominated for the Nobel prize. The inevitable political connotations of his joining the cabinet would certainly taint Carner. Consequently, through Gili (as well as Albert Manent, Joan Colominas i Puig and others), Carner is asked to decline the offer, which Carner, with few illusions about the symbolic appointment proposed by Sanchez Albornoz, immediately does. There is a telegram which has become a legendary document of this whole process. Sent by Émilie Noulet to the secretary of the campaign pro-Carner, the poet-doctor and cultural activist Joan Colominas i Puig, with an almost cryptic text, the missive makes things perfectly clear. It says: *Poète redevenu exclusivement poète*.

Among the various procedures that have to be gone through, the letters sent and the declarations of support solicited in favour of Carner's Nobel candidature, perhaps the most impressive documents are, on the one hand, the list of books by Carner that, within a couple of years, are translated into other languages to make his work more widely known, and, on the other hand, the report of a certain hispanist, to this day still anonymous, sent to a Swedish academic advising him against lending his name to Carner's nomination for the prize.

The operation to broadcast the poetry of Carner enlists some material already in existence, as for instance *Nabí* in the French version done by Émilie Noulet and the author himself (published in Paris by the prestigious Librairie José Corti in 1959), while other, newly made selections are delivered to the printers, mostly brief anthologies in various languages designed to bring his writing to the attention of critics, intellectuals and academics: *Lligam. Tria de poemes/Lien* (a selection of 24 poems, with the Catalan originals and French translations by the author and his wife, 1961); *Poemes* (in French, by the same translators, 1962); *Choix de poemes* (translations into various languages in a single homage volume—Pearse Hutchinson first publishes here four of his English versions and Philip Jones supplies three more—1962); *Poems* (translated by Hutchinson, 1962); *Legame. Scelta di poesie* (Italian version of *Lien* done by M. Tutino, 1963) and *Legatura* (Romanian version of *Lien* by J. Aderca, 1964). A noteworthy array, as one can see, motivated by good will, which, contrasting with the desert landscape of Catalan literature's international projection at that time, will serve to make available sufficient letters of presentation for the poet.

Alongside these editions, the report of the mysterious hispanist is rather more bizarre. We know about it through Harald Hagedahl, a member of the Swedish Academy, who in 1962 sends a confidential copy to Ramon Aramon i Serra, at the time General Secretary of the clandestine but academically respected Institut d'Estudis Catalans. Copied are extracts of a letter dated 3 March 1962, and if,

as seems to be the case, it comes from a purported specialist in Hispanic literatures, it is very obviously a weighty diatribe against Carner and against the entire literature of Catalan. Some of the arguments deployed are a model of that died-in-the-wool reactionary Spanish chauvinism so prodigally deployed *sub specie liberalis*, and some of the alternatives put forward elevate the anonymous author to the highest echelons of critical *pastiche*. Here are two long paragraphs from this offering:

I have endeavoured to broaden my information on Carner, with an outcome which scarcely modifies my earlier opinion. I am convinced that what is afoot is an effort to exalt the Catalan language, rather than to obtain due reward for the work of a particular writer. [...] Viewing things objectively, one must recognise that this poet does not qualify as one of the most outstanding Catalan personalities in the literary field. Among these the most deservedly renowned, within Spain and abroad, is Gironella, and above Carner, in many regards, stands Ana María Matute, whose *Los hijos muertos* places her, in my opinion, at the head of Spanish female novelists of all times. Then there is Goytisolo, much translated in France and Germany, with sufficient merit to be ranked also with the very best in the present-day European novel. But all three of them write in Spanish and this does not suit the case of the Institut d'Estudis Catalans. You have seen that the [1959] homage volume does not contain a single study which shows that Carner's merits transcend the limits of his provincial ambit. As is usual in works of this kind, they all come out with florid praise which, even if in large measure is valid, never for a moment gives us the sense of dealing with a personality of universal merit. Jean Cassou, trustworthy when speaking of Spanish literature, gives a kindly and quite exact idea of what Carner is: a delicate poet, with a subtle eye for colour, much nostalgia for the natural landscapes of his country, a highly tuned sensitivity to the exquisite nuances of language, abundant emotion when viewing humble, elemental, rustic people and things. He is lacking, however, in everything which needs to overlay all this in order to become a poet of our day and age and a universal creator, namely: tension,

nonconformity, idealism, anxiety, depth, power of abstraction... All of these are aspects in which poetry has provided splendid examples in recent decades without Carner's having been moved thereby to abandon his tender, tranquil intimacy nor fully to shake off that symbolist vagueness which for good reason has been superseded in our century. [...]

If the Swedish Academy takes into account political circumstances, which I believe to be proper in the matter of awarding prizes, it would also be mistaken in this sense, as by literary criteria, to have Carner in mind. The only thing to be achieved would be to serve the cantonalist interests of provinces which are never content no matter how many privileges are heaped upon them. I, who in many respects consider myself a Catalan, detest that provincial-minded pride which would be satisfied only by rupturing the unity of Spain. It is a quite different thing to defend and cultivate one's own language, local traditions, regional character, cultural particularity. But this, which would suffice and which is possible despite what some people with chips on their shoulders might say, does not satisfy the extremists, and they do nothing but put obstacles in the way of the already slow and painful progress of our homeland. Of one thing I am sure. That Carner's candidature is inspired by a mean-minded parochial sentiment and not by the praiseworthy, impartial and objective ambition of paying due tribute to the best person or to the one who might best symbolize that exemplary aspiration of great men for moral perfection and for the material progress of mankind.

(Original Spanish text quoted in Jaume Subirana, *Josep Carner: l'exili del mite (1945-1970)*, Barcelona 2000)

Guided possibly by a more intimate and more humble concept of the ways leading to moral perfection, on 29 July 1962 the whole Gili family, parents and three children, embark on the ferry from Dover at 8.15 in the morning. They are driving to Belgium and their object is to visit the Carner-Noulet couple at their summer home, less than twenty minutes outside Brussels. The formal reason for the journey is to present the poet with the first copy of *Poems*, the bilingual anthology of thirty poems translated by Pearse Hutchinson and so elegantly published by Gili.

Recognition of Carner's literary and moral exemplarity, and the affection invested in both the translation and the edition of the handsome book, these make the emotional frame for the reunion of two old friends between whom there is a paterno-filial respect. They are two Catalan intellectuals from two different generations and they have not seen one another for almost thirty years. The same number of years that each has been away from his country, the one in voluntary separation, the other in imposed exile; but Joan Gili wants to be accompanied by his family at the moment of presenting this first copy of *Poems* to Carner. It is a hard-bound book with a deep-blue cover and an ivory-coloured dust-jacket, where the author's name is set prominently in a noble type on background panels of pale-blue filigree and the word POEMS is picked out in red. It is a parallel-text edition of 86 pages, with Pearse Hutchinson's prologue dated 'Sant Gervasi, Barcelona: May 1962'. It is a sober and tasteful product, whose gold lettering on the spine, in this year of anxieties and frustrated strategies about achieving international recognition for Carner, ressonates time and again with the sure, intelligent echo of the words with which the introduction concludes, summing up the poet who 'sound[s] the essential accents of the truest modern spirit, the refusal to talk big'.

The two men talk, reminiscing, about those books by Carner that the young Joan Gili prepared for the printers in his father's publishing house in the distant Barcelona of the 1930s, and they recall together the poet's good offices in acting as 'advocate of the migratory urge' in the face of stern paternal authority. Carner and Émilie Noulet invite the Gili family to dinner, as the elder son Jonathan still remembers, 'in a restaurant where we discovered that there are at least twenty-three ways of cooking *moules*, and learnt how to eat *moules à la marinière* without a spoon'. It is surely a case of another of those extraordinary moments in which the intense truth of simple, pleasurable acts, only apparently insignificant, still has the power to move us.