

# READINGS OF J. V. FOIX

AN ANTHOLOGY  
(with English prose translations)

and

Complementary Studies by

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Manuel Carbonell

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Dominic Keown



Edited by Arthur Terry

and coordinated by Puri Gómez i Casademont

1998

**THE ANGLO-CATALAN SOCIETY**



FUNDACIÓ  
J. V. FOIX

Ajuntament  de Barcelona

# THE ANGLO-CATALAN SOCIETY

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## PREFACE

The year 1993 marked the centenary of the birth of J.V. Foix (1893-1987), probably the most enduring of modern Catalan poets, and one whose work continues to present a formidable challenge to his readers. That year, appropriately, saw the establishment of the *Fundació J.V. Foix*, and the centenary was further celebrated with various exhibitions, readings and other activities related to his work. One of these was *Descobrir la poesia* ('Discovering Poetry') -the performance of a selection of Foix's poems in a stage version by Carme Sansa and other actors. The texts used for that occasion were chosen by Carme Sobrevila and Ferran Bach, and this book is effectively the first edition of the small anthology they prepared. The title chosen for this Anglo-Catalan Society Occasional Publication refers back, then, to the original circumstances of *Descobrir la poesia* and, at the same time, characterises the other texts that here accompany the poetry.

As an echo of the 1993 anniversary celebrations, the Anglo-Catalan Society devoted its annual conference in November that year to a series of lectures on Foix's work, and it is these -two of which have been translated from Catalan- which form the second part of this volume. (The delay in publication is due to various circumstantial factors, which we are glad finally to have overcome.)

My own paper, which comes first only because it is in the nature of a general introduction, attempts to explain Foix's poetics in terms of a cosmic vision which affects the smallest details of his poems and accounts for the constant presence of metamorphoses. Manuel Carbonell examines with great subtlety the relations between modernity and tradition in Foix's work, stressing the importance of the 'Instant' in which time is made eternal, and which frees us from historical contingency. Marie-Claire Zimmermann concentrates on a single collection, *Sol, i de dol*, and shows in impressive detail how the voice of the speaker is deliberately constructed as independent from the author: 'In *Sol, i de dol* the voice gradually constructs its solitude and its place in the world. It invents all kinds of interlocutors: things, woman, friends, God. Language is above all a movement, a tension,

the material energy of the world in a reduced, poetic space.' And finally, Dominic Keown provides a useful corrective to over-solemn interpretations of Foix by insisting on the centrality of humour in his works, or, as he puts it himself: 'at the heart of Foix's creativity there is a certain playfulness stemming from the tension between the uncomplicated nature of the poetic vision and the complexity of its expression'.

These 'readings' of J.V. Foix, though they by no means exhaust the implications of such a complex body of poetry, clearly point the reader in the right direction and, taken together, raise a number of important issues which had previously been neglected. Similarly with the anthology. Adhering strictly to the contents of the *Descobrir la poesia* selection was taken up as a challenge in translation: the operation certainly produced some interesting and satisfying results that would not have emerged if we had succumbed to the temptation to modify the original anthology. Although only a much larger selection could be truly representative, this relatively small group of poems, arranged by themes, covers practically the whole of Foix's writing career and highlights many of his characteristic strengths: the mercurial imagination which constantly creates new and surprising images, the unique verbal texture, the ability to work equally successfully in the relative freedom of the prose poem and in the strict metres of the sonnet and the ballad, and above all the absolute assurance with which he moves between a vast cosmic vision and the minutest detail. Foix, clearly, is a master of language: his vocabulary, for instance, is easily the largest of any modern Catalan poet. Even when the translator confines himself to so-called 'literal' translations (the basic policy followed for this collection) considerable and very particular difficulties are posed by Foix's writing, the limits being reached in the tantalizing 'Poem for Antoni Tàpies'. Each of my fellow translators - Dominic Keown, John London and Alan Yates - has faced up to these difficulties with enormous care, and the results, I think, are as faithful as it is possible to be. Nevertheless, as should be obvious, our versions are mostly intended as a help to the reader who is prepared to engage with the originals, for which of course there is no substitute.

Finally, we should like to thank the following for various kinds of help:

Joaquim Horta showed generous commitment to the original publication plans involving the Direcció de Serveis Editorials of the Ajuntament de Barcelona, without whose support this volume could not have appeared.

Jordi Fernando and Isabel Deniel in the Direcció de Serveis Editorials have provided sympathetic help and invaluable expertise during the production process.

Ferran Bach has been, throughout, the vital link between The Anglo-Catalan Society and the Fundació J.V. Foix. The interest of Jordi Madern in our collaboration has been particularly appreciated.

Helen Oppenheimer and Manuel Carbonell have helped with fine-tuning of some details of translation, and Spencer Groves cooperated in translating the other texts.

Puri Gómez i Casademont has coordinated the publication process, from inception to completion, with dedication and efficiency. This collaboration was possible thanks to her tenure of a "Generalitat de Catalunya" Graduate Tutorship in the Department of Hispanic Studies at Sheffield University (1994-97) and subsequent tenure (1997-98) of a Batista i Roca research bursary.

Special thanks are due to Dr. Jaume Vallcorba for encouragement and permission to reproduce the poetic texts from the Quaderns Crema copyright edition. (Where fragments of longer works have been used, line numbering of the Quaderns Crema edition has been retained.)

The Anglo-Catalan Society places on record gratitude to the Fundació Congrés de Cultura Catalana for continuing financial support to the ACSOP series.

**Arthur Terry**

# Anthology

*Descobrir la poesia / Discovering Poetry*

## POEMS INCLUDED IN THE ANTHOLOGY

### 1. Landscapes and seascapes

Pepa, la lletera (*Gertrudis*, 1927)

'Aquest matí ha vingut una dona,...' (*L'Estrella d'en Ferris*, 1963)

'De cap a cap del carrer, ple de clarors...' (*Del «Diari 1918»*, 1956)

Notes sobre el port de la Selva (*KRTU*, 1932)

Érem tres, érem dos, era jo sol, érem ningú... (*On he deixat les daus...*, 1953)

### 2. Eros

No m'omplis més de flors: ja no t'estimo (*Darrer comunicat*, 1970)

'Sota les voltes diu Marta que es mulla;...' (*Sol, i de dol*, 1947)

### 3. Religion

També vindrem, infant, a l'hora vella (*Onze Nadals i un Cap d'Any*, 1960)

'Balada dels primers mesos de l'any...' (*Desa aquests llibres al calaix de baix*, 1972)

'Feu, Senyor Déu, el meu treball més dur,...' (*Sol, i de dol*)

Déu, de cara al mar (*Darrer comunicat*)

### 4. The surrealist vision

Noves de darrera hora (*Allò que no diu La Vanguardia*, 1970)

### 5. Dedications

Dèiem: la nit!... (*On he deixat les claus*)

'Ahir es va escaure que...' (*Desa aquests llibres al calaix de baix*)

Ah! qui, com vós, conegué la Jamaica... (*Desa aquests llibres al calaix de baix*)

Poema per a N'Antoni Tàpies (*Poemes esparsos*. Obra Poètica XIV, 1997)

## **6. Personal Poetics**

'Em plau, d'atzar, d'errar per les muralles...' (*Sol, i de dol*)

Si l'altra nit jo cavalcava al ras (*Onze Nadals i un Cap d'Any*)

És quan dormo que hi veig clar (*On he deixat les claus*)

Ho sap tothom, i és profecia (*Onze Nadals i un Cap d'Any*)

## PEPA, LA LLETERA

Pepa, la lletera, té les cames més fines del món. Fa vuit dies, al ball del carrer de Sant Vicenç, totes les noies li ho deien. Va anar a dormir tan a deshora, que son germà, matiner, ja apariava la bicicleta. Quan dues hores més tard

5 pujava Clos amunt, a cada mà dos pots de llet enormes, els ulls se li aclucaven. Veia, ballant, deu mil parelles amb un clavell de llustrina al front; dels fanals japonesos esberlats, els flams s'escapaven cap al cel i l'omplien d'estels incomptables. Les cases de banda i banda havien desapare-

10 gut. I, tot d'una, els dansaires. Pepa es veia sola al món, de cara al cel lluminós. En entreobrir els ulls, era davant el convent de les monges. Sor Roser la renyà: era tan tard!

## PEPA, THE MILKMAID

Pepa, the milkmaid, has the finest legs in the world. Eight days ago, at the dance in Sant Vicenç Street, all the girls told her so. She went to bed so late, that her brother, who's an early riser, was already repairing his bicycle. When two hours later she was walking up to the Enclosure, with two enormous milk cans in each hand, her eyes kept shutting. She saw ten thousand couples dancing, each of them with a lustring carnation on their foreheads; from splintered Japanese lanterns, flames shot out towards the sky and filled it with countless stars. The houses on both sides had disappeared. And, all of a sudden, the dancers. Pepa was alone in the world, facing the luminous sky. Opening her eyes just a little, she found herself in front of the nuns' convent. Sister Roser told her off: it was so late!

Deixà els pots al graó i, entre reny i reny, els ulls se li  
15 tornaren a cloure. Aleshores, tots els balcons i totes les  
finestres del Clos s'esbatanaren; se sentí un batec d'ales  
dolcíssim, i de cada obertura en sortí un àngel. S'acostaven  
silenciosament i ordenadament a Pepa, i omplien llurs pe-  
tits gerros argentats. En descloure els ulls, els pots de llet  
eren buits i el carrer era ple d'un perfum de roses.

20 El diumenge següent, en sortint, a les tres de la mati-  
nada, del ball de «La Violeta», li vaig dir: —Pepa! Quina  
son aquest matí. Em va respondre que els dilluns santa  
Eulàlia li feia la feina.

*(Gertrudis)*

She put the milk cans down on the steps and, as she was being told off, her eyes shut again. Then, all the balconies and the windows of the Enclosure opened wide; the gentlest flapping of wings was heard, and an angel came out of each opening. Silently, they flew up to Pepa in an orderly way, and filled their little silver pitchers. When she opened her eyes again, the milk cans were empty and the street was full of a scent of roses.

On the following Sunday, as we were leaving, at three o'clock in the morning, the dance at "La Violeta", I said: 'Pepa! How sleepy we'll be in the morning.' She replied that on Mondays Saint Eulàlia did her work for her.

*(Gertrudis)*

Aquest matí ha vingut una dona, coneguda de casa, a contar com la seva filla—que conec prou per haver-hi ballat—era tras-tocada. Havia sortit de compres i havia tornat sense el cistell, amb les mans buides. En preguntar-li sa mare què li havia pas-sat—a ella, tan benevolent i fàcil—, ha respost amb la mirada es-barriada dellà el temps:—*M'he perdut de vista*. I en exclamar la mare:—*Santa innocència!*, la noia ha seguit dient:—*Ho podeu ben creure. En pujant carrer endalt, m'he vist a mi mateixa com tombava pel carrer de l'Hort de la Vila. Tota sorpresa, m'he cridat. M'he vist com arrencava a córrer fins a desaparèixer per la Baixada de l'Estació. M'he perdut de vista, mare. Aviseu els qui caldrà, que no sé pas on és.*

(*L'Estrella d'en Ferris*)

This morning, a woman who's well-known in our family came round and explained how her daughter — whom I know well because I've danced with her — had gone mad. She had gone out shopping and had come back empty-handed, without her shopping basket. When her mother asked what had come over her — for her little girl was so kind and simple — she replied with a gaze on the other side of time: 'I lost sight of myself.' And when her mother cried 'You silly girl!', the daughter went on: 'But it's true. As I was going up the street, I saw myself turning into Village Garden Street. Astonished, I shouted at myself. I saw how I broke into a run until I vanished into Station Descent. I lost sight of myself, mother. Tell whoever you need to, I don't know where she is.'

(*Perri.s's Star*)

De cap a cap del carrer, ple de clarors seques amb deix  
d'amoníac, hi havia el malendreç de sempre: bótes desa-  
justades i descenyides del rovell de les rotllanes—on, d'in-  
fants, imaginàvem històries bíbliques—, un feix d'oliu,  
5 galledes amb sediments de laques, cubells amb fragments  
d'aeròlit i caixes amb engrut d'escates plenes d'argiles.  
Hem passat, de puntetes, cofats amb caperulles vermelles,  
i hem penjat estels de cuir retallat a la tija dels guixos.  
L'home de la serradora ha tapat, amb borres espesses, les  
10 portadores que obstrueixen el pas a les cales. Una brisa  
suau ha mogut les teranyines celestes, i, a la calma de  
l'hora, hem desat els pergamins a la Punta de l'Atzavara.  
D'amagat dels altres, he cremat les herbes de l'epistolari,  
i he fugit sorres enllà.

*(Del «Diari 1918»)*

From one end to the other of the street, saturated by sharp brightness with a smack of ammonia, there was the usual mess: dislocated casks loosened by the rust of their hoops — where, as infants, we dreamt up biblical stories —, an olive sheaf, buckets with lacquer deposits, vats with aerolite fragments and filthy flaky boxes full of clay. We tiptoed by, wearing big red hoods, and hung cut-out leather stars on to the vetch stems. The man from the sawmill plugged up, with thick shavings, the tubs which block the way through to the coves. A gentle breeze moved the celestial cobwebs and, in the calm of day, we stowed away the parchments in Agave Point. Secretly, away from the others, I burned the leaves of the epistles, and ran away to the far end of the sands.

*(From «1918 Diary»)*

## NOTES SOBRE EL PORT DE LA SELVA

### 1

Em trobaren ajaçat a la sorra quan ja tots els banyistes havien desertat la platja. Enganxats a la nuca i a l'esquena tenia papers de totes les colors amb inscripcions de duanes i de grans hotels i balnearis exòtics. Me'ls volien arrencar, però seguien trossos de carn viva.

### 3

Els ulls dels cavalls els pesquen a la cova de la Colomera quan toquen les dotze de la nit. Només en aquell instant precis es poden obrir com qui obre una ostra. Llur pupil·la flota damunt un licor tan ardent, que mai cap llavi humà no ha pogut acostar-s'hi. No els mireu mai de fit a fit, perquè us prendrà per sempre una tristesa sense fi, i la passió per les cales inabordables lligarà la vostra vida al més misteriós dels destins.

(KRTU)

## NOTES ON PORT DE LA SELVA

### 1

They found me lying in the sand when all the swimmers had already abandoned the beach. Stuck on my back and the nape of my neck were pieces of paper in all colours with inscriptions from customs houses and from grand hotels and exotic spas. They wanted to tear them from me, but chunks of live flesh came off as well.

### 3

They go fishing for horses' eyes in Colomera's cave when it strikes midnight. Only at that precise instant can they be opened as one opens an oyster. Their pupils float on a liquid which burns so strongly, that no human lips have ever been able to come near. Don't ever stare at them, because an endless sadness will take hold of you for good, and the passion for inaccessible inlets will bind your life to the most mysterious of destinies.

(KRTU)

ÉREM TRES, ÉREM DOS, ERA JO SOL, ÉREM NINGÚ...

*A Rosa Leveroni*

Érem tres, jups, al fosc de les veremes,  
Amb mar als ulls i vinassa a les mans,  
Quan fuma el rec a la sal de les selves  
I un plor d'infant espurneja al serrat.

5 Érem dos, drets, al roc de les estrelles,  
El cor sangós, sense fona ni dards,  
Quan crema l'erm i sangloten les breees  
Als clots latents a les feixes dels fars.

10 Era jo sol, ombrós entre ombres velles,  
Figuratiu d'una altra ombra, a l'escar  
On amarina, entre xarxes esteses,  
El son de tots en febrejants foscants.

WE WERE THREE, WE WERE TWO, I WAS ALONE, WE WERE NO-ONE...

*For Rosa Leveroni*

We were three, heads bowed, in the darkness of the grape-harvest, with the sea in our eyes and wine-lees on our hands, when the dyke smokes in the salt of the woods and a child's tear glints on the hills.

We were two, erect, on the rock of the stars, our hearts bleeding, with neither sling nor darts, when the waste land burns and the tar sobs in the hollows latent in the lighthouse beams.

I was alone, a shadow among ancient shadows, figuring another shadow, at the anchoring place where, among stretched-out nets, everyone's sleep is fitted out in feverish nightfalls.

Érem ningú, fullats per les tenebres  
Quan plou la por en els pètals dels aigualís  
15 I l'altre, el Pur, llibert d'arjau i veles  
Salpa, vident, cap al clarós Instant.

Port Lligat, agost de 1953

*(On he deixat les claus...)*

We were no-one, leafy in darkness when fear rains on the petals of the marshes  
and the other, the Pure One, freed from tiller and sails, steers, all-seeing, towards  
the bright Instant.

Port Lligat, August 1953

*(Where I Left the Keys...)*

NO M'OMPLIS MES DE FLORS:  
JA NO T'ESTIMO

Que tu plantis papers per façanes i portes, al peu del campanar, als vidres de l'escola, als bancs de la capella de les monges, al portaló de l'hort de l'Oriola, a les estacions del tren de Valldoreix, a les parades del mercat de fruita, a la sortida del funicular, damunt les cartelleres del cinema, a la sala de ball, a la torratxa de la Casa del llamp, a l'escrivania de la rectoria, sota els fanals del passeig, a la mateixa porta de l'al-cova... Que ho escriguis en lletra rodona, o en pal sec, o bé a 5    la romana, en caràcters d'impremta forastera, en elzeviriana, en 10    lletra molt ampla, o en cursiva... Amb carbó dur i gruixut, amb guixos exaltats o amb mangra de color de sang donada... Què hi puc fer jo, Francesca, què haig de dir, si amb els ulls aclucats ja sé el que escrius: «No m'omplis més de flors: ja no t'estimo.»

*(Darrer comunicat)*

DON'T COVER ME WITH FLOWERS ANY MORE:  
I NO LONGER LOVE YOU

If you put papers on the doors and house fronts, at the foot of the belfry, at the schoolroom windows, on the seats in the nuns' chapel, at the gate of the orchard of Oriola, at the stations on the trainline to Valldoreix, on the stalls of the fruit market, at the funicular exit, on the cinema posters, in the ballroom, on the tower of the House of Lightning, on the rectory desk, beneath the lamp-posts in the boulevard, at the very door of the bedroom... If you write in Roman type, or in uprights, in copper-plate, in foreign printing founts, in Elzevir, in broad lettering or in italics... With hard, thick charcoal, with heady chalks or with red ochre, the colour of given blood... What am I to do, Francesca, what can I say, if I know with my eyes closed what you're writing: «Don't cover me with flowers any more: I no longer love you.»

*(Last Message)*

Sota les voltes diu Marta que es mulla;  
Treu-te el mallot, guarneix-te de lilàs,  
Que sí que só, més que ningú, veraç:  
Em plaus, quan plou, tan nua com la fulla.

5 Cendra i boirassa: mar. Ni sol! La mulla,  
Rou del teu cos! Babau: omple el cabàs,  
Balla damunt la palla, ¿capiràs  
Per què entre aigua i lilàs no cal cogulla?

10 Porta el vi vell; arran de freu és dolça  
La palma escassa. Cobrim d'alga i molsa  
Cossos i mots, bevem! De flor i ruixim

Farem ample dossier. ¿Qui mira prim  
En cala breu? Un tret és un impacte:  
Sota paraigua som el Nombre Exacte.

*(Sol, i de dol)*

Beneath the arches Marta says she's feeling damp; take off your bathing costume, cover yourself in lilacs, for, indeed, I, more than anyone, speak the truth: when it rains, I like you to be naked as a leaf.

Ashes and mist: Sea. Not even sun! Soaked through, your body's dew! Softy: fill the basket, jump about on the straw; will you understand why between water and lilac there's no need for a monk's habit?

Bring the old wine; beside the straits the rare palm tree is sweet. Let's cover bodies and words with seaweed and moss, let's drink! We'll make a big canopy with flowers and water drops. Who is too careful in a tiny cove? A shot is an impact: beneath an umbrella we are the Exact Number.

*(Alone, and in Mourning)*

## TAMBÉ VINDREM, INFANT, A L'HORA VELLA

També vindrem, Infant, a l'hora vella  
Com a pagès, per ser més sols amb Tu;  
Deixarem rella i la mula de sella,  
I a peu, pel rost, allà on l'estel ens duu.

5 Et portarem vegetals esperances  
I el que jo tinc en el graner tardà:  
Llibres marcits, amb versos de vacances  
On Tu no hi ets, i el camp és de secà.

10 Els vaig escriure en el parlar dels pares,  
Que és el més dolç per qui el sap confegir,  
Però hi fa nit en platges i sahares,  
I el teu Nom és de sol i de jardí.

15 Guardo per Tu gallines ponedores  
A camp obert, darrere el mur herbós,  
Tocant al rec on maduren les móres  
Per als infants que Et saben dir de Vós.

### WE SHALL ALSO COME, CHILD, AT THE ANCIENT HOUR

We shall also come, Child, at the ancient hour, like peasants, to be more alone with You: we shall leave our ploughshares and our packmules, and on foot, down the slope, whither the star leads us.

We shall bring you green hopes and what I have in the late granary: faded books, with holiday verses where You do not figure, and the land is barren.

I wrote them out in my fathers' tongue, which is the sweetest to him who can manage it, but it is night on beaches and Saharas, and your Name speaks of sun and garden.

For You I keep laying hens in the open country, beyond the grassy wall, beside the dyke where blackberries ripen for the children who can address You familiarly.

En embolcalls que em fan la passa curta,  
Porto una leica i pàl·lids pensaments,  
Cançons d'hivern en fontanes de murta  
20 D'un monestir i un castell transparents.

Mantells eslaus i Florències alades,  
Poliol de la Nou, brucs de Lladurs,  
Illes ardents i gorgs negres amb fades,  
Llavor de goig i guies del Pertús.

25 I els segells nous de la Teva naixença  
En atlas filatèlics estel·lars,  
Vàlids per tots, per l'amo i pel remença,  
Pels llibertins, els pròdigs i els avars.

Porto els papers d'una casa forana  
30 Escumejant vora la mar i el port;  
—Omple-la Tu amb Ta divina ufana,  
Deixa-hi un àngel si m'hi ve la mort.

In wrappings which make me take short steps I carry a Leica and pale thoughts,  
winter songs in the myrtle springs of a transparent monastery and castle.

Slav mantles and winged Florences, germanders from La Nou, heather from  
Lladurs, burning islands and black gorges with fairies, seeds of joy and guides  
from El Pertús.

And the new stamps of Your birth in starry philatelic atlases, valid for anyone, for  
the master and the labourer, for libertines, prodigals and misers.

I bring the papers of a house outside the village, foaming beside the sea and  
harbour; — Fill it, Lord, with Your divine glory, leave an angel there if death  
comes to me.

35 I quan tot just si la tenora sona,  
Pastors i estels perduts serrat enllà,  
La Verge i Tu tots sols, a l'Hora Sola,  
I els corns reials qui sap qui els sentirà,  
Vindré mudat, al costat de la dona,  
Amb els vestits de quan ens vam casar.

El Port de la Selva  
Nadal de 1948

*(Onze Nadals i un Cap d'Any)*

And then just as the woodwind tenora sounds, shepherds and stars lost beyond the hills, the Virgin and You all alone at the Single Hour, and who knows who will hear the royal horns, I shall come, having changed my clothes, beside my wife, dressed as we were when we married.

El Port de la Selva  
Christmas 1948

*(Eleven Christmases and a New Year)*

BALADA DELS PRIMERS MESOS DE L'ANY EN EL  
 PLANELL DE LA VIDA. ULTRA EL TROBADOR I  
 UN ESTOL DE DISFRESSES QUE L'ACOMPANYEN,  
 HI SURTEN ALGUNES FADRINES, LA MULASSA,  
 5 EL CAPELLÀ, LA MULLER DEL BASTER, EL CON-  
 FRARE MULTIVALENT, EL MILCARES QUE ES-  
 QUIVA ELS TRÀNGOLS, LA FILLA DEL SASTRE,  
 UNA BRUIXA, LA LLUNA, LA FORCA D'EN BA-  
 10 NYETA I EL MINYÓ QUE ENTRA AL SERVEI CAP  
 ALLÀ EL FEBRER.

Ai quin riure, al Pla del Viure,  
 Si vesteixo de cabrer  
 I el bestiar, pota lliure,  
 S'empilloca amb vi terror,  
 5 I ara calça la babutxa,  
 O de boira s'encaputxa  
 I el cabrot no sap què fer.

BALLAD OF THE FIRST MONTHS OF THE YEAR ON THE PLAIN OF  
 LIFE. BESIDES THE SINGER AND A GROUP OF PEOPLE IN DISGUISE  
 WHO ACCOMPANY HIM, THERE APPEAR SOME YOUNG WOMEN, THE  
*MULASSA\**, THE CHAPLAIN, THE HARNESS MAKER'S WIFE, THE  
 MULTIVALENT *CONFRERE*, THE ONE-OF-A-THOUSAND-FACES WHO  
 AVOIDS ROUGH SEAS, THE TAILOR'S DAUGHTER, A WITCH, THE  
 MOON, OLD NICK'S GALLOWS AND THE BOY WHO GOES TO DO HIS  
 MILITARY SERVICE AROUND FEBRUARY.

O what a laugh, on the Plain of Life, if I dress up as a goatherd, and my beasts,  
 free to roam, get drunk on earthy wine, and now put on slippers or hood  
 themselves in mist and the leading goat doesn't know what to do.

\* The imitation mule which, together with the ox, goes in front of the Corpus  
 procession.

- Quina folga, en nit de glaça,  
Sortir amb noies al carrer
- 10 I darrere la mulassa  
Córrer pel bosc carboner;  
I si el clergue fa ganyotes  
Cobrir-nos amb les carotes  
De pelussa de mesquer.
- 15 Ai quin pler, si em voleu creure,  
Qualsevol dia fester,  
D'anar a veure, i s'hi pot seure,  
Com la dona del baster  
S'esfullassa i s'empolistra
- 20 I amb el poltre que ensinistra  
Dóna els tres tombs al paller.

- Quina fama té el confrare  
De la Verge del Celler,  
Que per fires porta vara
- 25 I cucurull de paper,  
I, si el temps bresca o s'enfresca,  
El fan, d'una sola llesca,  
Bisbe, batlle i banderer.

What fun, on an icy night, to go out in the street with girls and to run behind the *mulassa* through the charcoal wood; and if the clergyman makes faces, to cover ourselves with masks of muskrat fur.

O what a pleasure, if you wish to believe me, on any feast day to go and see — and you can sit down — how the harness maker's wife puffs and preens herself and, with the pony she's training, rides three times round the haystack.

How famous is the *confrere* of the Virgin of the Cellar who at fairgrounds sports a wand and a conical paper hat, and if the weather breaks up or turns fresh, they make him in one stroke bishop, bailey and standard bearer.

30        Ai quina aura, si et saps moure  
          I fas l'auca, en un paper,  
          Del qui fuig, perquè vol ploure  
          I no sap ben bé el sender,  
          I ara es posa barretina,  
          O el tricorni amb purpurina,  
35        I a la Seu fa l'encenser.

          Quina farsa, a colgant d'astre,  
          D'arraconar el semaler,  
          I amb la fadrina del sastre  
          Jugar als daus sota el quinqué;  
40        I, quan la fosca ens arruixa,  
          A l'esquena d'una bruixa  
          Volar enllà, sense recer.

O what a breeze, if you can move and can draw an *auca*\*\* , on a piece of paper, of the man who takes to his heels, because it's going to rain, but doesn't rightly know the way, and now puts on a *barretina*, or a three-cornered hat with purple, and waves a censer in the Cathedral.

What a farce, when the stars are hidden, to put the stretcher in a corner and to play at dice under the oil lamp with the tailor's daughter; and when darkness drives us out, to fly away, beyond refuge, on the back of a witch.

\*\* A series of drawings or caricatures, each with a short rhyming text and often satirical in intent, describing the life of a single character, real or fictitious.

45      Ai quin goig, a clar de runa,  
Caçar un herbot fetiller  
I esperar, franca, la lluna  
Per no perdre'ns pel reguer;  
I amb la força d'En Banyeta  
Anar al ball en bicicleta  
I a fer el soldat, pel febrer.

Cap d'Any de 1963

*(Desa aquests llibres al calaix de baix)*

O what joy, by the light of ruins, to search for a magic herb and to wait for the clear moon so as not to get lost in the dyke; and with Old Nick's gallows to go to the dance on a bicycle and to go soldiering, in February.

New Year 1963

*(Leave these Books in the Bottom Drawer)*

Feu, Senyor Déu, el meu treball més dur,  
Fosca la nit, i el paisatge més clos,  
Alceu-me murs en un ribatge cru,  
Empal'lieu forests, prades i flors.

5 Lligat de mans i sec com un hindú,  
Vestit de pells, obriu al Vostre ròs  
La meva ment! Entre tots, só ningú,  
I Us dic el nom sense repòs, i amb plors.

10 Só el serf comú si així Us plau, Senyor Déu,  
I en camps forçats o en foradats pregons,  
Plagat de cos i amb fardells damunt meu,

Em sé llibert si en el més negre fons  
Els Vostres ulls il·luminen els mons  
Que amb Vós delesc, i em fan el viure lleu.

*(Sol, i de dol)*

Lord God, make my work harder, make the night dark and the landscape more closed, raise me walls on a harsh shore, hang tapestries on forests, meadows and flowers.

Hands tied and dry as a Hindu, dressed in skins, open my mind to Your dew!  
Among everyone, I am nobody, and I say Your name unceasingly, and with tears.  
I am the common serf if it pleases You, Lord God, and in violated fields, or in deep hollows, my body plagued and bearing burdens,  
I know I am free if in the darkest depths Your eyes light up the worlds in which, with You, I delight, and which make my living easy.

*(Alone, and in Mourning)*

## DEU, DE CARA AL MAR

Haviem sentit fressa de passos, darrere nostre, i de fulla seca petjada per algú que caminava fatigat i apressat a la vegada. Era el pintor Joan Miró que ens volia aconseguir. Duia una imatge policroma del Sagrat Cor, a cada braç, de  
5 bastant pes. Ens va dir que cercava Déu i que s'havia hagut d'acontentar amb una aproximació. Un de la colla—un que sempre es deixa el tapaboques al penjador dels cafès—li va respondre que... a Déu, fort i etern, principi i fi de tot, geòmetra de l'absolut, omnipresent, el trobaria, a totes ho-  
10 res i a tots països, de cara a mar, assegut, pacient i misericordiós, amb els vells i els jubilats, al banc dels si-no-fos.

*(Darrer comunicat)*

## GOD, FACING THE SEA

We had heard the sound of footsteps behind us, and of dry leaves trodden by someone who was walking in a hurry, yet wearily. It was the painter Joan Miró who was trying to catch up with us. He was carrying under each arm a polychrome image of the Sacred Heart, quite heavy. He told us he was looking for God and that he'd had to be satisfied with an approximation. One of the group — one who always leaves his scarf on the peg in cafes — replied that... he would find God — strong and eternal, beginning and end of all, geometer of the absolute, omnipresent — at all hours and in every country, facing the sea, sitting, patiently and mercifully, with old men and retired people, on the bench of the if-it-weren'ts.

*(Last Message)*

## NOVES DE DARRERA HORA

### NOVES PROVES DE LA IDENTITAT DE JESÚS

han estat obtingudes al peu de les Tres Fonts, a la claror de les colors primordials, tocant sensiblement a la Plaça dels Primers Quarts de Segon, i ben bé al cap de mitja hora d'exposició cromàtica.

895

*No parla: diu.*

*No escriu: fa.*

*No raona: emancipa.*

*No ofereix: dóna.*

900

*No s'enamora: ama.*

## LATEST NEWS

### NEW EVIDENCE ON THE IDENTITY OF JESUS

has been obtained at the foot of the Three Fountains, by the light of the primordial colours, in touching distance of First-Quarters-of-the-Second Square, and after a good half hour of chromatic display.

*He does not speak: he tells.*

*He does not write: he acts.*

*He does not reason: he liberates.*

*He does not offer: he gives.*

*He does not fall in love: he loves.*

Una colla de pescadors, que aparellaven el llagut tot ronsejant i a crits, i uns quants badocs del mar, *veien* però feien el distret. Un d'ells, qui en un cap de moll llevava l'engrut de les semals, ha dit en veu alta: —*No feu massa fressa; és ell. D'ara endavant tot serà fresc, franc i novell; i arrelat, airejat i pur, d'inextingible bellesa.* I un altre, que sense sabó esbandia draps envilits, amb un bri de fonoll a punta de llavi, com si el conegués de sempre, ha dit a un dels badaires: —*Feu-ne dotze còpies i força més, si us vaga. Que n'hi hagi per a tothom.*

*a Guerau de Liost, I. M.*

A group of fishermen, rigging out their boat with much shouting but little urgency, and some of those people who just stare out from the shore, *could see* but pretended not to notice. One of them, who was cleaning out fish-tubs on the end of a pier, said out loud: —*Don't make too much noise; it's him. From now on everything will be fresh, free and new; and well rooted, well aired and pure, inextinguishably beautiful.* And another fisherman, washing out filthy cloths in water without soap, with a stalk of fennel hanging from his lip, said to one of the shore-watchers, as though he had known him for ages: —*Make twelve copies of that, or a good lot more, if you can get round to it. There should be one for even-body.*

*For Guerau de Liost, I.M.*

UNA ROSA AMB UN GANIVET AL PIT  
SALTA, SAGNANT, PER LA FINESTRA.

100

Acoltellada per una mà càlida, realista i experta, una autèntica rosa, gràcies a la seva remarcable valor física, va resistir l'hemorràgia. Pètals batent, va salvar plans, selves, rius, munts, illes i ports, i pertot va deixar caure la molsa vermella de la nafra. Es va aturar a contemplar, dels dalts estant, pàl·lidament ombrosos, els antàrtics deserts glacials, el bosc petrificat i els peixos fòssils d'ara fa tres milions d'anys. Va aterrar a Nova Zelanda on va morir sota les rodes d'un vergonyós tricicle. La magistratura n'ha disposat l'autòpsia per a establir la causa de tan irreparable esfullament.

110

*A Joaquim Falguera, I. M.*

A ROSE WITH A DAGGER IN ITS BREAST  
LEAPS, BLEEDING, OUT OF THE WINDOW.

Knifed by a warm and expertly realist hand, a genuine rose, thanks to its remarkable physical strength, still managed not to bleed. Flapping its petals, it ranged over plains, forests, rivers, hills, islands and high passes, dripping everywhere as it went red moss from its wound. It stopped to contemplate, from on high, the palely shadowed shapes of Antarctica's glacial desert wastes, the petrified forest and the fossil fishes from three million years ago. It landed in New Zealand where it perished beneath the wheels of an embarrassing tricycle. The magistrate's court has requested an autopsy to establish the cause of such an irreparable shedding of leaves.

*for Joaquim Folguem, I. M.*

655 UN PELEGRÍ SICILIÀ, VÍCTIMA DE TRES BUDISTES  
TRAFICANTS D'HEROÏNA, VIGILA, NIT I DIA, ELS  
AQUÀRIUMS, I EMPAITA ELS INSECTES ALATS  
AMB UNA ORQUÍDIA.

*a Joan Salvat-Papasseit, I. M*

*(Allò que no diu «La Vanguardia»)*

A SICILIAN PILGRIM, THE VICTIM OF THREE BUDDHIST HEROIN  
TRAFFICKERS, WATCHES NIGHT AND DAY OVER THE AQUARIA, AND  
ASSAULTS THE WINGED INSECTS WITH AN ORCHID.

*In Memoriam Joan Salvat-Papasseit*

*(What «La Vanguardia» Does Not Say)*

DÈIEM: LA NIT!...

*A Carles Riba*

Dèiem: la Nit!, en una nit oberta  
Al rost del Temps, més enllà del morir,  
Quan les negres frescors són un florir  
D'aigües i veus, i focs, en mar coberta.

5 Per tu i per mi no hi havia, deserta,  
Ni mà, ni llar; ni celler sense vi;  
Tots en el Tot, sabíem el camí  
Just i reial de la Contrada Oferta.

Junts érem U en la immortal sendera,  
10 L'alè indivís, el vent que venta l'era,  
I un mot, el Mot, era el parlar comú.

Serfs de la llum i lliberts per l'espera,  
Forts en el fort i assetjats per Ningú,  
Ens ombrejava una sola bandera.

Cadaqués, 30 d'agost de 1953

*(On he deixat les claus...)*

THE NIGHT!, WE SAID...

*For Carles Riba*

The Night!, we said, in a night open to the slope of Time, beyond death, when the black freshness is a flowering of waters, voices and fires, in a covered sea. For you and me there was no empty hand, or home; nor cellar without wine; every one of us within the Whole knew the just and royal way of the Offered Ground. Together we were One on the immortal way, our breath undivided, the wind that fans the threshing floor, and one word, the Word, was the common tongue. Serfs of the light and freemen through our waiting, strong in the strong and besieged by No-one, a single banner cast its shadow upon us.

Cadaqués, 30 August 1953

*(Where I Left the Keys...)*

AHIR ES VA ESCAURE QUE, ESSENT EN RIBA I JO  
AL PORTAL QUE DÓNA A PORT DE REIG, ON  
LLEGÍEM VERSOS D'ALTRI, VA PASSAR ELLA AMB  
UN VESTIT NOU. D'ARRIBADA A LA PUNTA DE  
LA LLOIA, AMB FILS DE NIT I AIGUA DE ROCA FI-  
GURAVA COSSOS CELESTES.

*a Carles Riba, I. M.*

Fronda de mar! Ahir s'esqueia  
Que Ella venia, a frec de cordes,  
Pel corriol que duu a les barques  
—Allà on enjonquen les gambines—  
5 I amb l'urc del foc cremava ombres.

*Tu llegies, docent,*

YESTERDAY IT CAME TO PASS THAT WHEN RIBA AND I WERE AT THE  
GATEWAY THAT OPENS ONTO PORT DE REIG, WHERE WE WERE  
READING OTHER PEOPLE'S POEMS, SHE CAME BY IN A NEW DRESS.  
ACROSS ON THE BLACK ROCK OFFSHORE WITH STRANDS OF NIGHT  
AND ROCK-POOL WATER SHE GAVE FORM TO HEAVENLY BODIES.

*In Memoriam Carles Riba*

Sea-frond! Yesterday it so happened that She came along, close by the ropes,  
down the track leading to the fishing boats -down where the nets are spread out  
on the quay- and with blazing haughtiness burned shadows to nothing.  
You were reading, educationally,

Tota de blau i amb flocs de festa  
Entrava, franca, a la sendera  
Del Roc Votiu: amb mels antigues  
10 Celava els signes del presagi,  
I amb ull novell sotjava l'Únic.

*.. jo bevia amb gots de caça*

Va seguir enllà, la passa dura,  
Cap als confins de la torrella  
15 On plana el duc i on, a migdia,  
Cada branc és l'Etern, i on brega  
L'Instant per a néixer i romandre.

*... i ballava a la terrassa:*

Dressed all in blue and wearing party ribbons, forthright She went on to the path  
to the Votive Rock: With ancient honeys She concealed the signs spelling out the  
prophecy, and with Her bright young eye espied the Unique Whole.

*.../ was drinking from little tin cups*

On She went, striding firmly, over towards the turret where the eagle owl hovers  
and where, at mid-day, every branch is the Eternal, and where the Instant strives  
to be born and to endure.

*...and was dancing on the terrace:*

20 Passava el coll, amb ales noves,  
Entre dos llustres; i, a la calma,  
Reia de joia, i plorava,  
I amb aiguafil i escama gerda  
Va figurar la Nit de l' Altre.

*...tu mories, sabent.*

Novembre de 1959

*(Desa aquests llibres al calaix de baix)*

She went over the col, on new wings, as the light finally faded; and, on the high meadow, she was laughing for joy, and weeping, and with fine sea-jets and fresh scales she gave form to the Night of the Other.

*...you were dying, aware of so much.*

November 1959

*(Leave these Books in the Bottom Drawer)*

AH! QUI, COM VÓS, CONEGUÉS LA JAMAICA...

*a Josep Carner*

Ah! qui, com vós, conegués la Jamaica,  
I begués rom, i amb qualque mot salaç  
Agemolís la dona en vells sofàs  
Tot parlant-li, baixet, llengua romaica.

5 Qui tingué casa amb cotxera i landó,  
I el cancell perfumat de vanil'lina,  
I una litografia subalpina  
Entre brocats toscans, al rebedor.

10 Qui una noia amb piano i secreter,  
Amb les robes balderes de l'any 30,  
Delejant un sipai de molt d'empenta

Quan la lluna clareja en nit de palmes  
I vós, cellut, i el vicari, sever,  
Cerqueu peròs al *Criteri* d'En Balmes.

Caldes d'Estrac, juliol de 1925

*(Desa aquests llibres al calaix de baix)*

AH!, WOULD THAT I, LIKE YOU, COULD KNOW JAMAICA...

*For Josep Carner*

Ah!, would that I like you, could know Jamaica, and drink rum, and with the occasional salacious word could make his lady recline on old sofas while whispering to her in Modern Greek.

Oh for a mansion with coach-house and landau, and vanilline-scented entrance porch, and a sub-alpine print hung between Tuscan brocades, in the reception hall. Oh for a daughter with a piano and escritoire, dressed in loose-fitting 1930s clothes dreaming of her doughty Indian soldier

While the moon shines bright in the palm-tree night, and you, heavy browed, and the vicar, severe, find niggling fault with points in Jaume Balmes' *Criterion*.

Caldes d'Estrac, July 1925

*(Leave these Books in the Bottom Drawer)*

## POEMA PER A N'ANTONI TAPIES

Iúnni cur unni olàs  
Ningi innúcure itlóra;  
Lora carús tèrni ritlizi,  
Titzí cur ane, ane pétorá otanna,  
5 Rítli, ot tànná, píř dus bicóra:  
Callús! Catlús! Fétorá mat!  
¿Mat? ¿Cur ingure?  
Gure!  
¿Mat? ¿Cur catlús?  
10 Catlús!  
Fàtirinc teïnga, rítli mitóra:  
Ot mat, ot gure, ot catlús.

6 de febrer de 1960

(*Poemes esparsos*. Obra Poètica XIV)

## POEM FOR ANTONI TÀPIES

lúnni cur unni olàs...\*

(*Uncollected Poems*. Poetic Works XIV)

### Translator's note:

An intriguing test of the 'untranslatability' thesis... Foix's interest in painting and sculpture is well known and reverberates in his writing, with a very particular signature which corresponds to the poet's close and creative relations with the Catalan vanguard painters of his own generation (Dalí, Miró) and the younger *Dau al Set* group including Tàpies. The background and the surface of this poem are thus explained. JVF pays homage to AT by seeking a poetic equivalence or 'translation' of an aspect of the painter's work. The primary allusion is to the raw ingredients of their respective means of expression (for the poet, language and a poetic format), made to defy convention, bereft of 'intentional' meaning. The message relates to the 'newness' of the organic regrouping of these raw materials

(the painter's textures of stone, fabric, fragments and *objets trouvés*, graffiti and inscriptions; the poet's textures of sound, cadence, the 'feel' of a language, the 'scription' of inscription) in a composition that is 'abstract' only in the sense explored in Tàpies's 'informalism': 'Matter in the Shape of a Bed', 'Matter in the Shape of a Foot'. Rooted in this specific pictorial reference, the text (Verbal Matter in the Shape of a Poem) moves beyond that into a poetic communication of a sense of 'understanding', somehow just out of grasp beyond the surface of the enigmatic incantation in this verisimilar yet magical language, the dimension where the poet-magus operates.

Em plau, d'atzar, d'errar per les muralles  
Del temps antic i, a l'acost de la fosca,  
Sota un llorer i al peu de la font tosca,  
De recordar, cellut, setge i batalles.

5 De matí em plau, amb fèrries tenalles  
I claus de tub, cercar la peça llosca  
A l'embragat, o al coixinet que embosca  
L'eix, i engegar per l'asfalt sense falles.

I enfilat colls, seguir per valls ombroses,  
10 Vèncer, rabent, els guals. Oh món novell!  
Em plau, també, l'ombra suau d'un teli,

L'antic museu, les madones borroses,  
I el pintar extrem d'avui! Càndid rampell:  
M'exalta el nou i m'enamora el vell.

*(Sol, i de dol)*

I like to roam at random by the walls of ancient times and, with the advent of darkness, beneath a laurel-tree or by a rustic spring, to bring to mind, thick-browed, siege and battles.

In the morning I like, with pincers of iron and box-spanners, to probe for the clutch's hidden part, or the bearing's which encircles the axle, and set off down the asphalt without mishap.

And to drive up through cols and on through shady valleys, to cross fords, headlong. O new-born world! I also relish the lime-tree and its soft shade,

The ancient museum, faded madonnas and the extreme painting of today! A candid whim: I'm exalted by the new, enamoured of the old.

*(Alone, and in Mourning)*

## SI L'ALTRA NIT JO CAVALCAVA AL RAS

- Si l'altra nit jo cavalcava al ras  
Com qui torna i se'n va, i esquiva el mas,  
Pertot i enlloc sentia corn i esquella;  
Sona que tunc tan tunc que tocaràs,  
5 Vénen de lluny, sense brida ni sella,  
Com qui torna i se'n va, i esquiva el mas.

- De tres pastors pataus seguia el pas,  
I de llur folc em feia l'escarràs  
Per heure foc i llum amb poca estella;  
10 Canta que tunc tan tunc que cantaràs,  
Passen, llampants, pel bosc i la planella,  
I de llur folc em feia l'escarràs.

- Dels cims nevats i els clots, vegeu quin cas,  
Vénen, alats, el Persa, de domàs,  
15 L'Hindú i l'Anglès enllà de la querella;  
Balla que tunc tan tunc que ballaràs,  
I el Rus i els seus amb la gorra i l'estrella.  
Vénen, alats, el Persa, de domàs.

### IF THE OTHER NIGHT I RODE OUT IN THE OPEN

If the other night I rode out in the open, like him who returns, goes astray and misses the farmhouse, everywhere and nowhere I could hear horn and cow-bell play on for as long as long could be. They come from afar, without saddle or bridle, like him who returns, goes astray and misses the farmhouse.

I followed the way of three innocent shepherds, and from their flock I made my kindling to have fire and light with little tinder. Sing out as loud as loud could be! They pass, all aglow, through wood and plain, and from their flock I made my kindling.

From snow-capped peaks and dales, just imagine, winging their way, come the Persian, damask-clad, the Hindu and the Englishman, leaving animosity behind. Dance on as long as long could be! And the Russian with kith and kin, his cap and star. Winging their way, they come, the Persian damask-clad.

De dalt del cel, tan alt, com ho diràs,  
20 Quan fulla el son entre aigües i joncars,  
I entrullo l'oli a la molina vella,  
Salta que tunc tan tunc que saltaràs,  
Ve tanta llum que em sembla meravella,  
Quan fulla el son entre aigües i joncars.

25 En gran estol els àngels baixen, clars,  
Amb fressa d'ombres i de fruits mollars,  
I tan contents amb lletra i cantarella;  
Toca que tunc tan tunc que tocaràs,  
Catalans i toscans, la caramella,  
30 Amb fressa d'ombres i de fruits mollars.

Els Torrents, de Lladurs  
Nadal de 1951  
*(Onze Nadals i un Cap d'Any)*

From Heaven above, upon high, you might say, when slumber thrives amid water and reeds, and I press olives in the old mill. Skip as spritely as spritely could be! So much light comes that it seems a marvel, when slumber thrives amid water and reeds.

In great host, the angels come down brightly, with a bustle of shadows and tender fruits, so joyous with their lyrics and lilt. Play on for as long as long could be, you Catalans and Tuscans, the flageolet, with a bustle of shadows and tender fruits.

Els Torrents, de Lladurs  
Christmas 1951  
*(Eleven Christmases and a New Year)*

## ÉS QUAN DORMO QUE HI VEIG CLAR

*A Joana Givanel*

És quan plou que ballo sol  
Vestit d'algues, or i escata,  
Hi ha un pany de mar al revolt  
I un tros de cel escarlata,  
5 Un ocell fa un giravolt  
I treu branques una mata,  
El casalot del pirata  
És un ample gira-sol.  
És quan plou que ballo sol  
10 Vestit d'algues, or i escata.

És quan ric que em veig gepic  
Al bassal de sota l'era,  
Em vesteixo d'home antic  
I empaito la masovera,  
15 I entre pineda i garric  
Planto la meva bandera,  
Amb una agulla saquera  
Mato el monstre que no dic.  
És quan ric que em veig gepic  
20 Al bassal de sota l'era.

### IT'S WHEN I SLEEP I SEE ALL CLEARLY

*For Joana Givanel*

It's when it rains I dance alone dressed in seaweed, scales and gold, there's a patch of sea at a bend in the road and a piece of scarlet sky, a bird loops the loop and a shrub branches out and the pirate's manor-house is a broad sunflower. It's when it rains I dance alone dressed in seaweed, scales and gold.

It's when I laugh I see my hunched back in the pond below the threshing floor, I dress up as a man from antiquity and harass the farm-girl, and between pine grove and kermes oak I plant my standard; with a sail needle I slay the monster whose name I do not utter. It's when I laugh I see my hunched back in the pond below the threshing floor.

És quan dormo que hi veig clar  
Foll d'una dolça metzina,  
Amb perles a cada mà  
Visc al cor d'una petxina,  
25 Só la font del comellar  
I el jaç de la salvatgina  
—O la lluna que s'afina  
En morir carena enllà—.  
És quan dormo que hi veig clar  
30 Foll d'una dolça metzina.

Abril de 1939  
(*On he deixat les claus...*)

It's when I sleep I see all clearly, deranged by a sweet venom, with pearls in either hand I live in the heart of a scallop shell, I am the spring in the gulley and the bed of the wild creature, — Or the moon who becomes more delicate as she dies beyond the ridge—. It's when I sleep I see all clearly, deranged by a sweet venom.

April 1939  
(*Where I Left the Keys...*)

## HO SAP TOTHOM, I ES PROFECIA

Ho sap tothom, i és profecia.  
La meva mare ho va dir un dia  
Quan m'acotxava amb blats lleugers;  
Enllà del somni ho repetia  
5 L'aigua dels astres mitjancers  
I els vidres balbs d'una establia  
Tota d'arrels, al fosc d'un prat:  
A cal fuster hi ha novetat.

Els nois que ronden per les cales  
10 Hi cullen plomes per les ales  
I algues de sol, i amb veu d'albat,  
Criden per l'ull de les escales  
Que a cal fuster hi ha novetat.  
Els qui ballaven per les sales  
15 Surten i guaiten, des del moll,  
Un estel nou que passa el coll.

## EVERYONE KNOWS, IT'S A PROPHECY

Everyone knows, it's a prophecy. My mother said it one day as she laid me down with gentle wheat; beyond dreams it was repeated by the water of intermediary stars and the raw panes of a stable covered in roots, in the darkness of a meadow: at the carpenter's house there's a new arrival.

The kids who roam around the coves gather feathers for wings and seaweed of the sun, and with an innocent's voice proclaim through the holes in their ladders —at the carpenter's there's a new arrival. Those who were dancing in the halls come out and gaze, from the quay, upon a new star passing over the hill.

- El coraller ho sap pel pirata  
 Que amaga els tints en bucs d'escata  
 Quan crema l'arbre dels escrits;  
 20 Al capità d'una fragata  
 Li ho diu la rosa de les nits.  
 L'or i l'escuma d'una mata  
 Clamen, somnàmbuls, pel serrat:  
 A cal fuster hi ha novetat.
- 25 El plor dels rics salpa pels aires,  
 I les rialles dels captaires  
 Solquen els glaços del teulat.  
 Un pastor ho conta als vinyataires:  
 A cal fuster hi ha novetat.
- 30 El roc dels cims escampa flaires,  
 I al Port mateix, amb roig roent,  
 Pinten, pallards, l'Ajuntament.

The coral fisher has been told by the pirate who hides his dyes in scaly chasms when the tree of letters burns; the captain of a frigate is told by the rose of nights. The gold and foam of a shrub announce, somnambulant, through the hills: at the carpenter's there's a new arrival.

The lament of the rich sets sail through the air, and the laughter of beggars furrows the ice on the roof. A shepherd tells the vine growers: at the carpenter's there's a new arrival. The summits' rocks scatter scents, and in the centre of Port de la Selva, in the brightest red, strapping lads paint the Town Hall.

El jutge crema paperassa  
Dels anys revolts, a un cap de plaça,  
35 I el mestre d'aixa riu tot sol.  
El fum dels recs ja no escriidassa  
I els pescadors faran un bol.  
Tot és silenci al ras de raça  
Quan els ho diu l'autoritat:  
40 A cal fuster hi ha novetat.

Els de la Vall i els de Colera  
Salten contents, a llur manera,  
i els de la Selva s'han mudat;  
Amb flors de fenc calquen a l'era:  
45 A cal fuster hi ha novetat.  
De Pau i Palau-saverdera  
Porten les mels de llur cinglera  
I omplen els dolls de vi moscat.

The judge burns dossiers from the insurgent years at one end of the square, and the adze master laughs alone. The smoke of the ditches shrieks no more and the fishermen will cast their nets. All is silence on the people's level when they are told by the authority: at the carpenter's there's a new arrival.

Those from La Vail and those from Colera leap happily, in their own way, the people of La Selva have changed; with hayflower they trace out on the threshing floor: at the carpenter's there's a new arrival. From Pau and Palau-saverdera they bring the honeys from their cliffs and fill the springs with muscat wine.

Els de Banyuls i els de Portvendres  
50 Entren amb llanes de mars tendres  
I un raig de mots de bon copsar  
Pels qui, entre vents, saben comprendre's.  
Els traginers de Perpinyà,  
Amb sang barrada en drap de cendres,  
55 Clamen dels dalts del pic nevat:  
A cal fuster hi ha novetat.

Res no s'acaba i tot comença.  
Vénen mecànics de remença  
Amb olis nous de llibertat;  
60 Una Veu canta en recompensa:  
Que a cal fuster hi ha novetat.  
Des d'Alacant a la Provença  
Qui mor no mor, si el son és clar  
Quan neix la Llum en el quintar.

Those from Banyuls and those from Portvendres enter wearing woollen wraps from gentle seas and a string of words, well received by those who, amid winds, can understand one another. The hauliers from Perpinyà, with blood striped on a sheet of cinders, exclaim from the heights of the snow-covered peak: at the carpenter's there's a new arrival.

Nothing ends and all begins. Mechanics, bondsmen, come along with new oils of freedom; a Voice sings in return: at the carpenter's there's a new arrival. From Alacant to Provence Whosoever dies does not die, if sleep is clear when the Light is born in the ploughland.

- 65 La gent s'agleva en la nit dura,  
Tots anuncien la ventura,  
Les Illes porten el saïm,  
I els de l'Urgell, farina pura:  
Qui res no té, clarors del cim.
- 70 La fe que bull no té captura  
I no es fa el Pa sense el Llevat:  
A cal fuster hi ha novetat.

El Port de la Selva  
Nadal de 1953  
*(Onze Nadals i un Cap d'Any)*

Folk gather together in the hard night, all announce the good fortune, the Islands bring lard and those from Urgell pure flour: those who have nothing, brightness of the peaks. The faith that boils cannot be captured and Bread is not made without Yeast: at the carpenter's there's a new arrival.

El Port de la Selva  
Christmas 1953  
*(Eleven Christmases and a New Year)*

## Complementary Studies

# The Poetry of J. V. Foix

Arthur Terry

The centenary of Foix, which comes only a few years after his death, seems a good occasion to reflect once more on a poetry which, despite its importance, is still, I suspect, not generally read, and when it *is*, can still give rise to puzzlement and misunderstanding. It's true that, over the last thirty years or so, since the first publication of the complete poems in 1964, various critics — Pere Gimferrer, Gabriel Ferrater and Josep Romeu among others — have helped to make Foix's work more approachable, above all by removing some of the misunderstandings I mentioned a moment ago. Yet the fact remains that this is a difficult poetry, not so much because of the difficulty of individual poems, but because it challenges, if not openly contradicts, many of one's assumptions about contemporary poetry.

In a moment I shall try to explain why this is so, though in a short talk like this I can only hope to suggest a few of the possible approaches to what will always remain a highly complex body of poetry. To begin with, here is a poem which is neither difficult nor complex:

*Oh! Si prudent i amb paraula lleugera  
Sabés fixar l'imperi de la ment,  
I amb hàbils mots, la passió naixent,  
Del meu estil pogués fer presonera;*

*Si, fugitiu de la faisó estrangera  
Arromancés en dura nit, dolent,  
L'amor del Tot i del Res, sense esment  
Delfosc i el rar, i a l'aspriva manera*

*Dels qui en vulgar parlaren sobirà,  
— Oh Llull! Oh March! —, i amb claredat de signes,  
Rústec però, sever, pogués rimar*

*Pels qui vindran; si, ponderats i dignes,  
Els meus dictats guanyessin el demà,  
Sense miralls ni atzurs, arpes ni cignes!*

(O! If prudently and with light speech I could fix the empire of the mind, and with skilful words could make budding passion the prisoner of my style;

if, fleeing foreign fashions, I could put into Romance, in harsh night, suffering, the love of All and Nothing, not to mention the dark and the rare, and in the abrupt manner

of those who spoke supremely in the vulgar tongue — O Llull! O March! — and with clarity of signs, rustic but severe, I could rhyme

for those who will come; if, pondered and worthy, my statements could reach to tomorrow, without mirrors or azures, harps or swans!)

This comes from a collection of sonnets, *Sol, i de dol* (Alone and in Mourning), published in 1947, though completed in 1936 and written over a period of more than twenty years. A few of these poems, like this one, suggest a literary programme. Here, it's a case of a simple opposition between the roughness and austerity of the two earlier masters of Catalan poetry and the refinements of the French Symbolists. And one notes in passing the slight archaism of the vocabulary and a certain cosmic dimension conveyed through simple abstractions: 'L'amor del Tot i del Res' (the love of All and Nothing). This deliberate looking-back towards the fifteenth century and earlier is very characteristic of a particular moment in modern Catalan poetry: it belongs with the very conscious attempt to create a new form of national culture in the early years of this century, one aspect of which was the return to what was felt to be an interrupted Catalan Renaissance.

What is striking in Foix is that he interprets this general preoccupation both more literally and more widely than any of his

contemporaries. One of his best-known lines reads 'M'exalta el nou i m'enamora el vell' (The new exalts me and I am in love with the old). As far as older Catalan poetry is concerned, Foix, significantly, is the only poet of his generation who is prepared to go as far back as Lull and the troubadours. However, it's in his conception of the 'new' that he diverges most sharply from a poet like Carles Riba who, after his early poems, moves steadily in the direction of the Symbolism which Foix rejects. The spectrum of Foix's poetry is much wider than this: at one end of the scale he goes back through Ausiàs March to the poems of the troubadours, and at the other he is closer to Apollinaire and the Futurists than to Mallarmé. On the surface, it's likely that his respect for the earliest poetry in Catalan and Provençal served to balance his interest in *avant-garde* writing. However, the more we read his poetry, the more we're made to realize the unexpected links which join the two ends of the spectrum. More than once he's described his prose poems as *semblances*; fantasies which nevertheless are 'real' to the extent that they reflect, however tangentially, the personality of the writer. There's no question here of autobiographical writing: he talks of the need, not to confess, but to express himself, to 'realize his personality', as he puts it: 'la qual aspirava a projectar, desmaterialitzada, com una ombra breu que llisqués sobre la mar, perceptible tot just un moment pels peixos...' (which I hoped to project, dematerialized, like a brief shadow gliding over the sea, to be perceived just for a moment by the fish). The significant thing is that his use of the word *semblança* is taken directly from Ramon Lull: 'From the real similitudes (*semblances*) there derive the fantastic as accidents issue from substance', and again: 'The more obscure the similitude, the more lofty the understanding which grasps that similitude'. And Foix insists on the connection by taking these two sentences as the epigraphs for his collection *Les irrealis omegues* (The Unreal Omegas).

Something like half of Foix's work consists of six collections of prose poems grouped under the general title of *Diari 1918*. The fact that he has chosen to refer this part of his work to a particular year, though it's clear that many of the pieces must have been written much later, suggests what on the whole seems true: that the later work, both

poems and prose poems, represents a steady unfolding of the possibilities implicit in his very earliest writing. So the 'poetic circumlocutions', as he calls them, of *Diari 1918* are related both to the interplay of the real and the fantastic which is implied in the *semblances* of Ramon Llull and, formally, to the tradition of the prose poem which forms one of the basic links between Symbolism and Surrealism.

There are times, indeed, when Foix seems very close to certain well-known techniques of Surrealism, for example to automatic writing; yet the total effect is anything but arbitrary. Time after time, in his prefaces and in the poems themselves, he insists that the poet is a kind of magician who retains the power to manipulate the elements of his vision: 'us mostraré els reialmes privats on jo esboscasso allò que no és... Us descobriré mes enllà de la muralla i de la frontera, l'ombra de l'Etern i el joc de flames que el nodreix' (I shall show you the private realms where I begin to fashion that which is not... I shall reveal to you, beyond the wall and the frontier, the shadow of the Eternal and the cluster of flames which sustain it). If the narrative of his most typical prose poems seems to take place on the frontiers of dream, it's a waking dream in which the poet never abandons his control, and we're reminded of the famous phrase of Gerard de Nerval: 'Diriger mon rêve au lieu de le subir'. This also helps to explain the astonishing number of transformations which take place in these poems: if the poet's imagination is able to combine and re-combine the elements of a situation as if he were deliberately setting a stage, how, we might ask, is it possible to separate the real from the unreal? So Foix is drawn towards the idea of an infinite regression of the real: 'recorda sempre que sóc un testimoni del que conto, i que el real, del qual parteixo... i l'irreal que tu et penses descobrir-hi, són el mateix' (always remember that I am a witness of what I relate, and that the real, from which I begin... and the unreal which you think you find in it, are one and the same).

It's difficult to quote from the early prose poems, since each piece is a fragment of a very large mosaic. Here is one such piece, chosen more or less at random:

*Les cases, de roure i de caoba, s'enfilaven turó amunt i formaven una piràmide caprici d'un artífex ebenista. Aquell era el poble on, sota el signe d'Escorpió, sojornava Gertrudis. Eren tan drets els carrers, que em creia, abans d'ésser al cim, defallir. De l'interior de les cases sortien rares músiques com d'un estoig de cigars harmònic. El cel, de pur cristall, es podia tocar amb les mans. Blava, vermella, verda o groga, cada casa tenia hissada la seva bandera. Si no hagués anat carregat d'un feixuc bidó de vernís, inelegant, m'hauria estret més el nus de la corbata. Al capdamunt del carrer més ample, al vèrtex mateix del turó, sota una cortina blau cel, seia, en un tron d'argent, Gertrudis. Totes vestides de blau cel també, les noies lliscaven, alades, amunt i avall dels carrers, i feien com si no em veiessin. Cenyien el cabell amb un llaç escocès i descobrien els portals i les finestres on vidrieres de fosques colors innumbrables donaven al carrer el recolliment de l'interior d'una catedral submergida a la claror de les rosasses. El grinyol del calçat, em semblava un cor dolcíssim, i la meva ombra esporugüia l'ombra dels ocells presoners de l'ampla claraboia celeste. Quan em creia d'atènyer el cim, dec haver errat la passa: em trobava en el tebi passadís interminable d'un vaixell transatlàntic. M'han mancat forces per cridar i, en cloure'm la por els ulls, desplegada en ventall, una sèrie completa de cartes de joc em mostrava inimaginables paisatges desolats.*

(The houses, of oak and mahogany, climbed uphill in the form of a pyramid — the dreamchild of some cabinet maker. That was the town where, under the sign of the Scorpion, Gertrudis was living. The streets were so steep that I thought I would faint before reaching the top. From inside the houses there came strange harmonies as if from a musical cigar box. The sky, of pure crystal, could be touched with the hands. Blue, red, green or yellow, each house was flying its flag. Had I not been weighed down by a heavy can of varnish, inelegantly, I would have tightened the knot of my tie. At the top of the widest street, at the very tip of the hill, beneath a sky blue curtain, Gertrudis was seated on a silver throne. Also clothed in sky blue, the girls were gliding, as if on wings, up and down the streets, and pretended not to notice me. Their hair was tied with a Scotch ribbon and they revealed the doors and windows whose panes of innumerable dark colours gave the street the tranquillity of the interior of a cathedral sunk in the clarity of the rose windows. The creaking of my shoes was like a sweet choir, and my shadow scared

off the shadow of the birds held prisoner in the wide celestial skylight. When I thought I was nearing the top, I must have missed my way: I found myself in the warm, interminable corridor of a transatlantic liner. I had no strength to shout and, as fear closed my eyes, a complete set of playing cards showed me unimaginable landscapes of desolation.)

It seems appropriate that this particular piece should be dedicated to the painter Joan Miró. The whole effect is intensely pictorial; in fact, if we respond at all sympathetically to this kind of writing, we might be inclined to say that its whole power resides precisely in this strong visual impact and to leave it at that. If we still continue to puzzle, however, we shall probably notice certain details which appear to stand out from the rest. Why is the narrator carrying a burden, and such an incongruous one at that? Why are all the houses decorated with flags? Why is the sky so low you could touch it with your hand? And so on... Part of Foix's intention, of course, is that many of the details should resist a wholly rational interpretation. Yet if we place this piece in its context, as one of a series, we become aware of a pattern of key images which suggest particular kinds of emotional state. It would be an exaggeration to say that there was a plot running through such pieces: yet almost every one has a narrative line, however tenuous, and it soon becomes clear that the protagonist is a version of the poet himself and Gertrudis the woman he is in love with, however many changes each is made to undergo. If we try to classify the images and situations which appear in these poems, bearing in mind that for Foix the limits between the real and the imaginary are extremely fluid, we come to recognize certain principles of order which underlie the personal myth.

One example of this is the number of minor personages who drift in and out of the anecdotes, and who are known only by the names of their trades: the scene-shifter, the wig-maker, the dress-maker, and so on. Their mere names suggest that they are the local agents of the more radical transformations, and a reading of the poems confirms this. Often, these transformations take place, as I've already suggested, through a kind of scenographic process, by which the poet seems to present the elements of a landscape in one combination, only to replace

it a moment later by another. So, in this particular piece, we get the sudden shift to the corridor of the transatlantic liner near the end, and the final twist of the pack of cards with pictures of unknown landscapes. This ultimate note of desolation, in fact, fixes the mood of the whole passage. In some of these pieces, the relationship between the poet and the woman generates an atmosphere of violence and treachery; in this one, the mood is more tender, not to say playful, and it's not only the image of the liner which reminds one of those other masterpieces of the twenties, the films of Buster Keaton. Whatever their mood, the poems are full of constricting images which bring home, in a very concrete form, the frustrations of the relationship: ceilings, narrow streets, walled-up doorways, and here, the sky one could touch with one's hands and the birds which are 'presoners de l'ampla claraboia celeste' (prisoners of the wide celestial skylight). Conversely, the world of happiness from which the poet is cut off is conveyed in images of celebration: not only the careful description of the woman on her silver throne, but the houses decorated with flags which at one point dissolve into the stained-glass colours of a church interior. And finally there is the way in which the narrator himself is made to labour under some absurd burden — a common dream situation, but one which is carefully integrated into the dominant pattern. One could extend the list of such properties; the trouble is that, by doing so, one falls more and more into the kind of rationalization which the poem itself is at pains to avoid. When one takes the poems at their own pace, however, such images strike the mind much more lightly, though with no less inevitability, than this more laboured kind of analysis suggests.

The mere fact of writing prose poems presupposes a metaphysical interest which underlies the whole of Foix's work as a poet. In the prose poems, the cosmic vision this implies is taken for granted and never openly stated. In his book of sonnets, *Sol, i de dol*, these assumptions are more clearly defined, in keeping with the more formal nature of the poems. I've already referred to the way in which they attempt a fusion of the old and the new, both in their language and in the deliberate eclecticism of their images. It's noticeable, for example,

how the typical deserted landscape of Petrarchan poetry, the 'prats ignots i munts de llicorel·la' (unknown fields and heaps of slate), is made to include both dolmens and the wrecks of crashed aeroplanes. Again, this is not just capricious: this ranging over vast periods of history is the work of a poet who sees the whole of reality as a single unity. This is stated clearly and very beautifully, I think, towards the end of the other poem I want to read from this collection:

*És per la Ment que se m'obre Natura  
A l'ull golós; per ella em sé immortal  
Puix que l'ordén, i ençà i enllà del mal,  
El temps és u i pel meu ordre dura.*

*D'on home só. I alluny tota pastura  
Al meu llanguir. En ella l'Irreal  
No és elfosc, ni el son, ni l'ideal,  
Ni el foll cobeig d'una aurança futura,*

*Ans el present; i amb ell, l'hora i el lloc,  
I el cremar dolç en el meu propi foc  
Fet de voler sense queixa ni usura.*

*Del bell concret faig el meu càlid joc  
A cada instant, i en els segles em moc  
Lent, com el roc davant la mar obscura.*

(It is through the Mind that Nature opens herself to my greedy eye; through it I know myself to be immortal since I order her, and, before and beyond evil, time is one and endures through my order.

Whence I am a man. And I reject all that would feed my languishing. In it the Unreal is not the dark, or sleep, or the ideal, nor the foolish desire for a future inheritance,

but rather the present; and with it, the hour and the place, and the gentle burning in my own fire made out of will without complaint or usury.

Of what is lovely and concrete I make my impassioned game at every instant, and move slowly through the centuries, like the rock facing the dark sea.)

Like the other sonnet I've quoted this gets its solidity both from the use of certain technical devices — the number of strong caesuras, for instance, and from the persistence of archaic or dialect forms like 'ordén' and 'alluny' for 'ordeno' and 'allunyo'. And this solidity seems entirely appropriate to a poem which, again, is concerned with statement and definition. The insistence on the mind as the force which orders the poet's world is very characteristic of Foix, and it's distantly related to the deliberate transformations of the prose poems. This is also a poem which defines by exclusion: not the 'unreal' and the 'ideal', but the 'real' and everything which is available to the mind of the poet at the time of writing. This sense of a free-ranging mind which is nevertheless rooted in a particular time and place leads Foix, in this and other poems, to a sense of human solidarity, so that his feeling for the Catalan language becomes a feeling of being anchored in a community which still maintains its traditional dignity. As he puts it in another of these poems: 'Mes cere i am aquell que diu "Jo só", / I té una llar, té pàtria i mester, / I se'n fa un tot, i acata lleis severes' (But I seek and love the man who says 'I am', and has a home, a country and a trade, and sees it whole, and respects severe laws). At this stage, this rather generalized vision of Catalonia might seem only another version of the theme of 'la Catalunya ideal' which appears so often in the work of Foix's contemporaries. There's more to it than this, though to see how he fills out the abstraction, we have to turn to some of his later writing, like the passage from *L'estrella d'en Ferris* (The Star of En Ferris) which I shall eventually be quoting. Coming back to *Sol, i de dol*, it's very striking how, in the last section of the book, this collective concern takes on an openly religious sense. Several of the poems in this group are directly couched in Christian terms: 'Em sé llibert si en el més negre fons / Els Vostres ulls il·luminen els mons / Que amb Vós delesc, i em fan el viure lleu' (I know myself to be free if, in the darkest depths, Your eyes light up the worlds in which, with You, I delight, and make my living easy). The presence of God in these

poems may come as a surprise after a book like *Gertrudis*. It's not so surprising, though, once one begins to reflect that the vision conveyed in the prose poems seems to demand some kind of absolute, some divine principle, to complete it. This religious note, in fact, recurs on and off in Foix's later poetry, though never as sharply as in the poems of *Sol, i de dol*. And what one finds in the later poems is not so much a direct confession of faith in the Christian God, as the patient exploration of a universe which, for Foix, is constructed on religious principles which, just because of their dazzling clarity, always retain a dimension of mystery.

Apart from *Sol, i de dol* and *Onze Nadals...* (Eleven Christmas Poems...) a relatively simple, but very attractive, collection of occasional poems, most of Foix's poems in verse are grouped in two closely-linked collections, *Les irrealis omegues* and *On he deixat les claus...* (Where I Have Left the Keys...) and in a third, *Desa aquests llibres al calaix de baix* (Leave these Books in the Bottom Drawer), which appeared for the first time in the collected poems of 1964. I'm going to leave out this last collection and concentrate on poems from one of the other two, partly because of time, and partly because, apart from a few good pieces, it doesn't really add much to the two previous books. It's worth noticing, however, that, just as the prose poems really form a single whole, so these three collections of poems are intended to complement one another. It's difficult to be sure when some of these poems were written: most of them are dated, but as Foix explains at one point, the dates refer more to the actual experiences incorporated in the poems than to the time of composition. One can't help noticing, in fact, how, in each of these collections, the dates range over a period of something like forty years, and how, for instance, a poem dated in 1922 is stylistically indistinguishable from one written thirty years later.

This raises the question of whether it's possible to speak of a development of any kind in Foix's work. It's not entirely true to say that there's no development, but the fact that the question arises at all is sufficiently unusual in a poet who has been writing for over half a century. The truth is that Foix has remained extraordinarily faithful to

the themes and technique of his early work. And this, which might seem a possible weakness, is natural enough in a poet who sees his task as the exploration of a single truth, which is both unique and indivisible.

This might sound as if his work existed in a kind of vacuum, though this is far from the truth. As I've tried to suggest, his early work took shape in a very definite artistic milieu, whose basic assumptions he has never felt the need to renounce. At the same time, Foix is a writer who more than once has claimed the superiority of life over literature, and this means that he has remained peculiarly open to new experience, both personal and collective. It's no coincidence, for example, that he has written two or three of the best poems in Catalan on the Civil War. Foix, of course, is not the only poet on whom the war acted as a kind of catalyst — one thinks, in a very different way, of Carles Riba — but it's very striking that the poems he wrote between 1936 and 1939 should seem such a natural prolongation of his earlier work.

The three remaining poems I've chosen to talk about all date from this period, though each shows a different kind of reaction. Many of their obvious features — rhythms, vocabulary and so on — could be illustrated equally well by earlier or later poems, but I've preferred to concentrate on these particular ones because, in them, the emotion seems to speak with a particular authority. As one would expect, this emotion isn't a simple one: the speaker's reactions vary in keeping with the hopes and frustrations of the moment, though the essential vision remains unchanged. The first two poems show another peculiarity of Foix's writing: his liking for long titles which sometimes tend to become separate prose poems. This has been explained as an attempt to create a certain expectancy, so that our reactions have already been heightened before we come to the poem itself, and Foix himself has suggested that it's a means of straining off the anecdotic element from the poem. This certainly seems to be the effect in these particular poems, where the title functions as a kind of miniature scenario for what follows. Here is the first one, which is strictly speaking a post-war poem, since it's dated September, 1942. In it, Foix is using one of his favourite themes — the journey — to convey the

feeling of alienation which dominates a country which is still suffering from the effects of a war:

*VAIG ARRIBAR EN AQUELL POBLE, TOTHOM ME SALUDAVA I JO NO CONEIXIA NINGÚ: QUAN ANAVA A LLEGIR ELS MEUS VERSOS, EL DIMONI, AMAGAT DARRERE UN ARBRE, EM VA CRIDAR, SARCÀSTIC, I EM VA OMLIR LES MANS DE RETALLS DE DIARIS*

*¿ Com se diu aquest poble  
Amb flors al campanar  
¿ un riu amb arbres foscos?  
On he deixat les claus...*

*Tothom me diu: — Bon dia!  
Jo vaig mig despullat;  
N'hi ha que s'agenollen,  
L'altre em dona la mà.*

*— Com me dic!, els pregunto.  
Em miro el peu descalç;  
A l'ombra d'una bóta  
Clareja un toll de sang.*

*El vaquer em deixa un llibre,  
Em veig en un vitrall;  
Porto la barba llarga,  
— Què he fet del davantal?*

*Que gent que hi ha a la plaça!  
Em deuen esperar;  
Jo que els lleigeixo els versos,  
Tots riuen i se 'n van.*

*El bisbe em condecora,  
Ja els músics han plegat,  
Voldria tornar a casa  
Però no en sé els topants.*

*Si una noia em besava...  
De quin ofici faig?  
Ara tanquen les portes:  
Qui sap on és l'hostal!*

*En un tros de diari  
Rumbeja el meu retrat;  
Els arbres de la plaça  
Em fan adéu-siau.*

*— Què diuen per la ràdio?  
Tinc fred, tinc por, tinc fam;  
Ei compraré un rellotge:  
Quin dia deu fer el Sant?*

*Me'n vaig a la Font Vella:  
N'han arrencat els bancs;  
Ara veig el diable  
Que m'espera al tombant.*

(I ARRIVED IN THAT TOWN, EVERYONE GREETED ME AND I DIDN'T KNOW A SOUL: WHEN I WAS ABOUT TO READ MY VERSES, THE DEVIL, HIDING BEHIND A TREE, CALLED OUT TO ME SARCASTICALLY AND FILLED MY HANDS WITH NEWSPAPER CUTTINGS

What is this town called, with flowers in the belfry and a river with dark trees?  
Where I have left the keys...

Everyone says 'Good morning'. I am half naked; some of them kneel, another shakes my hand.

What's my name, I ask them. I look at my bare feet; in the shade of a barrel, a pool of blood grows light.

The cowherd gives me a book, I see myself in a stained glass window; I have a long beard, — what have I done with the apron?

What a crowd there is in the square! They must be waiting for me; as soon as I read them my verses, they all laugh and go away.

The bishop decorates me, by now the musicians have packed up, I would like to go home but I don't know the way.

If a girl were to kiss me... What is my trade? Now they are shutting the doors; who knows where the inn is!

On a piece of newspaper my picture stands out; the trees in the square say goodbye to me.

What are they saying on the radio? I'm cold, I'm afraid, I'm hungry; I shall buy her a watch: what day is her Saint's Day!

I go off to the Old Fountain: they have taken away the benches; now I see the devil waiting for me round the corner.)

This may seem a relatively light-hearted way of approaching a serious theme, and certainly a lot of the poem's effect comes from the self-mocking details of the poet's reception in the town he once knew, but whose name he's now forgotten. But this forgetfulness extends to the poet's own identity, and again there's self-mockery in the thought that he may be some kind of itinerant preacher or biblical prophet. All he knows is that, in some way which escapes him, this place holds the key — the 'keys' of the fourth line, which give the title to the whole volume — to his own existence, to the world he was once able to dominate but which is now quite alien to him. And this is what the poem is really saying, though it says it much more subtly, through a whole series of concrete images and apparently casual gestures. One notices, too, how the appearance of the devil fits in with the suggestion that the poet may be a kind of anachronistic prophet. Coming after the stark mention of suffering —

'Què diuen per la ràdio? / Tinc fred, tinc por, tinc fam' (What are they saying on the radio? I'm cold, I'm afraid, I'm hungry) — there's a sinister appropriateness in the idea of a temptation in the wilderness, and a very real awareness of the evil possibilities inherent in the general situation.

It wouldn't be difficult to relate some of the details of this poem to the more surrealistic progressions one finds in the prose poems. Yet there can be no question here of automatic writing: the metre is beautifully controlled, and Foix draws on all the possibilities of the stricter medium to create a tension between the tripping movement of the verse and the underlying seriousness of the situation. The next poem I'm going to read is more expansive in its form — it's closer, in fact, to the ode than to the ballad — and the general effect is more rhetorical. The experience from which it arises is also more closely related to the war. The poem is dated September, 1936, and the occasion is the departure of a woman friend for a foreign country. As one might expect, the dominant images mark the contrast between freedom and the loss of freedom: some of these may seem opaque or irrational at a first reading, but if one knows the rest of Foix's work, it's remarkable how much of his more cosmic vision he's managed to retain while conveying the poignancy of a wartime farewell. So the hostile giants and monsters who appear from time to time in the early prose poems are transposed into the much more concrete figures of police and customs officials, and the trains to the frontier are conceived in images of light, which for Foix is always associated with truth and liberty. Here is the poem:

*A L'ENTRADA D'UNA ESTACIÓ SUBTERRÀNIA, LLIGAT DE  
MANS I PEUS PER DUANERS BARBOSOS, VAIG VEURE COM LA  
MARTA SE N'ANAVA EN UN TREN FRONTERER. LI VOLIA  
SOMRIURE, PERÒ UN MILÍCIA POLICÈFAL SE'M VA ENDUR  
AMB ELS SEUS, I VA CALAR FOCAL BOSC*

*Escales de cristall a l'andana solar  
On passen trens de llum cap a platges obertes  
Entre murs transparents i corals sarmentosos  
I ocelles d'ull clarós en brogiment de brancs.*

*Ets tu, blanca en el blanc d'aquesta alba insular,  
— Líquid l'esguard, atenta a músiques innates —  
Que escrius adéus humits a la forest dels vidres,  
Amb semença de nit per a un somni desclós?*

*Te'n vas enllà del goig, al ribatge encantat  
Amb gegants embriacs; a l'espluga gatosa  
Ifalcons dissecats a les roques senyades,  
A un mar petjat pels déus en els nocturns furtius.*

*No puc heure 't, dormant, orb de llum i de ment,  
Vestit com un infant, sense veu ni bagatge,  
Entre tràmeccs guardat per hostalers biformes;  
Els passaports són vells i sangosos els cors.*

*T'emportes puigs i rius, i els estanys estel·lars  
Ifonts en bacs gelius en profundes valises;  
Un guaita tenebrós, des del serrat en flames,  
Em crida amb noms estranys i emfa que no amb les mans.*

*Onegen foramur banderes esquinçades.*

(AT THE ENTRANCE TO A SUBTERRANEAN STATION, TIED HAND AND FOOT BY BEARDED CUSTOMS MEN, I SAW MARTA LEAVING IN A FRONTIER TRAIN. I WANTED TO SMILE AT HER, BUT A MANY-HEADED MILITIAMAN TOOK ME OFF WITH HIS MEN, AND SET FIRE TO THE WOOD

Stairs of crystal on the solar platform where trains of light pass towards open beaches between transparent walls and branching corals and bright-eyed birds in a murmur of boughs.

Is it you, white in the white of this island dawn — your liquid gaze, alert to inward music — who write moist farewells on the forest of windows, with seed of night for an open dream?

You are going beyond joy, to the enchanted shore with drunken giants in the thorny coves and dissected falcons on the cross-marked rocks, to a sea trodden by gods in their furtive nocturnes.

I cannot reach you, sleeping, blind to light and thought, dressed like a child, with neither voice nor luggage, guarded between hoes by double-formed innkeepers; the passports are out of date and hearts are bleeding.

You take away with you in deep suitcases mountains and rivers and stellar lakes and springs in icy hollows; a dark sentry, from the blazing mountain ridge, calls me with strange names and says no to me with his hands.

Torn flags wave outside the walls.)

Part of the force of a poem like this comes, I think, from Foix's talent for raising a personal situation to the status of myth. Perhaps this is a crude way of describing what takes place much more subtly in the poem itself. Another way of putting it would be to say that some of the most telling details seem to come from the same reaches of the imagination as the traditional symbols of folktales. This would explain how, for example, the one realistic image of the poem — the woman writing goodbye on the window of the railway compartment — is merged unexpectedly with the image of the forest: forests are traditionally places where adventures and strange encounters occur, and here, by a very natural extension of the metaphor, the leavetaking takes place at the edge of a 'forest' which the poet himself may not enter.

It's very striking how, in the course of a complex poem like this, Foix can hit off a line which is simplicity itself, but which seems to carry the whole weight of the emotional situation. So here, the line 'Els passaports són vells i sangosos els cors' (The passports are out of date and hearts are bleeding), though it arises quite naturally from the rest of the context, continues to echo in the mind with a life of its own. Many of the shorter poems of *On he deixat les claus...* have this quality, and several of them are among the best things he has written. The one I'm going to quote now is dated September, 1937, a year later than the previous one, and it's so simple that it needs no comment:

## FRONTERES

*Pel corriol, entre flames de tinta,  
El no-res augur;  
Oscil·la en cels antics llàntia extinta  
I una ombra en el mur.*

*Avanç, enllà, però una mà m'atura  
I, dura, una veu  
Molla dels rous d'antany, clama segura:  
— De tot crim ets reu.*

*I en cloure els ulls per contemplar el paisatge  
De la mort carnal,  
Abandon en els glaços el bagatge  
Del país natal.*

(FRONTIERS Along the narrow path, among flames of ink, I sense nothingness; in ancient skies an extinct lantern sways and a shadow on the wall.

I go on, beyond, but a hand stops me and, harshly, a voice soft with the dew of bygone years, cries firmly: You have committed every crime.

And as I close my eyes to contemplate the landscape of bodily death, I leave behind in the ice the baggage of my native country.)

This, to me, is one of the most moving poems to have come out of the Civil War. It stands beautifully on its own, though obviously it's related to one of Foix's most obsessive themes: the questioning of his own identity, not in any narcissistic sense, but as a guarantee of his right to speak for others in a common situation. In his more recent work, the humanity one glimpses at certain moments in his earlier poems becomes deeper and simpler. This is particularly true of his last collections of prose poems, and especially of *L'estrella d'en Perris*. A great deal of the experience contained in this book is centred on the people and landscape of Port de la Selva and Cap de Creus, a source

of inspiration he shares with his friend, the painter Dali. It's difficult to imagine Foix writing these pieces at the time of *Gertrudis*: here, certainly, one can speak of a development, not in the technique so much as in the capacity to observe the speech and actions of other people. In the piece I'm going to quote, the speaker is simply listening to a group of fishermen sheltering from a storm and talking, quite casually, about death. The naturalness of the occasion, and the way in which it's reported, can easily blind one to the skill of the writing. Perhaps one measure of the distance Foix has come since *Gertrudis* is to say that the question of whether this is a prose poem or not hardly arises: it's quite simply one of the finest pieces of prose in modern Catalan:

*Quan el vent i la trangolada entren a boca de fosc, una colla de pescadors i jo acostumem de trobar-nos a la cabina d'una de les barques de bou ancorades i segures a recer del dic. Avui feia tramuntanassa — tramuntanada o gropada, discutien entre ells —, i les onades, fosques i altes, saltaven els carreus i escumejaven brogidores. Tot eren negrors en un fons boscaí de negrors, on jo veia foradades i esplugues, i galeries amb portes drapades i cambres medievals. A la punta, la nafra vermella de la nit sagnava damunt la polseguera de l'aigua. Hem fet foc en una brasera d'altre temps, i hem preparat i consumit menges olioses i salobres. Jo no recordava ventades tan xiuladores, fredes i udolaires. Les pregones rumors del mar, la cruixadera de les fustes, el renou de la ferramenta, la fregadissa de cordes i xarxes, i el grinyol de tants d'ormeigs malendreçats, ultrapassaven la memòria que jo tenia d'altres estades a bord d'una barca sòlidament amarrada. Algú ha sortit a parlar de la mort, i cadascú ha narrat la seva història de navegant amb tempestes, naufragis i negades. No és pas que els pescadors que conec siguin massa tràgics ni dramàtics en llurs contalles. Diuen que no temen la mort. Volen dir, ja ho sé, que no hi pensen ni no hi volen pensar. Massa eixerits, s'han avesat a no recordar-la. De tants d'estels com espurnegen en les clares nits soberanes, tot just si només els interessa el nom de l'estrella d'en Ferris, que és la de l'alba i la del vespre. Però saben dels rocs i dels recs. — Mirem més ensota que endalt; de peixos,*

no en plouen. /, *de cua d'ull, si apunta el grop. Ja un altre comenta: — La mort, en aquest temps que som, no fa por a ningú: mireu com corren i com volen. / un terç — Ja no els fa por ni l'infern; a mi tampoc, perquè no hi crec. Me'n fan més les balenes. D'altres han parlat com els filosofastres, però amb menys urc i mes airejadafantasia. — Sempre ho hem vist així, i el qui ens va embarcar que ens colgui. Ara, si he de viure uns quants anys més, que em deixí vi a la bóta i pa a la post. Quins descreguts, *Senyor!* — Deixa't de vi: sous!, *refuga el mes cagalatxa.* — Jo voldria morir tot ballant, *diu un de jove.* — Jo, quan dormo. / *el més vell, mestre de sardinals: — Jo, tot mirant el mar. / girant-se cap a mi, planta: — La mort només fa por als senyors i als valents, vull dir a aquells qui diuen sempre que no els fa por res. Mireu, per aquí als voltants, de tant en tant n'hi ha que es pengen, de tan feliços que són. Era tard, i elfred i la son ens ensopien. Tants de sorolls, el bufareu que passa pertot i els batzacs de l'embarcació ensfeien enyorar eljaç. Hem tornat amb el bot de passatge, hem saltat com si passéssim el Cap, i ens hem mullat. Ja en terra, hem sentit la veu vinosa d'algú que s'aturava i ens escridassava. És un que s'empilloca sovint i que, de nit, volta pels horts on parla, diu ell, amb les canyes, les quals li conten històries i secrets. — Fujo del poble: hi ha massa gent pels carrers, i cotxes i motos que van amunt i avall, i no et deixen pas. Com si fóssim per la Festa. Un lifa: — Què dius ara! No en fa poques, d'hores, que tothom és a dormir. — N'hi ha que ni s'han llevat, avui; i de cotxes, fa mesos que no se'n veuen. L'embriac segueix dient: — Pareu bé l'orella: ^no sentiu enraonaments, crits, cants, música i rialles? Les terrasses dels cafès són plenes, i les tenores no havien refilet mai tan prim i tan altes, ni les piules no havien petat tan fort. / a primeres hores de la matinada, enmig d'una soledat basardosa, s'apartava per deixar pas als carruatges i a la gent figurats que... l'empenyien. Li he dit que no feia pas gaire que parlàvem de la mort i dels morts, — Què en penseu, vós... S'ha tret el tapaboques, i ha cantat una cançó fresca i mordaç, amb tendres tornades que repetia mig cloent els seus ulls de xibeca. Li he preguntat si me la deixaria copiar: — No sé pas si la recordaré: me l'he pensada ara mateix. Li he dit si en recordava el nom: — Això, rai! 'Mariner quan folga amb dona, prou s'hi voldria morir'.**

(When the wind and the choppy sea go into the dark, a group of fishermen and myself usually meet in the cabin of one of the boats anchored securely in the shelter of the dyke. Today the wind came from the mountains — they argued as to whether it was a *tramuntanada* or a *gropada* — and the waves, dark and tall, broke over the blocks of stone with a crashing of foam. All was darkness, against a background wooded with darkness, where I saw tunnels and caves, and galleries with curtained doors and medieval chambers. At the point, the red wound of night bled over the dust of the water. We have kindled a fire in a brazier of bygone days and have cooked and eaten things tasting of oil and salt. I couldn't remember such cold squalls of wind, or which had whistled and howled so much. The deep sounds of the sea, the creaking of the planks, the grinding of metal, the rubbing of ropes and nets, and the shifting of so much badly arranged fishing tackle, exceeded my memory of other sessions on board a firmly anchored boat. Someone has begun to talk about death, and each one has told his mariner's tale of storms, wrecks and drownings. It isn't that the fishermen I know are over-tragic or dramatic in their tales. They say they're not afraid of death. They mean, I know, that they don't think of it or don't want to think of it. Too canny, they have got used to not remembering it. Of all the stars which glitter in the clear, supreme night, they are only just interested in the name of the star of En Ferris, which is that of dawn and evening. But they know about the rocks and the channels. — *Let's look down the coast, not up; it doesn't rain fish.* And, from his eye corner, he points to the storm clouds. And another comments: — *Death, in this day and age, doesn't scare anyone. Look how they fly and run about.* And a third — *Nowadays they aren't even afraid of hell; I'm not either, since I don't believe in it. I'm more afraid of whales.* Others have spoken like small-town philosophers, though with less pride and more airy fantasy. — *We've always seen things like this, and he who set us on board ship, let him hide it from us. Now, if I'm to live a few more years, let him leave me wine in the barrel and bread on the shelf.* Lord, what unbelievers! — *Never mind wine: cash!*, chips in the most miserly. — *I'd like to die dancing*, says a young one. — *I, in my sleep.* And the oldest, a master of sardine-fishing: — *I, watching the sea.* And, turning to me, he goes on: — *Death may scare gentlemen and the brave, I mean those who always say they're afraid of nothing. Look, in these parts, there there are folk who hang themselves from time to time, they're so happy.* It was getting late and we were drowsy with cold and sleep. So many noises, the draughts which were everywhere and the buffeting of the boat made us long for bed. We went back with the ferry-boat, we jumped as if we were passing the Cape, and we got wet. Once on land, we heard the wine-sodden voice of someone who stopped and shouted at us. It was a man who often gets drunk and who, at night, wanders through the fields where, he says, he talks to the reeds, which tell him stories and secrets. — *I avoid the town:*

*there are too many people in the streets and cars and motorbikes going up and down and leaving you no room. As if it were feast-time. Someone replies: — What are you saying? For hours now everyone's been asleep. — There are some who haven't even got up today; as for cars, it's months since there were any. The drunk man goes on: — Listen carefully: don't you hear speaking, shouts, songs, music and laughter? The café terraces are full and the tenores have never played so high and so shrilly and the fireworks have never sounded so loud. And in the early hours of the morning, amidst a frightening solitude, he draws back to make way for the imagined carriages and people who... were pushing him. I told him that only a short while back we were talking about death and the dead, — What do you think about it... He took off his scarf and sang a fresh, biting song, with a tender refrain which he repeated, half-closing his owl-like eyes. I asked him if he'd let me write it down: — / don't know if I'll remember it: I thought it up just now. I asked him if he remembered its name: — Of course I do! 'When a sailor sleeps with a woman, sure he'd be glad to die'.)*

And here I shall have to leave Foix, with the sense that I've done very little to convey either the depth or the variety of his work. After many readings, I feel more than ever that this is a beautifully coherent work, which will repay any amount of investigation. I use the word 'investigation' deliberately, since Foix likes to refer to himself as 'un investigador en poesia' (an investigator in poetry). As he uses it, there's nothing clinical or frivolous about the phrase: quite simply, he sees poetry as what he calls an 'objective reality', a reality which is always there, detached from the poet, but always ready to be explored. Such a view may disturb our own preconceptions about poetry, but Foix has always been clear about its consequences. As he puts it:

*No hi ha doncs una realitat superada, ni un triomf de l'esperit sobre el real: hi ha una realitat vexada pels llòbreges mercaders del natural i de l'espontani, que el poeta, generós, allibera i ordena... No hi ha missatges nous, ans bé un sol missatge: el del poeta que expressa amb mitjans propis, que són els de la seva època, allò que verament és.*

(There is not, then, a reality which is overcome, nor a triumph of the spirit over the real: there is a reality which is humiliated by the dark merchants of the natural and the spontaneous which the poet, generously, liberates and sets in order...

There are no new messages, but rather a single message: that of the poet who expresses with his own means, which are those of his times, what really is.)

In an age when even the best poets often seem to settle for minor poetry, it's as well to be reminded of this larger view, and perhaps the best way of praising Foix is to say that his best poems make it seem the most natural view of all.

# J. V. Foix. Modernity and Tradition

Manuel Carbonell

I have chosen this title because I think it frames one of the most distinctive features of Foix's poetry. Indeed, one of his most famous lines is that which closes the seventh sonnet *of Sol, i de dol*: 'M'exalta el nou i m'enamora el vell' (Novelty excites me and I'm in love with the old). This forceful affirmation that he finds attractive, even exciting, not only the fruits of the modern sensibility but also the enduring, essential legacy of bygone ages, is repeated in diverse forms throughout his poetic production. The definitive text, however, where the basis of his poetic conception is fixed and most clearly expressed is *Sol, i de dol*.

Just to trace this through a few examples, the fourth sonnet already shows the poet expressing himself through paradox: 'Sóc a París, i entre ermots, a Lladurs' (I'm in Paris and, among waste-lands, in Lladurs). Here the old and the new, united by the verb 'sóc' (I am), figure metonymically as Paris (capital of avant-garde and symbol of modernity) and as Lladurs (where Foix's forebears originated, the emblem thus of ancestrality). Turning now to poem 26 of *Sol, i de dol*, we read:

*/ si em complac en la forest aspriva  
Exult en plor davant la plana mansa.*

(And if I'm glad to be in the wild woodland I exult tearfully too before the gentle plain.)

The play of antithesis between 'wild woodland' and 'gentle plain' is compensated by the near-synonymous verbs, 'complaure's' (to delight, to be glad) and 'exultar' (to exult) while the whole is cemented by the

alliterative consonant groups *pl/pr*. These are repeated as central props for both lines —*plac-*, *-pri-*, *plor*, *pla* — with a sound effect as though of applause. We see here a repetition of the device found in the first line we quoted, that of using two near-synonymous verbs to unify two contrasting indicators. Upon this the poet sets a sequence of heterogeneous and often opposing elements in which he delights and exults, so much that his pleasure brings him close to tears. The final tercet deserves close attention:

*Elfenc humit, els olis de l'hangar,  
El mot novell, i el vell que l'art relliga:  
Tot l'or espars en una estampa antiga!*

(Damp hay, oils from the hangar, the new word, and the old one fixed by art: all the gold that flecks an ancient print!)

While 'damp hay' takes us back to a traditional agricultural way of life, 'oils from the hangar' sets us in the urban landscape with its strong technological flavour. However these two opposing worlds are defined even more precisely in relation to 'the new word, and the old one', which clearly allude to literature. We notice that what pleases and excites the poet is not the simple fact of one being new and the other old, but that it is 'art' which 'fixes' the word, the language of poetry itself, that which constitutes the attraction of the poetic art. This is to say that the poet's technique and linguistic expertise are what make a poem immortal, transcending the particular taste of each new era. The poet's attainment, then, is that we are given the vision to see, according to the line just quoted, 'the gold that flecks...' poetic material.

Even in the fourth and fifth sections of this book, which are quite explicitly vanguardist in spirit and in their promotion of newness and modernity, we still find the same claim for the immediacy and active relevance of the past.

Poem 58, one of the most characteristic of this spirit (elevating to mythic status Foix's own generation of 1918), reads as follows:

(...) *ens domina l'esport* (...)  
*D'un 1, un 9 i un 8, d'un vermellfort,*  
*I escoltem Bach en un llagut estort*  
*Del naufragi del temps de les romances.*

(Sport is our passion... with the bright red of its number 1, number 8 and number 9, and we listen to Bach in a barque saved from the shipwreck of the days of the ballads.)

Here the spirit of radical innovation, with incendiary implications conveyed by the 'bright red', far from being denied or contradicted is, rather, reinforced by listening to Bach in a boat which has been saved from the shipwreck of a legendary past.

Perhaps we should pause a while here to consider something so evident that it is often overlooked, yet which is nevertheless essential for the case I want to put forward. The fact is that generally when we speak of something modern we do so in contradistinction with oldness, even to the extent that modernity must exclude anything 'old'. The supporters of revolutionary modernity-at-all-costs have always insisted on a clean break with the past. This has been particularly so in the case of artistic vanguard movements. Without going too far into detail we can say that these movements generated a debate, running through to 1939, that involved virtually every creative artist in Europe. The issue, in a nutshell, was: Does modernity entail a break with the past? Of course, the starkness of the question posed in these terms forced the majority to tone it down to 'To what extent must we break with the past, if indeed there must be a break at all?' Because by the word 'past' we understand the sum total of the Western tradition. In the fields of painting and music the responses would tend towards a gradual dissolution of traditional models. In literature, though, the same iconoclasm leads into a cul-de-sac from where a retreat is initiated back towards familiar conventions. This has to be understood in relation to the essential raw material of literature: language, and thus *meaning*. Consequently even the most radical experimenters, the Dadaists, were prisoners of that which they wished to destroy. For

example, in their sound poems the absence of meaning is immersed in the total span of the very literary tradition they would have blown up. And all these writers were finally swept along or assimilated by the general evolution of the surrealist adventure.

This digression was necessary to focus Foix's attitude towards the issues in question. From the extracts we have read it is clear that his concept of modernity does not imply a break with the past. Unfortunately we cannot go here into Foix's own substantial and recurrent arguments in favour of this position, as they are expounded in his writings on poetry. Basically it boils down to a conviction that there is no such thing as 'newness', only individual works that can be deemed 'perfect' and which, as such, stand outside time and beyond fashions. Thus for Foix the authentic spirit of avant-gardism and innovation is with those who are capable of creating products which define an era and contribute to shaping the future. This leads to a view of newness not being found in work which seeks to cut loose from all precedents, but rather in work which can take from the past means and forms of expression that accord with the communicative needs of the present. The paradox is obvious: art thus conceived is not a nostalgic harking back to a mythified past. On the contrary, there is a movement backwards which becomes an authentic progression, a forwards impulse: not locked into the past but rather opening on to the future.

It is important to understand one thing: that for Foix the past is not the whole past, neither is it any past. In fact he singles out and always focuses on the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, skipping the period from the 16th to the 18th centuries through to the 19th-century Revival movement (the *Renaixença*) where his interest resumes. Even from among the writers of the *Renaixença* and beyond, lumped together and labelled '*modernistes*', only Verdaguer and Maragall are saved. On the other hand, the national cultures which he takes into account, apart from Catalan, are not randomly chosen from anywhere on the globe: what Foix's gaze does is to 'home in' on the other Latin peoples. The reason behind this selection is a particular perception of the specific needs of Catalan culture in general, and its literature in particular. He explains what his vision is in an article which appeared in the April

1947 issue of *Ariel*, in which he emotionally evokes the days of his youth. Of special interest to us in this text is a declaration of principles which we can take as a reliable indicator of the poet's deep motivations. It reads:

*En un dels mes bells moments de la nostra renaixença col·lectiva es va projectar a la ment dels fidels la imatge d'una comunitat on el concret substituïa el mite, arcaic o futurista. Hi va haver un Polític, un Poeta, un Glossador, un Pintor, un Gramàtic que, una vegada, ençà o enllà de llurs valences personals, van coincidir, en llurs investigacions i en la pràctica de llur art, a fer vivent a les ments joves la idea d'una comunitat nacional on, per una conjunció feliç d'orientacions, el mite no era capfaula ni l'universal una teoria. Hi va haver un possible per als mes atents, no pas per als il·lusos.*

(In one of the finest moments of our collective revival there was projected into the minds of the faithful the image of a community in which concreteness replaced the myth, whether archaic or futurist. There was one Politician, one Poet, one Spokesman, one Painter, one Grammarian, all of whom, regardless of their private wills and desires, coincided, in their investigations and in the practice of their arts, in vitally inspiring young minds with the idea of a national community wherein, through a happy convergence of guide-lines, myth ceased to be pure fable and universality ceased to be pure theory. Many things became possible now for those most attentive to these forces but not to those who just took them as the source for vague illusions.)

(J.V. Foix, 'L'Obiols, o el que hem perdut', *Obres completes*, IV, p.535).

Just who these exemplary figures were is revealed to us in an entry dated 1st January 1913 from *Catalans de 1918*. This was just after the Orthographical Norms for the Catalan language issued by the *Institut d'Estudis Catalans* had been published in the newspaper *La Veu de Catalunya*. The sense of it being a major cultural watershed is embedded in the poet's remark to friends: "With [the Politician] Prat de la Riba, with [the Poet] Carner and [the Grammarian] Fabra," I said, "Catalonia has some good leaders." Then they, Obiols and Casanovas,

added the name of [the Spokesman] Eugeni d'Ors-Xènius. And I, with a laugh, said "And don't forget [the Painter] Torres Garcia!" (J.V. Foix, *Obres completes*, IV p. 196).

These names, of course, are the ones which map out the integral features of that programme of political and cultural self-affirmation for Catalonia known as *el Noucentisme*, New Centuryism, a blue-print for the twentieth century. This was the context in which Foix was formed, taking its classically inspired moral and aesthetic ideals and converting them into the conceptual bases that would guide his literary evolution. These were the root of his exclusive focus on the cultures of the Latin peoples, in so much as they express the continuity of a spiritual community at a level deeper than that visible in modern state frontiers. In this way the weight of the past within the present is borne out for him. But at the same time he realized that national recovery also must involve engagement with the most vital forces of artistic renewal, especially when these arise within the sphere of the Romance countries. It was this which made him receptive, albeit critically so, towards the experiments of the avant-gardists. In this sense he ended up in a paradoxical position, which translated for some years into a fluctuating output, using diverse formal models. He went from calligrams, to the narrative poem on classical lines, to poems composed in prose from surrealist inspiration and attempts at automatic writing in poems without punctuation.

Nevertheless, the prestige which he won in intellectual circles in the 1920s and 1930s, to the extent of being chosen to represent the Catalan PEN club at the 1933 Dubrovnik conference, was not due to his poetic activity, which was still sparse at this time. Foix's reputation was based chiefly on the articles he wrote regularly for the newspaper *La Publicitat* and on his editorship of the literary page, where pieces of his own under the pseudonym of *Fòcius* gained a wide following. To a lesser extent, he had also made a name for himself through his contributions to the two magazines produced in Sitges, both of them addressed to a more restricted readership *Monitor de les Arts i les Lletres* (1921-23) and then *L'Amic de les Arts* (1925-27).

Even so, and despite the very limited impact of his only two pre-Civil War books of poetry, *Gertrudis* (1927) and *KRTU* (1932), we can

talk of a distinct inclination towards experimental literature and avant-gardism. At the same time we must recall that he was one of the most outstanding promoters of the figure of Ramon Llull, (interestingly taken by Foix as an avant-gardist *avant la lettre*) in connection with the quincentennial celebrations of his birth between 1933 and 1935.

So we must wait until 1947, after the calamity of war and the painful recovery thereafter, for the publication of *Sol, i de dol* and, eventually, a decisive statement of his position, which, as soon as it came, truly bewildered the critics. Gabriel Ferrater used the following words to describe the shock which the book produced:

*Després de Gertrudis i de KRTU, Foix tenia l'obligació de continuar fent super-realisme; per molt boirós que allò es veiés (...) Però quan va publicar Sol, i de dol! Quina insolència: un llibre de sonets que no es podien qualificar sinó de pre-petrarquistes, un llibre tan 'culturalista' que no porta pas menys de quinze epígrafs, d'autors el més modern dels quals es Roiç de Corella. I després vam anar de mal en pitjor; ningú no sap encara ben bé si Les irrealis omegues és un llibre post-surrealista o, per dir-ho així, pre-hitita... "*

(After *Gertrudis* and *KRTU* Foix was obliged to keep on writing in a surrealist manner, however vaguely... But when *Sol, i de dol* came out! What insolence: a book of sonnets which could only be called pre-Petrarchan, such a 'high-brow' offering that it comes with no fewer than 15 epigraphs, the most modern of whose authors is Roiç de Corella (1433-1497). And then things went from bad to worse; nobody knows, still, whether *Les irrealis omegues* is a post-surrealist or, as it were, a pre-hittite work...)

(G. Ferrater, Prologue to J.V. Foix, *Els lloms transparents*, Barcelona, 1969, p. 9).

Ferreter's irony about post-surrealism and pre-hittitism, however, contains the essential truth about Foix's position. This is that especially in *Les irrealis omegues*, but also in subsequent books of poems, those elements that in *Sol, i de dol* were still, as it were, theoretical propositions, like those we have examined, are now converted directly into concrete images.

critical, that is, receptive to the palpitations deep in his own times which will produce the cracks on the surface and destroy the heavy weight that our own age places in the way of a better future.

Thus the painful experience of the war and its consequences become the starting point, referring both forwards and backwards, for the process of assimilating and coming to terms with that reality. Each poem is the objectivization of a deep and crucial moment in the experience of the poet, and in the experience of all of us. In this sense the trauma is overcome (transcended), and the suffering of the victim(s) is transmuted into the joy of the victors. 'Cada poema,' states Foix, 'és un crit de llibertat' (Every poem is a cry of freedom). Indeed, all poetry, when it is authentic, that is to say when it springs from the clash of elemental forces of its own times, has liberating potential. It liberates the poet from his own inward spectres and neuroses. It also liberates us, the readers, from mental imprisonment by the haunting powers and false idols that hold sway in every epoch.

The battlefield where every existential struggle is decided, where every ontological and ethical issue is hammered out, is always intuitively located by Foix in relation to a concept of history and, more specifically, in relation to modes of perceiving time. And as always when dealing with fundamental themes, the difficulties increase and confusion spreads. In the final sonnet of *Sol, i de dol* the poet confesses:

(...)per cingles salvatges  
 Amb un sol crit la Nit i el Cel vull fendre!  
 Tot es confús, Senyor Déu.

(Amid wild crags I would like to cleave the Night and the Heavens with a single cry! Everything is confused, Lord God.)

It shouldn't surprise us then that Foix seems to be contradictory, for his aim is not to supply rational discourse on his subject, not to 'tell' us anything but rather to 'show' what the poetic imagination makes out of the matter.

In the sonnet that opens the second section of this same book there is the exclamation '[tant de bo si] el Temps no fos!' (if only time did not exist!). Time is seen as nothing other than the fact that all things come to pass, and then pass away. Set against this concept of time is the idea of eternity. But time and eternity do have a meeting point, and this is the Instant. In the Instant time is made eternal and the eternal is given temporal condition. One line in particular that Foix loved to recall, to the extent that it became a sort of motto for him, reads: 'Viure l'instant i obrir els ulls al demà' (To live the instant and to open one's eyes on tomorrow) (*Sol, i de dol*, 3, 12). Contained within this laconic maxim-like phrase we can detect the full depth and richness which underpin and nourish the poetry of J.V. Foix.

Experience of the Instant is the point at which habitual ways of perceiving the passage of time are overturned. And what characterises these habits is that the determining dimension of time itself is the past. Even that which has not yet come about, that which is not yet in being, is seen in advance as something which is no longer, as something which has disappeared from presence and present. Time, the Greeks, explained, devours its children. Then there's the saying that the day we are born we begin to die. Foix tells us: 'Visc de la Mort i Ella m'exalta etern/Davant la mar, o en borrasca d'hivern' (I live on Death and She exalts me, as an eternal being facing the sea, or in a winter's squall) (*Sol, i de dol*, 16, 14).

The generally held idea of time is that everything that can be measured in or by it is ephemeral and inexorably condemned to extinction. This is as true for 'measurability' in the mode of inanimate things (mere presences), as it is in the mode of the animate (living beings), and as it is, especially, in the mode specific to humankind (personal existences). Time becomes synonymous with 'the past'. Even the present, the present moment or the 'right now', is always the moment that has just elapsed, because 'nowness' is constantly being superseded.

But this way of looking at time and the temporal is not of the order of (supposedly) absolute and eternal truths, so that it could just as well be applied equally to what scientists call the 'soup' of elemental

and how we came to be here. For every one of us this means a rethinking of our own lives in the light of what is absolutely unavoidable, a thing as simple as this: we are who we are because we are from here and not from any other place and because we are here now and not in any other era. But this sharply particularising self-affirmation, radically anti-chauvinist and anti-provincialist, is the condition for entry into the truly cosmopolitan community. And this is constituted by the complete history of mankind. As he proclaims in one of the last poems that he published:

*Tota amor és latent en l'Altra amor,  
tot llenguatge és saó d'una parla comuna,  
tota terra batega a la pàtria de tots.*

(Each love is latent in the Other love, every language is the seasoning of a common speech, each land beats in the heart of the homeland belonging to us all.)

# The speaker in the language of J. V. Foix: Construction and function of the poetic voice (*Sol, i de dol*)

Marie-Claire Zimmermann

In order to try to resolve the difficulties continually posed by the reading, and even more, by the interpretation of the poetic text — especially in the case of a work so complex and varied as that of J.V. Foix, and that despite the valuable and numerous bibliography now at our disposal — the critic, the *poetologist* — if we accept this designation of the specialist in poetic criticism — needs to begin from the tangible reality of the *speaker*, who issues from silence in order to assume enunciation, knowing for sure that his listeners or readers will never communicate directly with him. I shall propose straight away some theoretical elements which can be applied to any kind of poetic writing. The speaker of the poem is above all, I believe, a human voice, enclosed in the body of paper which is the text, and therefore an anonymous voice which has ceased to be that of the author (that is to say, of the writer), but which is composed of the imaginary and linguistic experiences of this author so as to constitute, solely through style, a completely new personage, a poetic persona, a poetic, or rather poematic, Subject. The reason or cause of this creative act is philosophical. The only reality which is beyond discussion — like birth — is death; now to die is to fall silent, to cease to be a voice; the poematic voice, therefore, is the chief sign of a desire for the word to survive, or, more precisely, the voice is a collection of words destined to overcome the definitive disappearance of the authorial T — not a biographical ego, nor a mask, but an entity which exists in order to be a voice, a form which encloses a speaker, and with which any reader

or listener of today or tomorrow can identify. This voice will endure, will have this capacity of being form, or formal delegation, for other people only if it succeeds in inventing a distinctive language, a style irreducible to any other poetic language which can be identified with the native poetic production of the past or the present, and, if it is essentially literary, capable of incorporating intertexts and re-inventing them.

Thus the scheme of the poetic phenomenon is as follows: the poem is a space, a square; the author remains outside the square which represents the poematic speaker and the reader/receiver also remains outside, but on the other side; there is only a link between the recipient and the poematic speaker; but there is no direct communication, no dialogue between the author and the always virtual audience of the poetic text.

If, then, we wish to study a style, we shall only be working on the speaker, without projecting what we know of the author; obviously, before beginning our analysis, we are familiar with the poet's own times, with the history of the country in which he lives, with his own particular history — perhaps with a detailed biography — and above all with his country's poetry. But we shall not explain the text in terms of what we know; it is perhaps more profitable to try to discover the way the poetic system functions, to see how the speaker constructs a reality or an internal poetic referent; we shall have to discover the networks of metaphor, the concepts, the words which invent a particular world — dreams, projections with their internal laws; and within this poematic space we shall have to identify a difficult, and always partial, search for meaning. Thus the speaker is both a creative subject and the place where various formal metamorphoses take shape. If he refers directly to the author's person or to national history, we shall see to what extent he invents them, departing from official reality and above all from the conventional language in which others had expressed them.

Very often the speaker talks in the first person, with the pronouns and grammatical conjugation of verbs, but the use of an impersonal formulation is also quite frequent. This double mode of expression

itself does not mean that there are two types of speaker in the poetic work, one personal, the other impersonal. The speaker is in the work, just as a man is a single body for the whole of his life, even though the harsh signs of the passage of time are evident in him. Personalization and impersonalization are two modes of the voice, the signs of a stylistic choice at a given moment, but, whether they are conjoined or chronologically isolated, they remain separate parts of the writer's itinerary.

The speaker, the emitter of the message, is unique, but can often pass through various subsidiary voices, through a range of tonalities, duplications, interior dialogues, soliloquies, all of which urgently demand a reply, or more than one reply, which may not exist. Obviously, the voice may possess various inflexions and can also give rise to a number of other voices.

### **The word of the Foixian speaker**

The example of Foix is particularly interesting from this point of view; we shall examine his work as the message of a speaker who produces a discourse spread over fifty years, though sometimes bringing together poems 'distant in time', as he says in *On he deixat les claus...* (Where I have Left the Keys...) (p. 227); the speaker talks with the voice of 1928 or of 1932 (pp. 233-34), and with the voice of 1950 (p. 262), or of 1953 (p. 269). What is the meaning of these juxtapositions? Is there one voice or several? a conflict between voice and speaker? or between voices and speaker? or between voices and speakers?

This paper refers above all to the formation of the speaker in *Sol, i de dol* (Alone, and in Mourning), so as to arrive at the speaker of around the year 1935. (I have used the following edition: J.V. Foix, *Obres completes I: Poesia*, introduction by Pere Gimferrer, Edicions 62, Barcelona, 1974.)

We shall make a preliminary observation which comes from a first reading of Foix: whether it is a question of the sonnets (*Sol, i de dol*) or of the polymetric poems of *Les irrealis omegues* (The Unreal Omegas), in other words of fixed and free forms, of texts of 1920 or of others of the 60s, the speaker is always, overpoweringly, a person who

expresses himself in the first person singular, that is to say, a decidedly personal speaker. Quite often he says 'I'. The pronoun accompanies the verb of which it is the grammatical subject and thus serves to intensify the expression of the speaker. The 'I' intervenes in order to affirm, very often in the first syllables of the opening line, everything it feels:

*Jo tem la nit, però la nit m'emporta* (p. 51)

(I fear night, but night carries me away),

everything it sees:

*Jo veig* (p. 51)

(I see),

everything it does:

*Jo salt barranc i branc, torrent i clos,  
I al bo i al mal em don i allarg la mà:  
No tem la mort si a d'altri calen flors.*  
(p. 61)

(I leap ravine and branch, torrent and enclosure, and I give myself and stretch out my hand to good and evil: I do not fear death if others need flowers.)

because the speaker attempts, above all, to *name* everything which constitutes existence, being and life:

*Mes cerc i am aquell qui diu 'jo só'* (p. 69)

(But I seek and love the man who says 'I am')

The poetic enterprise reveals itself as the search for a definition of the 'I' by means of a metaphor *in praesentia* which brings together the compared, the verb and the comparer:

*Só el serfcomú si així Us plau, Senyor Déu* (p. 167)

(I am the common serf if that pleases You, Lord God)

*Jo só l'apòcrif que tu creus insigne!* (p. 143)

(I am the apocryphal one whom you believe to be illustrious!)

*Sóc elfoll de la mar, fill de sirena* (p. 143)

(I am the madman of the sea, the son of a siren);

but, later, the T appears with the other pronouns, the 'you' of the beloved, which is present in *Sol, i de dol*:

*Jo só / tu* (p. 143)

(I am / you);

there are also added the names of friends, of different people known and loved; this is very evident in *Les irrealis omegues*:

*En Creixells i jo* (p. 197, 1934)

*Sunyer i jo* (p. 197, 1922)

*En Riba i jo* (p. 339, 1959)

(Creixells and I; Sunyer and I; Riba and I)

However, the personal pronoun as subject is in the minority compared to the verb conjugated in the first person; this is logical, linguistically speaking, since the verb contains the first person, and if the pronoun is used, it is because the speaker needs to insist on this presence of the 'I'. Why? Above all, so that it may exist alongside the other pronouns, facing the 'you', for formal reasons of clarity, but above all to assert itself more firmly and to arrive at a unity.

Notice the profusion of all the other signs of the first person: the verb is essential, and when it is not accompanied by the pronoun it is still more varied from a semantic point of view:

*Sóc a París, i entre ermots, a Lladurs,*

*Ensems vestit i nu, i en calls incerts.*

(p. 43)

(I am in Paris and, among wasteland, at Lladurs, both clothed and naked, and in uncertain passages.)

*I veig, al lluny, mil pics entre clarors* (p. 77)

(And I see in the distance a thousand peaks, among clarities)

*Só, doncs, Adam; i ets Eva! i tenim set* (p. 55)

(I am, then, Adam; and you are Eve! and we're thirsty)

*/ adés só gran, i m'exalt o, submís*

*'Míser', em dic, i faig pira dels llibres.*

(p. 63)

(And sometimes I am big and exalt myself, or, humbly, I call myself 'wretch' and make a bonfire of my books.)

etc.

How is the speaker related to the verbal action? If we examine *Sol, i de dol*, we see first of all that the first-person verb may appear in each line of the same text, but with different elements, with pronominal forms alternating with active verbs; the pronoun complement is frequent, as is the dative; all this means that the speaker is creating himself in a world in which he is continually situating himself in relation to landscapes and things, and from time to time he manages to formulate questions or clear statements as the 'voice of the I', for example in the first sonnet:

*em veig* (v. 2)

*m'aturen* (v. 4)

*I dic: on só?* (v. 5)

*m'adreç* (v. 8)

*sóc etern* (v. 9)

*m'és present* (v. 9)

*m'és estrany* (v. 10)

*jo m'hi sent* (v. 11)

*jo retrob* (v. 12)

*ja vaguí* (v. 13)

*heure'm* (v. 14)

(p. 37)

(I see myself; they stop me; And I say: where am I?; I direct myself; I am eternal; is present to me; is strange to me; I feel myself in it; I find again; I once wandered; for me to inherit)

or else, the same form is repeated, with variants, at various places in the sonnet, thus emphasizing the affirmation of the speaker and his insertion in the world:

*Em plau d'atzar, d'errar* (v. 1)

*De matí em plau* (v. 5)

*Em plau, també,* (v. 11)

*M'exalta el nou i m'enamora el vell* (v. 14)

(P- 49)

(I like, by chance, to wander; I like in the morning; I like also; the new exalts me and I am in love with the old)

Above all, the T explains itself, it produces a language about that which is and what it says. This justifies the frequency of antithetical and complementary verbs:

*Vull i no vull* (v. 5)

*Refús* (v. 5)

*/ caic vençut* (v. 8)

*Vull ésser sant i heroi* (v. 9)

*Del meu país i la més vasta Espanya* (v. 10)

*I les colors i els sons em fan llangor* (v. 11)

*Em dolc i plany* (v. 12)

*m'anega* (v. 12) *m'afanya* (v. 13)

(P- 57)

(I want and don't want; I refuse; and I fall defeated; I want to be a saint and a hero; of my country and of the vaster Spain; and colours and sounds make me languish; I grieve and lament; drowns me; is a labour to me)

Observe how oppositions are created at various points in the stanza and in the line; the unique speaker brings his contradictions into the open and manages to exist poematically as a single voice, as a centred 'T';

all these procedures allow a firmness in the structuring of the 'I', but through constant antitheses of a troubadouresque nature.

Thus the speaker of *Sol, i de dol* is essentially personal, rarely impersonal, and in the latter case it is a question of giving a more general, more anonymous version of an art of writing, and of living, in order to make the transition to a metalanguage, as in the sonnet on p. 41:

*Saber narrar en llenguatge vigorós  
Deler i desig, i plers, i, sense esforç  
Rimar bells mots amb el ritme dels cors  
Amants o folls; i, gens fantasiós...*

(To be able to narrate in vigorous language passion and desire, and pleasures, and, without effort, to rhyme beautiful words with the rhythm of loving or foolish hearts; and, not at all fantastic...)

To be able to narrate in vigorous language is an impersonal version, equivalent to the personal version on the previous page:

*Oh! Si prudent i amb paraula lleugera  
Sabés fixar l'imperi de la ment,  
I amb hàbils mots, la passió naixent,  
Del meu estil pogués fer presonera*  
(p. 39)

(O! If prudently and with light speech I could fix the empire of the mind, and with skilful words could make budding passion the prisoner of my style)

The aesthetic postulates are the same, but the second poem rids itself of models and proposes a desire for style.

The primordial 'I', then, is the key personage of the textuality of *Sol, i de dol*, but if the speaker has a voice and is unified, we cannot reduce him to the poetic function of a young man in love — sensual, impassioned with nature and also attracted by the name of the God to whom he devotes a section of his first book, since he wanted to invent, in 20th-century language, another metaphysical diction, different from that of March's *Cant espiritual* or the *Cant espitual* of Maragall.

In the early texts, in fact, the T is essentially a man who wants to express himself; this we know from the 'Letter to Clara Sobirós', p. 28:

*Sóc dels qui creuen que cada poeta és ell. EU tot sol davant el poema que escriu, no per distreure's o distreure els altres, o salvar-se, sinó per a expressar-se.*

(I am of those who believe that each poet is himself. He himself is alone in front of the poem he is writing, not to distract himself or to distract others, nor to save himself, but to express himself.)

Thus from the beginning the speaker is presented as a writer — not necessarily as Foix, but as someone who essentially dedicates himself to the practice of the Word. Words must fix an internal image, but, paradoxically, there is a call for a *clarity of signs*. Writing is a compromise between contradictory terms; that is to say, style can only arise from a tension — rather than from an opposition — between contradictions. Whence the will, the decision to juxtapose opposing images and to pass continually from one more to one less, from diversity to unity; this explains the association of binary forms with the existence of a pendular movement. The structures are symmetrical, but in two ways; vertically, in paradigms:

*En port travat ets l'algosa clapera* (v. 1)

(In a closed harbour you are the rocks covered in seaweed)

*En port obert ets boira marinera* (v. 5)

(p. 115)

(In an open harbour you are the sea mist)

*Si de noiet delia l'hora malva* (v. 1)

(If as a boy I enjoyed the violet hour)

*Si de fadrífugia a punta d'alba* (v. 5)

(p. 83)

(If as a youth I took flight at daybreak);

or in the syntactic anaphoras of the same quatrain:

*Bru del teu nu i del teu ésser abscon,  
Blau de la mar i dels ulls on em mir,  
Blanc de l'hostal i, puix que em plau el gir...*

(p. 65)

(Brown of your nakedness and of your hidden being, blue of the sea and of the eyes in which I look at myself, white of the inn and, since I like the phrase...);

horizontally in the same verse, in the syntagms, or else to create a harmony, to introduce a contrast, or to qualify a statement:

*Sol, sóc etern. M'és present el paisatge  
Defa mil anys, l'estrany no m'és estrany:  
Jo m'hi sent nat; i en desert sense estany...*

(p. 37)

(Alone, I am eternal. The landscape of a thousand years ago is present to me, the strange is not strange: I feel I was born there; and in a desert without a lake...)

We see here, for example in this tercet, the diversity of experiences and the unity of the 'I'. We observe a creation in the present, but explicable by the past, by tradition; 'l'estrany no m'és estrany' (the strange is not strange) is a way of affirming by negation the strength of a performative 'I':

*M'és / no m'és*

*Jo m'hi sent:*

(is to me; is not to me; I feel:)

Here are inscribed the roots and the time of the T; 'desert sense estany' (a desert without a lake): the contradictory place belongs to the T: 'jo retrob' (I find again), which includes finding; 'on ja vaguí' (where I once wandered) includes both past and place.

In the sonnets, the structure is an increasingly intense conglomeration of antithetical groups, of places, times and experiences, which because of their plurality allow one to construct the unity of the

speaker. The solitude of the 'I', already present in the title of the book and in the opening line of the first sonnet, is precisely the one indispensable element in the poetization. The speaker does not write in order to express lyrically the bitterness and sadness of solitude: the solitude is the point of departure and the foundation of a diction. It is because it is alone that the I is able to say: 'I dic: on só?' (And I say: where am I?). Language appears as the site of an interior debate, of a reflection, with justification, explanations and questions.

Gradually in the same poem two ways of speaking come together:

— A very internalized language with the marks of a solitary wanderer:

*Ver és — em dic quan soliu per la duna  
Despull la ment i em trob —, que l'acollença  
De tantes mans sense do ni remença  
M'obre deserts en la terra comuna.*

(P- 53)

(It is true — I say to myself when alone on the dunes I strip down my mind and find myself —, that the reception of so many hands without gift or redemption opens deserts for me in the common land.);

that is to say, a murmur which very often gives rise to a long sentence which may take up the entire quatrain.

— Another language which speaks of the external world and which uses 'dic' (I say) rather than 'em dic' (I say to myself), in other words, a different style, much more curt, with questions, in slightly fragmented verse:

*Dic: — La mar, és? I tu? ; I la platjola  
On fórem u? I el calabrot, i el bot?*

(p. 53)

(I say: the sea, is it? And you? And the beach where we were one? And the pulley-block, and the boat?)

### Inheritance and Modernity

This scheme which joins together intimate life and exteriority partly corresponds to a primarily literary dilemma, in other words, to the conflict so powerful in poetry of the 14th and 15th centuries, between 'raó' (reason) and 'follia' (madness), 'cos' (body) and 'esperit' (spirit), 'amor' (love) and 'desamor' (lack of love), some echoes of which we find in the epigraphs to the second section of *Sol, i de dol*, and above all in the lines of Pere Torroella which serve as an introduction:

*Si pogués acordar raó ifollia*

(If I could bring together reason and madness)

Here the speaker acknowledges the inheritance of a tradition which is not only Catalan but Provençal, and more generally speaking Occidental. He uses the same words as the troubadours: 'irós', 'deler' (angry, passion; p. 47), 'follor' (madness; p. 97), 'conhort' (comfort; pp. 67, 95), 'Cants d'amor' (lovesongs; p. 67), 'gaubança' (enjoyment; p. 89), 'els meus dictats' (my statements; p. 39).

The name of Ausiàs March appears in the second sonnet; as well as this, a line of March's forms the epigraph to the first section. The speaker's poetic situation is related to the birth of poetry, both in Provençal and Catalan; it is based on the topic of 'felicitat' / 'dolor' (happiness / pain), and this contradiction is further inscribed in the diction to the extent that Foix's decasyllabic is the same as March's:

*/ el cremar dolç en el meu propifoc (p. 71)*

(And the gentle burning in my own fire)

There is a temptation to gloss or re-invent 15th-century assumptions; some features of March's symbolism are registered here, some temporal elements such as night, some attitudes of the 'I', for example:

*Jo tem la nit però la nit m'emporta (p. 51)*

(I fear night, but night carries me away)

*Em veig sovint perfosques solituds...*

*I dic: on só? Per quina terra vella* (p. 37)

(I often see myself in dark solitudes... And I say: where am I? In what ancient land)

*Entre negrors veig mil camins oberts* (p. 43)

(Among darknesses I see a thousand roads open)

*No crec perir puix que el traspàs ignor* (p. 67)

(I do not expect to perish since I do not know death)

*La nau desfeta en la borrosa riba* (p. 89)

(The ship wrecked on the vague shore)

*Bru i descofat, i descalç, d'aventura*

*En dia fosc, per les platges desertes*

*Errava sol; ...*

(p. 45)

(Brown and bareheaded, barefoot, by chance on a dark day, I was wandering alone on the deserted sands...)

where we can find echoes of March's famous line: 'Vaig sobre neu descalç i ab nua testa' (I go barefoot over snow and with bare head) and:

*Jo sóc aquell que en mars advers veleja*

*Escapadís de l'amorós parany;...*

(p. 131)

(I am he who sails on hostile seas to escape from the snares of love;...)

Thus Foix's speaker chooses a rhythm, some images, a vocabulary, a tone which make him a continuator. But this medieval voice which is introduced into the enunciation does not dominate, and gradually becomes more modern, more contemporary. From the beginning, although he uses 15th-century words, archaisms, the speaker delights in his modern language, one which Ausiàs March could not have used.

Various signs of modernity appear: machines, sciences, 20th-century personages like the pilot who takes off from El Prat, or 'el vol' (flight; p. 61), 'barbes futuristes' (Futurist beards; p. 105), 'ciclista', 'la URSS' (cyclist, USSR; p. 155), 'benzina' (petrol; p. 161), 'el frac', 'el jersei' (tuxedo, jersey), 'Sigmund Freud' (p. 161).

It is possible to interpret this mixture of languages past and present as a sign of humour, as proof of a desire for expressivity in order to achieve a new style.

One can also understand the longing for a lost world — 'on són, o mar, els déus...' (o sea, where are the gods... ) — or the wish to capture the attention of a modern reader, perhaps also divided between two worlds, or, again, the attempt to renew poetic language, in other words, the re-creation of the poetic voice.

The speaker continues to be unique, but, at a deeper level, two interwoven voices are emerging: for if the verse and the images of March and the troubadours are preserved in the text, one notices that the 20th-century poet has not kept the poetic structures; instead of using *cobles* of 8 or 10 lines, Foix chooses the sonnet. I see in this the sign of a modernity, since Ausiàs March could not use the sonnet, but I also see a quite subtle way of joining tradition and renewal, by introducing a series of alliances:

1) between the vocabulary of the 15th and 20th centuries;

2) between the memory of the *cobles* and the sonnet,

that is to say, between two present vocabularies, and between two structures, one present (sonnet) and the other absent (*cobles*). Thus the T invents a place of absence, a lack, so as to express itself between distant centuries and places; in other words, *Sol, i de dol* represents a crossroads between two voices, the decasyllabic voice of the 15th century and the decasyllabic voice of the 20th. But there are still complications, since the sonnet is older than Ausiàs March (Petrarch, Dante): the Italians invented it and spread it throughout the Western world, but 15th-century Catalan poets did not use it; moreover, we may notice another trick of Foix's: in the epigraph to the section entitled *Chi è questa che ven, ch'ogn'om la mira* (Who is this lady who comes, that everyone looks at her), the four lines of Jordi de Sant

Jordi appear to be a quatrain, though in actual fact Sant Jordi's poem is not a sonnet:

*Quin destí!  
Del segle deu; o del vintè, t'afanyes  
Com jo, per l'U i l'Incert. I vols partir  
Per recalar, de nit, en mars estranyes.*

(p. 139)

(What a fate! Of the tenth century; or the twentieth, you strive like me for the One and for the Uncertain. And you want to leave, to navigate by night in strange seas.)

The speaker is the result of a highly complex pattern, since he has various interlocutors or recipients between / beyond space and time. If the voice of the troubadours points to the suffering of the body, the Foixian speaker's voice is defined in terms of a modern body, always registered in the text, which is in contact with objects and machines, but is also said to be capable of running and jumping (p. 61), swimming (p. 159) and speaks of the 'crawl' (p. 153) and of walking rather in the manner of Jorge Guillén, with the same kind of exultation. 'Platja' (beach) rhymes with 'garatge' (garage; p. 157); the vocabulary extends to words like 'volant' (steering wheel), 'raqueta' (racket), 'macadam', 'viatges' (journeys), which are not only rather insistent signs of modernity and Futurism, but also poetic elements which help to define the body and its sensations, and thus a physical voice, the voice of a body which is present. The speaker, more than anything, *enjoys* ('gaudeix'; p. 87). The registering of pleasure in these sonnets — and not merely erotic pleasure — is exclusively modern, and the use of ancient words must be interpreted,

*Cavalquem l'hipogrif vestits de fil...  
Del gran esport del món, heterodox,...*  
(p. 107)

(We ride the hippogryph, dressed in linen... Of the world's great sport, heterodox,...)

create. But Foix's novelty consists in a genuine renewal of the enunciation: the rigid structure of the sonnet is broken, giving rise to three procedures which allow the elaboration of a style.

### **Landscape and abstraction**

The speaker is above all a reflexive voice: but the landscape not only inclines one to reflect, as it does in the 19th-century French Symbolists, but here the speaker is continually questioning the meaning of the landscape and its reality.

Admittedly, certain clichés arise, for example the city / country contrast in the sonnet 'A sol eixit, ...' (At sunrise, ...; p. 77); the pronominal T returns to the purity of the sources and utters words which belong to the highest Virgilian tradition:

*Veig d'ací estant, presents, els símbols purs:*

*L'home i el Bou i l'Arada immortals.*

(P. 77)

(I see from where I am, present, the pure symbols: the immortal Man, the Ox and the Plough.)

But the diction is much more daring than it seems: the landscape stimulates the memory and the intelligence so as to allow the emergence of images in which the T moves not among trees or flowers but among words. Obviously all this corresponds to the desire to fix time with language. But the novelty consists in the structure of the poetic discourse: the speaker alternates, in a flexible syntax, the words which designate places (or landscapes) and ideas. A sentence may begin in the middle of a line, after the sixth syllable, or else it may include a syntagm between dashes; what is more, the entire punctuation breaks up the discourse by introducing variants, hypotheses, shades of meaning, dreams. The sentence has a kind of sinuosity: it comes from an external and an internal gaze, but is continually linked to the wish to express itself in 'mots, sons i tons' (words, sounds and tones; p. 75). The speaker interrupts his digressions in order to look, and then to elaborate language. The

subjunctive, the initial mood of the poem, introduces another distance which, in spite of everything, conveys the immense desire to create:

*Si pogués acordar Raó i Follia,  
I en clar matí, no lluny de la mar clara,  
La meva ment, que de goig és avara,  
Em fes present l'Etern. I amb fantasia...*  
(P. 75)

(If I could bring together Reason and Madness and one clear morning, not far from the bright sea, my mind, which is sparing with joy, could make the Eternal present to me. And with fantasy...)

The speaker chooses reason — 'l'intel·lecte m'és brúixola' (the intellect is my compass; p. 91) — but in him co-exist 'el nihilista i el gregari.' (the nihilist and the gregarious one; p. 91), which always forces him to reproduce the same antithetical scheme, continually creative, since the voice has adopted the fragmentation of the discourse as a system of poetic enunciation.

One can identify a second stylistic procedure, also linked to the first: since the speaker is a poet who formulates the great unchanging philosophical questions, he must create in his itinerary the abstract form, the allegories which intensify the expression of desire and make it a tension straining towards the absolute; but instead of being traditional resources, these become the cause and justification of all the landscapes described in the text. It is not the T which tells, with its subjectivity, of the beauties of the world, but — especially in the last part of *Sol, i de dol* — the perception of the essence of things, the magnification through capital letters, which lead to the creation of other images and to the contamination of the writing act. 'S'han de conquerir les al·legories per a enfortir el llenguatge poètic' (Allegories must be conquered in order to strengthen poetic language). Foix manages to give the numerous entities a weight, a presence, which make them into an absolute, but with a strong insistence on the material signifier.

*Amb foc al puls esper l'Alba del Jorn...*  
*El Cos, el So i el Mot sense contorn.*  
*I l'Irreal adjur a l'hora fosca...*  
 (p. 169)

(With fire in my pulse I await the Dawn of the Day... The Body, the Sound and the Word, without limit. And I beseech the Unreal at the dark hour)

*El Pic, la Vall i el Pla, l'Ordre Cabdal...*  
*La Ciutat greu, i el Verger tendre i clar...*  
*Colg l'Home Dur vers ell, la seva llei:*  
*Estirp, Costum i Verb; el mot rebec...*  
 (p. 173)

(The Peak, the Valley and the Plain, the Principal Order... The solemn City and the clear, tender Orchard... I hide the Man who is hard on himself, his law: Lineage, Custom, Verb; the rebel word...)

This is noteworthy in the poems addressed to God, but the allegories do not designate the religious world: 'Natura', 'Moment' (Nature, Moment; p. 159), 'Idea', 'Caça' (Idea, Hunt; p. 103), 'Mar' (Sea; p. 109), 'L'Instant' (the Instant; p. 115), 'el Perfet' (the Perfect One; p. 117), 'Temps' (Time; p. 121), 'Etern Permanent' (the Eternal Permanent; p. 123), 'Nit', 'Lluna' (Night, Moon; p. 129). In reality, the natural elements, the intellectual and spiritual capacities, the linguistic signs all share in this diction in which the 'I', above all, wants to delight in its language, perhaps also giving the same pleasure to the recipient. The abundance of allegories dignifies the words, but also establishes a weight of silence between the substantives; the voice speaks more slowly, but strongly pronouncing the words, insisting on the validity of the poetic discourse.

There exists a third procedure, which is continually linked to the first two. The T celebrates the presence of the woman, of the 'you', which is the sign of the other *par excellence*; but the lover's discourse is perhaps what most favours the play of signifiers. The whole book demonstrates the poet's extraordinary capacity for associating alliterations and wordplay, but here he does it even more:

*Seré loquaç: la mar, Marcel-la! Cela...*

(p. 133)

(I shall be loquacious: the sea, Marcel-la! It conceals...)

*Del segle IV, i als daus als déus aposta*

(p. 155)

(Of the fourth century, and he bets with dice on the gods)

Why? Because the laughter of the lovers's pleasure, the humour, is another secret by which the diction of the voice is renewed. If one creates a myth (that of the landscape, of God, of the beloved), one immediately needs to destroy it, on the one hand by uttering disorder — a conventional conceit of the lover — and on the other, by throwing into relief the fragmented and playful discourse, a relief which is that of a voice which is passing through various registers, tones, etc. The line and the sonnet are now much more than decasyllabics and a fourteen-line poem. Broken with ellipses, the language imitates the lover's discourse, but if the woman mocks the verbal game, the T also mocks its own inventions; thus the poem is also a facetious game in which the language of the past and the language of the 20th century quarrel and play like lovers.

The poem is often a highly significant representation of this debate between words, for example:

*Fútil joc: dius, i te'n rius, que ets d'Atenes*

*Pels teus ulls clars. Oidà, jo só romà,*

*Dic, i en ric. Dona: — Qui del call dirà*

*(Turc?), 'Del meu burg?' Per les teves rehenes*

*D'aigua i cristall — flors de sol i sal! — menes...*

(p. 141)

(O futile game: you say, laughing, you are from Athens because of your clear eyes. Oh yes, I'm Roman, I say, and I laugh. A woman: Who shall say of the passage (a Turk?), 'Of my burg?' With your hostages of water and crystal — flowers of sun and salt — you lead...)

The text is a poetics, a linguistic game, an emblem of the Foixian speaker. The vocabulary may be ordinary, colloquial or trivial,

*Babau: omple el cabàs*

(p. 145)

(Softly: fill the basket);

and then there is a commentary in *gravis stylus*, for instance in the final line: 'Sota paraigua som el Nombre Exacte' (Beneath an umbrella we are the Exact Number; p. 145). This constant alternation between *gravis* and *humilis stylus* is quite remarkable:

*Bufeu, vents seculars — oh quin brogit —  
/ quin cabreig, oh Laura, el mar. Desfulles,  
Març fredós, ombra i colors. (— Com me mulles,  
No xipollegis tant; i quin despit.)*

(p. 139)

(Blow, age-old winds — oh, what a din — and how choppy, oh Laura, the sea. Cold March, you unleave shadow and colours. (How you're wetting me, don't splash so; and what spite.))

The basic fact is the association of 'Cossos i mots' (bodies and words; p. 145), the object and the idea, tradition and modernity, the instant and eternity. The speaker amuses himself but also represents metaphorically the splendour of the cosmos, of words:

*Nuesa eterna, cels i mars. I embulles  
L'encesa cabellera de la Nit.*

(P- 139)

(Eternal nakedness, skies and seas. And you tangle the burning hair of Night.)

### **To invent another poematic space**

In *Sol, i de dol* the voice gradually constructs its solitude and its place in the world. It invents all kinds of interlocutors: things, woman, friends, God. Language is above all a movement, a tension, the material energy of the world in a reduced poematic space. Already in the 1930s, well in advance of the Civil War and the publication of *Les irrealis omegues* (1948), which includes poems of 1930 and 1934, the speaker invents another space for the voice, more ample than that of

the sonnet, with more or less regular stanzas, but with predominantly decasyllabic or alexandrine lines; the novelty consists in the titles, which are humorous, compact blocks of prose. Here the title is rather a mark of the presence of a speaker who strongly resembles the author — *Més llibres meus* (More Books of Mine; p. 209) — and which at least tries to explain or present a reality so as to communicate with the hypothetical reader. This is a possible image of Foix or of the personage invented by the poet. But afterwards there is a blank space, and there begins the poetic voice, the other voice, Foix's invention, which has nothing to do with the biographical T of Josep Vicenç as it appears in the *Plant en lo qual respòs a J. Ferrater* (Lament in which he replies to J. Ferrater; p. 281), which is a pastiche of a medieval genre.

In *Les irrealis omegues* and other later collections, one can interpret the new structure as a *mise en abyme* of the Foixian poetic act: in the title, the speaker is still the author, and later, after the blank space, there emerges the poetic voice. What are we to say? Are there two speakers? or one speaker and a voice? or two voices?

The unique speaker, one, but with two voices, continues to seek in space, in beings, that language — open, fantastic and strict — which resolves dynamically the fundamental contradiction between unity and diversity.

# The ironic vision of J. V. Foix

Dominic Keown

As a result of a steadfast commitment to the national ideal and a creative excellence of impeccable constancy, the name of J. V. Foix has become synonymous with activity of the highest calibre in both the moral and artistic order. In the course of the past seventy years, the unswerving patriotic concern for Catalonia and its future, combined with the elaboration of an inimitable and unique poetic idiom, have allowed Foix pride of place in the contemporary hierarchy of Catalan letters. The corresponding critical reaction in the self-protective close of a culture in crisis has been, in many cases, to treat the poet with the utmost deference, a reaction compounded further by the 'difficulty' of the poetry itself. One senses that, at times, there has been a tendency to keep a respectful distance from the poet without quite coming to grips with the immediate reality of his life and works.

Such is the case in so far as the political sphere is involved. Commentators have been inclined to gloss over without comment Foix's clear right-wing sympathies of the twenties and early thirties. Joaquim Molas has referred to the poet as 'polític en el sentit més noble de la paraula',<sup>1</sup> and Patricia Boehne has even gone so far as to say that 'Foix always was, and always has been apolitical — neither a rightist or a leftist, but rather a journalist, an owner of pastry shops, and an investigator in poetry'.<sup>2</sup> There have only been Joan Fuster and latterly Oriol Pi de Cabanyes who have indicated with any accuracy the conservative, reactionary nature of Foix's outlook. In a series of writings from *Monitor* (1921-23), *L'Amic de les Arts* (1927-29), and

the *Revolució Catalanista* (1934), all of which display a consistency in Pratian inspired line and purpose, the poet revealed his committed and, on occasions, proto-fascistic sentiments which earned him, in the Republican satirical press, the rather dubious but revealing heteronym of 'el foixista Feix'.<sup>3</sup>

It is not the intention here to embark on a synopsis of Foix's ideological affiliation. In the confused political morass of the late twenties and early thirties, Fascism offered an innovatory alternative and had found an artistic voice in the Futurism of Marinetti. Foix's naive, misguided espousal of certain of its ideals was in some ways typical of what, with the benefit of hindsight, can be seen to be the dreadful mistake of an entire generation. The point at issue, however, is the general unwillingness to investigate thoroughly those 'delicate' areas of the poet's work which might alter the image of him as the reliable, imposing man of letters. This attitude has spilled over into other areas. In terms of theory and criticism Foix displays an extensive knowledge and acute understanding of literature both ancient and modern. His callous, disparaging, and groundless dismissal of Salvat-Papasseit's vanguardism in the *Revista de Poesia* of March 1925, however, has passed without comment. Foix would have been well advised to re-read such excellent offerings as 'Marxa Nupcial' and 'Com sé que es besa', before rejecting Salvat's calligrams as 'infelicíssims'.<sup>4</sup>

Similarly, apart from the censure from the social-realist generation of the sixties, which criticized the writer's class as much as his production, there have been very few to suggest that Foix could write a bad poem, or indeed one that was less than exceptional. Nonetheless, in this respect one should not understate the real *difficulty* of the work for readers of every level. Its abstruse language, intricate metaphors and complex, surreal imagery are initially quite dumbfounding. Thus the enigmatic expression, together with the author's imposing presence, have led to the output being treated with great reverence and sobriety. I should like to suggest that a closer textual approach to the poetry would prove beneficial, especially to our appreciation of what will be seen to be a cornerstone of his work, humour. Certain

commentators have remarked on an element of playfulness in the later collections but have failed to notice that it is a constant in all Foix's expression. It would not seem excessive, therefore, to venture that an analysis of the role of the light-hearted 'Fopoix' will afford a more complete interpretation of the nature of the poetic insight, the mechanics of the expression, and Foix's view of the function of the artist in society.

The general critical response to the world presented in the first two volumes, *Gertrudis* (1927) and *KRTU* (1932), has been quite uniform. It is a singularly hostile, violent and unattractive place. Pere Gimferrer has spoken of the themes of:

*la clausura, i la claustrofòbia... l'amenaça de les forces hostils al poeta... l'empetitiment, l'aclariment davant un món immens i enemistós... la destrucció... l'anorreament... l'home davant un univers que li resulta estrany, aliè, misteriós.*<sup>5</sup>

(enclosure and claustrophobia ... the menace of forces hostile to the poet ... reduction in stature, bewilderment in the face of an immense and antagonistic universe ... destruction ... annihilation ... the condition of humanity confronted by a world which is strange, alien and mysterious.)

Similarly, Carme Arnau considers that the violence present in *Gertrudis* 'no fa més que augmentar a *KRTU*'<sup>6</sup> Patricia Boehne sees the poet as 'not only... isolated, but increasingly smothered, imprisoned, maimed, paralysed'.<sup>7</sup> Joaquim Molas has likewise spoken of 'la solitud i la indefensió del poeta en el context d'una humanitat hostil: brutal. Una humanitat que l'identifica amb un disminuït'.<sup>8</sup>

If Foix's world is depicted in such adverse terms as has been suggested, however, how can it be that the reader finds it so compelling and stimulating? One is inclined to suspect that there is some attraction more wholesome than any perverse sado-masochistic fascination. The answer seems to be quite simply that this is merely one side of the poetic reality that Foix describes with such exhilaration. Fear, danger, and oppression are apparent, but these are compensated by a more colourful and carefree series of referents. Critical attention

may have unsuspectingly fixed onto the more violent aspect, as these poems tend to be more intense and charged, compared with the light-hearted pieces. A brief examination of certain themes will disclose the more amusing element of the early work.

The question of the nature of reality and the individual's perception of it was a common Vanguard preoccupation and is duly reflected in Foix's poetry. Professor Boehne has written of the poet's 'crisis of reality — or unreality — involving his duped and distorted perception of real objects and persona'.<sup>9</sup> As has been abundantly illustrated, this 'duped and distorted' vision at times causes peril and distress. What has not been adequately disclosed, however, is that this can also produce a good deal of humour, as in one of the opening poems from Gertrudis:

*En percebre de lluny el meu rival que m'esperava, immòbil, a la platja, he dubtat si era ell o el meu cavall o Gertrudis. En acostar-m'hi, m'he adonat que era un fal·lus de pedra, gegantí, erigit en edats pretèrites. Cobria amb la seva ombra mitja mar i duia gravada al sòcol una llegenda indesxifrabla. M'he acostat per a copiar-la, però al meu davant, badat en ple sorral ardent, hi havia únicament el meu paraigua.*

(II, 22)

(When I perceived, from afar, my rival waiting for me, motionless, on the beach, I wondered whether it was him, or my horse, or Gertrudis. As I drew near, I realised that it was a gigantic stone phallus, erected in preterite ages. With its shadow it covered half of the sea and upon its base was engraved an indecipherable legend. I approached to copy it but in front of me, open in the burning sand, there was only my umbrella.)

Without wishing to dwell on the thematic significance of the subject matter, a certain amount of playfulness in presentation is clearly apparent. The subtlety is produced by a tension in the style between the enormity of the statement and the matter-of-fact tone adopted for its expression. The scene described is quite fantastic. That the narrator is so myopic as to mistake the delightfully sensuous Gertrudis for a horse

and his umbrella for a gigantic phallus is utterly astounding. Nevertheless, there is not the slightest perturbation or surprise evident in the account which imbues the whole affair with a definite comical aspect.

The passage 'Joan Miró' from the section 'Presentacions' of *KRTU* is conveyed in similar fashion. Again dealing with the distorted perception of reality, the protagonist is confronted by a polygamous ticket inspector who is somehow attempting to impersonate Joan Miró with his hundred wives. The humour is achieved once more by a contrast between the enormity of the initial premise and the matter-of-fact acceptance of the absurd situation:

*Sou un impostor! No passeu d'ésser el marit de cadascuna d'aquestes dames — que ja són 30, 38, 49, 97, 100... — i us heu deixat un bigoti com el d'En Miró. Però, Déu meu i si fóssiu el pintor Miró, marit de cadascuna d'aquestes dames? Però En Miró fa temps que s'ha afaitat el bigoti. Si no portéssiu aquest bigotàs, jo diria que sou En Miró... Sou En Miró, és cert, En Joan Miró, el pintor Joan Miró. Què tal Miró, com esteu, perdoneu, i cadascuna de les vostres mullers?*  
(II, 74)

(You imposter! You are the husband — and no more — of each one of these women — who now number 30, 38, 49, 97, 100 ... — and you've grown a moustache like Miró's. Good Lord, but what if you were the painter Miró, the husband of each one of these women? However, Miró shaved off his moustache a long time ago. Were you not sporting that huge moustache, I'd say that you are Miró ... You are Miró, it's true, Joan Miró, Joan Miró the painter. How are you, Miró, I do beg your pardon, and how is each one of your wives?)

The diversion is maintained throughout these three long passages of 'Presentacions' and each provides an alternative view to the vision of hostility and destruction generally perceived by the critics. In 'Artur Carbonell', the theme of the return to childhood is approached, but without any sense of foreboding which had hitherto been considered an exclusive component. The schoolboy register of the protagonists lends a further degree of light-heartedness to the presentation of this topic:

¿Opoi quepet dipius Apartupur Caparboponepell? *Va acostar totes dues ales al pit i amb una gran reverència va respondre: Sipi. Ens vam donar les mans i, riba enllà, ens vam posar a garbellar sorra amb els dits... podem repetir-nos, amb cordial delectança, el nom: — Caparboponepell — Començajo. I ell respon: — Fopoi.*  
(II, 75)

(¿Supurely yopou're capalled Arthurupur Caparboponepell? He pressed both his wings to his breast and with a great bow replied: *Yepess*. We grasped each other's hands and, up and down the beach, we began to sift sand with our fingers ... repeating, with cordial relish, our names: — *Caparboponepell* — I begin. And he replies: — *Fopoi*.)

Similarly, the unattractive, even horrific, character of the poet's sense of alienation has long been emphasized. On a number of occasions, however, a more playful aspect becomes readily apparent. In 'On aniré tot sol', for example, the topic is described in an amusing vein. The narrator is a sign painter, yet he only ever paints the same word: COTILLAIRE. The choice of corset-maker is frivolous enough to provoke a smile yet this becomes quite ludicrous as the baker — 'el flequer' — scolds the author for omitting the letter T from his sign!:

*Però el flequer que m'havia contractat ahir, em perseguí llanterna en mà fins a la placeta i m'obligà a acabar la T del rètol de casa seva.*  
(II, 66)

(But the baker who hired me yesterday pursued me, torch in hand, right up to the square and made me finish off the T on his house's sign.)

The same humorous absurdity typifies the section 'Notes sobre la mar', from *Gertrudis*, as exemplified in the second passage by the Anglican vicar's accommodating reaction to Foix's outrageous false nose:

*Ben lligat el nas de cartó, grotesc, em passejava pel moll amb un imponent diccionari de sinòmits sota el braç. El barquer, vulgues no vulgues, em*

*féu navegar mar endins. Era un pastor anglicà, i em volia demostrar com els miracles més bells s'han esdevingut a la mar. En adonar-se, però, del meu nas arbitrari, tingué la polidesa de calar-se el seu.*

(II, 37)

(With my grotesque cardboard nose firmly affixed, I strolled up and down the quay with an imposing dictionary of synonyms under my arm. The boatman, willy-nilly, made me sail out to sea. He was an anglican pastor and he wanted to show me how the most beautiful miracles have taken place at sea. However, on noticing my arbitrary nose, he was courteous enough to append his own.)

Clearly, the courteous and conscientious ecclesiastic carries a spare false nose around with him for just this type of eventuality. As far as the early work is concerned, then, the light-heartedness of these and many more passages demonstrates that the world of *Gertrudis* and *KRTU* is not exclusively violent or terrifying as has been generally proposed.

This creative playfulness, however, is much more central to the actual mechanics of Foix's art, and this becomes more apparent as his work progresses. The ludic effect stems from an implicit tension in the poetry between the simplicity of the author's insight and the stylistic complexity of the expression. If our initial reaction to Foix's work is one of bafflement in the face of its apparent indecipherability, the same cannot be said about the poetic vision itself. The perception of the fundamental unity behind the diversity of creation, the *U clar ós*, is quite straightforward, as has been described by Arthur Terry:

*Es tracta, evidentment, d'una teoria que pressuposa la idea d'un ordre transcendental, d'un univers divinament estructurat en el qual tot objecte pot ésser una representació de la unitat fonamental.*<sup>10</sup>

(Clearly we are dealing with a theory which presupposes the idea of a transcendental order, a divinely structured universe in which every object can be a representation of its fundamental unity.)

Castellet and Molas have in turn related the significance of this transcendental order to the actual stylistic direction adopted:

*La Natura no és sinó un complex caòtic d'aparences contradictòries... però a la base del qual hi ha un tot — un U — irreductible que, etern, li dona sentit... la seva obra lírica... e's un desplegament, prodigiós i optimista — més esportiu — d'aquesta Natura i alhora, de l'esforç d'ordenar-la intel·lectualment i de descobrir-ne la Unitat i l'Eternitat últimes... Les concretacions solen concretar-se... en diversos jocs d'opòsits: Raó - Follia, Voluntat - Indolència... Realitat - Ficció. "*

(Nature is merely a chaotic complex of contradictory appearances ... but which has as its basis an irreducible whole — a oneness — which, being eternal, gives it sense ... His lyrical work ... is a prodigious, optimistic unravelling — one might even call it sportive — of this Nature and, at the same time, an effort to impose an intellectual order and uncover its ultimate Unity and Perpetuity. The concepts tend to gell playfully around various sets of opposites: Reason - Folly, Volition - Indolence, Reality - Fiction.)

One can readily appreciate the reason why in this excellent definition the commentators centre on the question of *esportivitat*. The 'jocs d'opòsits' they correctly infer to be the nexus of Foix's output, reveal an underlying and implicit conceit in the expression of the poetic vision. If the total diversity of creation shares the same essence, then even independent and opposing elements are never disparate but basically similar. The juxtaposition of superficially unrelated concepts will not, therefore, manifest their difference but will rather accentuate their identity. The poet is thus afforded the opportunity to employ the most random or senseless of associations to convey a message which is simple and coherent. In this way, at the heart of Foix's creativity there is a certain playfulness stemming from tension between the uncomplicated nature of the poetic vision and the complexity of its expression.

Foix has reflected in a similar vein on the character of poetry and has referred to it as 'el joc etern'.<sup>12</sup> In a sonnet from *Sol, i de dol* (1947), he describes his own artistic process as 'el meu càlid joc'. That is not to imply that the poet is in any way a mere dabbler. In the case of Foix, we have a dedicated commitment to a creative philosophy and idiom to which he has consistently remained faithful. In this he differs radically from, say, Junoy and Sanchez-Juan who, as recorded by

Castellet and Molas, merely contributed to the Vanguard artistic experience for reasons of 'mimesi i esnobisme'.<sup>13</sup> This playfulness at the centre of Foix's expression is most effective when it is used as an organic reflection of the basic poetic vision. The combination of opposites provides a terse metaphor describing the unity and perennality of creation, as brought out in the motifs of the fusion of light and dark in *Les irrealis omegues* (1949); age and youth, birth and death, etc., throughout the work.

It is upon this tension that much of Foix's best work is built. On occasions, however, the poet becomes too random in his selection of elements, the metaphor loses its coherence, and the whole thing drifts into mere verbal flourish. The relationship between the referents in various poems from *Desa aquests llibres al calaix de baix* (1964), for example, especially in the long titles, is often tenuous. This detracts from the expressive force which makes the piece seem merely decorative and ornate. The extravagant verbal display, however, is of extreme significance in the context of the function of the poet in society.

Throughout most of his work Foix achieves a mood of haunting intensity and mystery which is frequently accompanied by an element of sanctity. It had been an ancient convention, one resurrected by the Romantics, to view the poet as a type of mystagogue — a man apart with a gifted perspective and sacred message. This approach was duly adopted by the Avant-garde and Foix has chosen to cast himself repeatedly in this role:

*Jo só l'orat, segrest, amb vesta d'ungles . . .*  
*Qui, si no jo, n'és Sacerdot Suprem ?*  
(I, 243)

(I am the madman, abducted, with a tunic of claws ... Who, if not myself, is Priest most High?)

he intones in *On he deixat les claus* (1953). The figure is projected with all the antiquity of his pristine counterpart including, as seen in *Les irrealis omegues*, the elaboration of an oracular idiom:

*Cantaré sol per orris i caelles*  
*El cant de tots amb aire antic i plors.*  
 (I, 215-16)

(I will sing, alone, in sheep-pastures and coves the song of all with ancient melodies and lament.)

Foix clearly aspires to the archaic function of the primeval seer and pursues this policy with a conscious atavism:

*Amo, però, com mai, els poetes d'avui, els qui creuen encara i per sempre en la permanència de la deessa, delfoc i de les vestals... I, més que cap els qui en veu baixa, tonada lleugera i a cau d'orella, narren... de la por del misteri i de la fredor de l'alba tants de divins secrets com la Natura lliura als elegits que creuen en la màgia de la seva presència.*<sup>14</sup>

(I love more than ever those poets of today who still believe, now and forever, in the permanence of the Goddess, the fire and the vestals ... And more than all others, those who in a low voice, soft tone and in private, relate ... those divine secrets of the fear of mystery and the cold of dawn which Nature releases to the chosen few who believe in the magic of her presence.)

What is more intriguing about the treatment of this topic is the element of humour implicit in what might be expected to be a serious matter. Two passages from *Del 'Diari 1918'* (1956) exemplify this aspect of what may be termed 'sacred diversion'. The last line of 'si venta, corro, adelerat...' reads cryptically: 'I prego a Déu, i ric' (II, 110). More revealing in this respect is 'Quan he sabut que el meu oncle'. In this much cited poem we have the narrator returning to the toponymic region of his forebears on the event of his uncle's death and, inspired by a heathen shepherd, assuming the ancient hierophantic role of his ancestors. The playful tone is set immediately by the poetically just but extraordinary manner of his mischievous uncle's demise:

*Quan he sabut que el meu oncle havia mort d'una guitza de mula — li donava terrossos per farratge*

(II,111)

(When I found out that my uncle had been killed by a kick from a mule — he was giving it turf for forage)

which in turn is accentuated by the colloquial vitality of the earthy description and register of the heretical shepherd:

*M'ha assenyalat, amb un ditàs d'on brollaven herbes nodrides amb fang adobat, un paràgraf on el meu nom es repetia, amb insolent prestigi, a cada ratlla. — Tot això, ha dit, és d'un tal Foix, hereu d'una nissaga morta i que ningú sap on ronca.*

(II,111)

(He pointed out, with a thick finger from which there sprung herbs nurtured with seasoned mire, a paragraph wherein my name was repeated, with insolent prestige, on every line. — *All this*, he said, *belongs to some or other Foix, heir of a lost line; and no-one knows his hang out.*)

The whole piece is crowned by that ludicrous, quixotic image of the author, crook in hand and draped in recently acquired shepherd's clothing, running amok in his new role of heathen pastor, amidst flocks of emaciated goats and oxen:

*bastó en mà, recorro dia i nit, amb bous magres i cabres deslletades, el vell reialme del Cardoner on, durant segles, els meus han plantat l'ullastre.*

(II, 111)

(crook in hand, I roam day and night, with emaciated bulls and weaned goats, around the old realm of the Cardoner where, for centuries, my family have planted the wild olive.)

The relevance of humour to the original function of the seer demonstrates a much deeper significance in Foix's work than that of

mere *esportivitat*: 'All antique poetry', Huizinga explains in *Homo Ludens*,

*is at one and the same time ritual, entertainment, artistry, riddle making... sorcery... [the archaic poet's] function was at all times both sacred and literary. But sacred or profane, his function is always rooted in a form of play... sacred play no doubt, but always in its sanctity, verging on gay abandon, mirth and jollity.*<sup>15</sup>

The hermetic use of language and complexity of expression, so typical of Foix, is also relevant to this tradition: 'Archaic thought', Huizinga continues,

*brooding in rapture on the mysteries of Being, is hovering here over the borderline between sacred poetry, profoundest wisdom, mysticism and sheer verbal mystification... For archaic man... the orderly progression of things was safeguarded by nothing more potently than by the knowledge of holy things, their secret names and the origin of the world... This art-language, differs from ordinary speech in that it employs special terms, images, figures etc., which not everybody will understand.*<sup>16</sup>

The inspired view of the permanence and unity of creation — I 'U claws — expressed through a mysterious esoteric medium is thus in total compliance with the ancient convention. In this way the relationship between Foix's difficult style and his poetic vocation may be more fully understood. The 'secret names' and 'art language' of this tradition are present in the enigma of Foix's creativity and crystallized in the repeated reference to the 'altre alfabet' from which two collections derive their titles: *Les irrealis omegues* and *KRTU*. In the passage 'KRTU' from the eponymous volume we have a further account of that verbal mysticism with an accompanying mirthfulness — here as the ridiculous sound of the name — which was so typical of the ancient hierophant:

*quatre homes... carregats cadascun d'ells amb una feixuga lletra diversa de l'alfabet, la lectura conjunta de les quals donava el nom*

*misteriós; KURT, URKT, TRUK, UKRT, TURK, KRUT... — del personatge central dels meus somnis.*

(II, 64)

(Four men ... each one of them laden with a weighty, diverse letter of the alphabet, the combined reading of which gave a mysterious name; KURT, URKT, TRUK, UKRT, TURK, KRUT ... — of the central character of my dreams.)

Humour and playfulness are thus at the very centre of Foix's expression and extend stylistically in the work to the numerous 'jocs d'opòsits' which convey the basic insight. The amusement involved also allows us to see more clearly the more joyous aspect of the poetic reality which counterbalances that exclusive view of the tension, violence, and hostility which are also present.

Foix, however, is not being blindly retrospective in his fulfilling of this pristine role. The boost given to the subliminal impulse of psychoanalysis by both Freud and Jung greatly enriched the possibilities of this hermetic idiom, as seen with Surrealism, allowing it a truly modern dimension. 'Modern schools of lyric', Huizinga concludes,

*which move and have their being in realms not generally accessible and are fond of wrapping the scene in an enigmatic word, are thus remaining true to the essence of their art. "*

Similarly, with Foix, we have the same mysterious and compelling marriage of the primeval and the present, whose exhilarating force is summed up by the poet's own maxim 'M'exalta el nou i m'enamora el vell', (I, 49) but at the basis of which there is an implicit and constant playfulness. An awareness of the full relevance of humour to Foix's work becomes, therefore, essential if we are to appreciate fully the intricacy of the poetic expression and also the writer's own view of what he has to offer as a consciously modern, creative artist.

## Notes

1. 'La literatura catalana i els moviments d'avantguarda', *L'Avenç* (September 1979), 18-20.

2. *J. V. Foix* (Twayne: Boston, 1980), p. 19.
3. As revealed by Oriol Pi de Cabanyes in 'J. V. Foix i la Catalunya ideal', *Serra d'Or* (January 1983), 31-33.
4. 'Algunes consideracions sobre la literatura d'avantguarda', *Revista de Poesia* (March 1925), 65-70.
5. *La poesia de J. V. Foix* (Eds. 62: Barcelona, 1974), p. 16.
6. Prologue to J. V. Foix, *Diari 1918* (Eds. 62: Barcelona, 1981, p. 11).
7. *op. cit.*, p. 26
8. Prologue to J. V. Foix, *Obres completes*, 2 vols. (Eds. 62: Barcelona 1974 and 1979), vol. II, p. 14. All subsequent references to the text correspond to this edition.
9. *op. cit.*, p. 26.
10. 'Sobre les obres poètiques de J. V. Foix', *Serra d'Or* (March 1968), 47-53.
11. *Poesia catalana del segle XX* (Eds. 62: Barcelona, 1963), p. 88.
12. 'El joc etern', *Poesia*, no. 25 (1944), pages not numbered.
13. *op. cit.*, p. 54.
14. 'De la poesia encara', *Poesia*, no. 3 (1944), pages not numbered.
15. *Homo Ludens* (Routledge & Kegan Paul: London, 1949), pp. 120-32.
16. *Id.*, p. 107.
17. *Id.*, p. 135.