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*Singing from the Same Hymn Sheet: The Catalan Voice in the Global
Chorus*

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ABSTRACT

The Joan Gili Lecture, centrepiece of the annual conference of the Anglo-Catalan Society, provides the opportunity to promote Catalan culture through media which are accessible and transnational. In this context, the present study offers an aural snapshot of the Folk Revival and Civil Rights movements both globally and in the Catalan-speaking areas. Particular attention is paid to the theoretical antagonism frequently posited between issues of an ethical and aesthetical nature. A critical reading of two classic songs of the period, “Diamonds and Rust” by Joan Baez and “Canço a Mahalta” by Lluís Llach, are adduced to show, however, that such tension is little more than a smokescreen. Both elements tend rather to combine to produce the finest examples of the creativity of the period.

KEYWORDS

Folk Revival; Aesthetics; Civil Rights; Protest; Joan Baez; Lluís Llach; Màrius Torres

At the time of my first Anglo-Catalan Society conference in the autumn of 1977, the world was a very different place. Catalonia had been stripped of her historical institutions and autonomy. Her political leaders, including the President of the Generalitat, worked clandestinely or were still in exile. Pro-freedom protestors were savagely beaten by fascist gangs aided and abetted by the police. Arrests were common, on utterly spurious charges, of those who took to the streets to advocate freedom and reform. A full four decades later in the autumn of 2017, when I received the invitation to deliver the Joan Gili Lecture, Catalonia had been stripped of her historic institutions and autonomy under Article 155 of the Spanish Constitution. Her political leaders faced imprisonment or, in the case of the President de la Generalitat, were forced into exile. Ordinary people on their way to vote were savagely beaten by police and Civil Guard. Arrests were common, on utterly specious charges, of those who took to the streets to advocate freedom and reform.

Happily, during this same period, a transition of a palpably more convincing

nature characterised the ethos of academia in Britain and Ireland with regard to the discipline of Catalan Studies. For example, my initial course of doctoral research carried out in the 1970s— the literary avant-garde with a focus on poets J. V. Foix and Joan Salvat-Papasseit— had the ultimate aim of contributing to an academic apology for the quality of the voice of this national minority among the European chorus. In an environment which viewed each language of the faculty vertically, as a discrete area of knowledge —impervious, non-porous and brittle— creative expression in Catalan might not enjoy the cultural richness of French, Russian or German; but an appreciation of its yet unrecognised quality and depth might help the subject carve out a similarly hermetic niche within the mainstream of philology.

In due course, over the next two decades, the exclusive verticality attached to philology —an elitism epitomised by the primacy of national literature— was to crumble, as Cultural Studies came to offer a far more pluralistic avenue for the penetration and perception of voices from all sectors of society, including that of the national minority. If literature now had to share centre stage with the popularity of other creative genres, the rigid division in Modern Languages gave way, in turn, to a plurilingual mestissage in which the Catalan contribution to the international chorus could be appreciated transversally. Transnationality rose to prominence, and was to showcase a Catalan element in studies of major significance and, most importantly, at all levels. Since the turn of the century, for example, Cambridge has seen its tripos awash with Catalanists—a yearly average of some thirty-five, about a third of the intake of Hispanists, across the three undergraduate levels available. More impressively, over the past five years, ongoing doctoral research devoted to the Peninsula has contained an emphatic Catalan element within the pan-hispanic spectrum: Linguistics, Cinema, Feminism, Education, Politics and the Press.

Needless to say, the advantage of such a perspective is that our discipline is no longer marginalised, peripheral or peculiar. Along with the case of minority cultures elsewhere in the world, the Catalan experience is typical of acute transversal tensions which are tearing apart the comfortable orthodoxy of mainstream post-imperial states. To this effect, the horizontal, popular mix is to be celebrated for its inclusivity and melange. And it is precisely this perspective that I would like to consider today in a comparative exposition of this phenomenon in the medium of folk music.

Unlike literature with its intricate linguistic bar, music immediately unites people of different traditions. Its spontaneity, immediacy and commonality attest, in turn, a rudimentary aestheticism. Little erudition is required to appreciate a popular medium open to all in the expression of a human experience we all share, within confines we all recognise. Such is the case of the folk revival of the 1960s and 1970s, especially in the USA, Spain and Ireland. Despite the variety in systems of government —few would

compare military autocracy with democracy—the *nova cançó*’s militant confrontation with dictatorship dovetailed seamlessly into a transcontinental network of protest in defence of Human Rights. As was evinced by problems of race in the USA and sectarianism in the North of Ireland—and as the discomfort of their perdurance reminds us still—a modern democratic system does not preclude institutional abuse and injustice, especially if condoned by less than accountable political, legal or administrative machinery.

In global terms, the link between folk music and the mass protest of Civil Rights against social injustice was forged in 1950s America. The denunciation of racism, first and foremost, counted on the active support of singers of the stature of Woody Guthrie, Pete Seeger and a group as amorphous as The Weavers. The solidity of these foundations and the immediacy of the support it attracted gave rise to a monumental following in the next decade with a new generation of musical activists of whom John Denver, Peter, Paul and Mary, Joan Baez and Bob Dylan would be the most representative. Their music went hand in hand with social engagement and their performances were replete with denunciations of injustice or the iniquity of the Vietnam war.

The movement followed a similar course in Ireland where traditional forms were recovered by the McPeake family in 1950s Belfast, a reawakening which scaled new heights in the following decade with the immense international popularity of the Dubliners, Clancy Brothers, Planxty and Chieftains to name but a few.

In the parlance of today, the folk revival went viral, reaching out across frontiers of states, class and languages. Mass protest went hand in hand with folk anthems, paradigmatic of which would be “We shall overcome”. This black spiritual, as revived by the genius of Pete Seeger, was intoned at every Civil Rights march from the USA to the North of Ireland. This was the song sung in denunciation of apartheid by Senator Bobby Kennedy in his tour of South Africa in 1966. He sang it from the roof of his car: before declarations from the roofs of cars were ruled seditious by senior judges of a “modern democracy”. It was intoned before the last homily offered by Martin Luther King four days before his assassination. What is more—and as is recorded in the eponymous film of 2002—it was the anthem chanted by those demonstrating in Derry prior to the Bloody Sunday massacre of 1972. The experience was reflected exactly in the Països Catalans in both ethical and aesthetical terms. The polyfacetic Setze Jutges, founded in 1961 after much groundwork in the 1950s, morphed into the genius of a troupe of *cantautors* like Raimon, Llach, Serrat, Pi de la Serra, Ovidi Montllor, *i un llarg etcètera*. Similarly, key anthems like the signature “Blowing in the Wind” were incorporated directly into the local repertoire and embraced at political meetings with other homegrown ever-presents like “Al vent” by Raimon or “L’estaca” by Llach.

And, in terms of global assimilation, a clear consensus emerged surrounding the central axes which defined the experience in both Europe and the Americas and might be adapted to our case as follows:

1. A clear ideological commitment which characterised or, in the opinion of some commentators, determined the aesthetics of the experience (Street 2000, 299–305).
2. The condition of *cantautors* which was afforded to protagonists whose inspiration and production, despite emanating from a basic social dissatisfaction, could range from the socially aware to the amorphous and idiosyncratic (Aragüez Rubio 2006, 86–89).

Although nearly all commentators have accepted the validity of these elements, a clear partiality in reception has lingered, especially regarding the primacy of the former. As Mark Marqusee (2003) has pointed out, certain constituencies continued to consider overt political denunciation as a *sine qua non* of this creativity.¹ This more restrictive vision, for example, will be familiar to students of modern verse in the *Països Catalans* where critical assessment of the literary experience in the sister genre of poetry became similarly set in stone, reduced to a simplistic dyad in the epoch-defining anthology of 1963, *Poesia catalana del segle XX*, elaborated by Josep Maria Castellet and Joaquim Molas. According to this classificatory hypothesis which was to become engrained, poetic creativity was to find itself—and remain for the next half century—divided exclusively into verse of social commitment (*poesia social*), on the one hand, and lyrical experiment (*formalisme*) on the other.²

As such, it is with the determination of avoiding this reductive, programmatic binary and to celebrate the latent combination of aestheticism with ethical intent that I propose analysis of two key songs from the movement: Lluís Llach's majestic "Cançó a Mahalta" (1974) and the heartwrenching "Diamonds and Rust" (1975) by Joan Baez. Both offerings are particularly relevant in this context. Firstly, the artists concerned could not be more militant in profile. Llach's social commitment is legendary from his frequent contretemps with the regime to his present protagonism, as an independentist politician, in the defence of democracy, justice and the national rights of Catalonia. Joan Baez rejoices in the similar status of an anti-establishment militant. In biography.com, for example, she is described as an: "anti-war activist, environmental activist, Civil Rights activist, singer, women's rights activist, children's activist, songwriter, guitarist (1941–)" ("Joan Baez" 2020).

In both cases, then, the first principle outlined above could be readily applied.

¹ The exchange described by Marqusee between Dylan and a member of the audience at a concert in London reveals the dogmatic simplicity of the mindset which equates politics and overt protest in folk music: "When a disappointed punter at the Albert Hall called out for 'protest songs', a frustrated Dylan replied: 'Oh come on, these are all protest songs'" (Marqusee 2003).

² For a critique of this brittle and exclusive paradigm see Keown (1996), especially 27–93.

However, within this highly politicised framework, it remains essential to respect the creative inclusivity suggested by the second consideration where, as will be seen, formalistic concern comes to represent a fundamental element in production which affords a convincing aesthetic edge to the artistry overall and the impact of the social critique.

Diamonds and Rust

The brief but intense love-affair between Baez and Dylan is part of folk-revival history. And the couple's subsequent, acrimonious separation has been frequently explained from the perspective of ideology. Baez was persistently at the forefront of militant resistance to the establishment. In fact, in many ways, her militancy was almost a necessary part of her understanding of performance. And many commentators have outlined how ethics and aesthetics became confused in a simplistic explication of their break-up. Whilst certainly a fellow-traveller, Dylan was less overtly active and, despite the iconic status of such anthems as "Blowing in the Wind" and "The Times They Are A-Changin'", came to shun a previous protagonism within the movement.

Baez was top gun when they started, with her haunting renditions of classic folk ballads, bringing them to a mainstream audience for the first time. But, as one commentator explained, the genre had to generate new material to become a leading edge in modern music, and that simply left her in Dylan's dust. (Bob Dylan's evolution during the 1961–66 period from folk singer to "voice of a generation" to rock star is captured in Martin Scorsese's 2005 documentary, *No Direction Home*.) Baez detailed how Dylan rejected the openly political role she wanted him to play—which she herself played out to such a life-defining degree—and how now she would never have insisted on that. As political issues became more foggy (with integration and Vietnam off the table), the Dylan approach turned into a better career choice (Peele 2009).

Dylan's increasing hesitancy in militancy was taken as a rejection of a previously committed stance. Such a reading is both superficial and misleading. In fact, Mark Marqusee has described precisely how, in aesthetic terms, Dylan's denunciation of social injustice is no less acute, merely more sophisticated or ideological in terms of creative imagination rather than straightforwardly political.

Dylan's break with politics and the movement that had been his first inspiration unleashed his poetic and musical genius; it freed him to explore an inner landscape. His lyrics became more obscure; coherent narrative was jettisoned in favour of carnivalesque surrealism; the austerity of the acoustic folk troubadour was replaced by the hedonistic extravagance of an electrified rock n roll ensemble. The songs depicted a private universe—but one forged in response to tumultuous public events.

It's remarkable that so many of Dylan's left critics failed to see the politics that

infuse his masterworks of the mid-sixties. “Maggie’s Farm” —booed by purists at the Newport folk festival— fuses class and generational rage in an uncompromising renunciation of wage labour (Marqusee 2003).

The point which needs iteration, I feel, is that the phenomenon need not be predicated on the limited polarity of an either/or situation. It is simply that artists responded to the whole spectrum of lyrical possibilities at their disposal: from the banality of the prosaic, on the one hand, to formalistic indulgence on the other. The statement holds true, I will suggest, even in the case of Baez herself where, with “Diamonds and Rust”, we see the practitioner *par excellence* of the most straightforward banal idiom, indulging in formalist extravagance to spectacular effect. That is to say, in a creative language which should, allegedly, be alien to her.

On the surface, the narrative offers a wilfully prosaic account of how the author is awoken to the intensity of her past feelings by a phone call from her former lover. In true down-to-earth fashion of social realist style, the lexis is open and communicative and the register is flat and straightforward, almost devoid of metaphor. The low-key idiom enhances the sincerity of the discourse, culminating in the directness of the confession “Yes I loved you dearly”. On this superficial level, the only element with any real lyrical depth is the melody which, combining with the power and rich musicality of Baez’s voice, underlines with its insistent and plangent cadence, the intensity of the nostalgia and its inevitable, haunting return. In this light, the song is a declaration of emotional solidarity and intimacy perfectly suited to its ethos of artless commitment.

Well, I’ll be damned!
Here comes your ghost
Again. But that’s not
Unusual, it’s just that the
Moon is full and you
Happened to call.

And here I sit,
Hand on the telephone
Hearing a voice I’d known
A couple of light years ago
Heading straight for a fall.

As I remember your eyes
Were bluer than robin’s eggs.
My poetry was lousy you said
Where are you calling from?
A booth in the midwest.

Ten years ago
I bought you some cufflinks.
You brought me something.
We both know what memories can bring
They bring diamonds and rust.

Well, you burst on the scene
Already a legend.
The unwashed phenomenon,
The original vagabond,
You strayed into my arms.
And there you stayed,
Temporarily lost at sea;
The Madonna was yours for free.
Yes, the girl on the half-shell
Would keep you unharmed.

Now I see you standing
With brown leaves falling around
And snow in your hair.
Now you're smiling out the window
Of that crummy hotel
Over Washington Square.

Our breath comes out white [clouds
Mingles and hangs in the air.
Speaking strictly for me

We both could have died then and there.
Now you're telling me
You're not nostalgic
Then give me another word for it

You who are so good with words
And at keeping things vague.

We both could have died then and there.
Now you're telling me
You're not nostalgic
Then give me another word for it
You who are so good with words
And at keeping things vague.

Because I need some of that vagueness now
It's all come back too clearly.
Yes, I loved you dearly
And if you're offering me diamonds and rust,
I've already paid. (Bing n.d.)

Despite its putative ingenuousness, the expression is nuanced and charged. There is much jousting of a subtle, metacritical nature as the sentimental antagonism between the lovers is transmitted in terms of the familiar divergence in aesthetics. On the one hand, the banality of Baez's creativity is underlined by a simplicity in expression. The location—living room/phone booth—is as prosaic as her ironic gift of cuff-links to the “original vagabond” and the simplistic verbal excess which describes the moment of passionate intimacy in a crummy hotel room, grinding into an unnerving and unmeasured climax. This corresponds precisely to the artless sincerity of Baez's poetic register which Dylan had dismissed, perhaps appropriately but unfeelingly, as “lousy”. But the vengeance is devastating. The alleged sophistication of mastercraftsman Dylan, the great wordsmith, would-be prophet and, as a crowning achievement, Nobel laureate for literature in 2016, is soon divested of any intricate value and reduced to pure vacuity. The sum total of what her former lover gave is blank indefiniteness: a vacuous and meaningless “you brought me something”. His creative genius is purely cosmetic—Dylan is, ironically, “so good with words”—yet his verbal conjuring and its putative intensity is emptied into the artless formula of “keeping things vague”.

The significance of this discursive strategy is not unfamiliar to students of poetry. In his seminal *Anxiety of Influence* (1973), Harold Bloom had described the strategies employed by the antagonistic poet for denying the authority of the master or rival. In the revisionary ratio he labels *Askesis*, or the movement of self-purgation, the poetic contender voids their own expression, emptying themselves out and, by association and extension, nullifies the significance of the competitor. This is exactly what Baez is doing here: belittling her own poetic skills and, through this process of demeaning, denying Dylan his status as a major creative figure.

What is more, the accompanying tactic which Bloom terms *Apophrades* is also employed. *Apophrades*, of course, was the impure period in ancient Athens when

temples closed and the dead returned to inhabit the houses where they once lived. The ploy involves the invocation of the ghost of the rival to effect a proleptic comparison with the vitality and strength of the ephebe, now mature and empowered —exactly the tone of confident self-assurance articulated throughout by Baez and crowned by the triumphant resolution of the You/I dialectic in the last stanza and final dismissal of her former lover.

The uncanny raising of the dead explains the extended ghostly metaphor of the opening strophes enhanced by the haunting ululation of melody and cadence as the demons venture abroad. The interjection “damned” of the first line, for example, could not be more idiomatic; however, in this spectral environment, the eerie mood of necrophilia is extended metaphorically into the gothic genre of literature and film. Star-crossed (or damned) lovers from Faust and Don Álvaro to Count Dracula loom large as myth and the horror genre combine. Just as with myth and legend the experience is non-chronometric, “a couple of light years ago”. This is precisely the timeless moment when the dead—or the undead—return to do aesthetic battle with the living.

The archetypal condition is, of course, enhanced by the full moon and biblical dimension afforded to Dylan who, like Milton’s Lucifer, is “heading straight for a fall”. A fall which is ethical as much as apocalyptic; and corresponds no doubt to the abandonment of the praxis of creative militancy and its characteristic idiom. The act of revolt or betrayal is described iconographically by the seminal constants of art history. The struggle is that of heaven against hell, good against evil with Baez cast as the chaste and innocent Madonna. Botticelli’s goddess of love on the half shell, significantly this all modest *Venus Pudica*, will be undone by her seducer, yet another of the dishevelled legion of outlaws and villains—Bohemian and menacingly anti-establishment—who, like Don Juan, feature prominently as the pirates, wanderers and shipwrecks of literature and film with their demonic and subversive glamour, fatal charm and ultimate betrayal and flight.

As the crescendo rises to the climax of the lovemaking, however, the aesthetic indulgence in art history turns disturbingly real. Artistic paradigm is deconstructed by female agency as immediate, copulative intimacy is articulated by the narrative mundanity of the lexis. Significantly, coitus is conveyed by an excessive outpouring of near impossible scansion—particularly evocative of the excess of Bataille’s *plethora*—conveying a transcendent interaction of emotion, physicality and spirituality registered by the mingling of the white clouds of the lovers’ respiration in a manner of the erotic ecstasy of mortality as mapped out by the French polymath. Needless to say, the subversive, libertarian and revolutionary connotations of the register cohere incisively with the debate about artistic militancy central to the deliberation.

The urge is first of all a natural one but it cannot be given free reign without barriers being torn down, so much so that the natural urge and the demolished

obstacles are confused in the mind. The natural urge means the barrier destroyed. The barrier destroyed means the natural urge. Demolished barriers are not the same as death but just as the violence of death overturns —irrevocably— the structure of life, so, temporarily and partially, does sexual violence. Indeed, Christian theology identifies the moral degradation following the sins of the flesh with death. Inevitably linked at the moment of climax, there is a minor rupture suggestive of death; and conversely the idea of death may play a part in setting sensuality in motion. This mostly adds up to a sense of transgression dangerous to general stability and the conservation of life, and without it the instincts could not run their course unhindered (Bataille 1986, 106–07).

The bitter, nostalgic accusation of the conclusion underlines the duality insisted upon throughout and the superiority —in all key areas— of the position defended by Baez. Emotionally, her sincerity and constancy are admirable. Ethically, she has not deviated from her commitment to social justice. Aesthetically, her straightforward idiom —a creative correlative of these two previous qualities— dismantles the putative pre-eminence of Dylan's poetic flourish through the strategies described by Bloom. What is not explicitly stated, of course, but ingeniously discernible from the musicality and nuanced depth of the lyrics, is that, as a work of art, her song is the equal of any of the most intricate contributions of her rival. All in all, in terms of imagination, allusion and aestheticism, the number is a magnificent creative composition. It is, in fact, positively and consciously artful —an exercise in metapoetics, in fact— especially in the ingenious manner in which its formal sophistication is used to present, paradoxically, an apology for precisely the opposite: that is to say, simplicity in expression.

Cançó a Mahalta

The similarly misleading divide imagined in the context of the modern Catalan lyric, between the dour commitment of *poesia social* and intricate ethereality of *formalisme*, could be exploded quite simply by reference to the work of Lluís Llach. One need only posit the album *Com un arbre nu* (1972), wherein, as seen from the table of tracks, social satire combines effortlessly with intense aestheticism to offer an example of symbiosis rather than division. The LP opens with the satirical “La gallineta” whose ironic tone is echoed in “Madame” and then again in the swipe at the censor in “Bon senyor”.

This public and frivolous subversion, however, finds counterpoint in the plangent evocation of repression, both individual and communal, of the eponymous track. Here the despondency and torment are intensely aesthetic in conception. The care in production and orchestration is exemplified by the precision of the *fortíssimo* in the refrain. And the raw edge to the lyrics, epitomised by the taut anaphora of Marchian simile of the tortured isolation imposed by Franco's repressive regime. In a more

nostalgic register, the hauntingly melodic “Ma tristesa” offers, alternatively, a wistful lamentation decrying the denial of freedom synonymous with the dictatorship, a constant of the record in its entirety.

An identical *modus operandi* accompanies the next album, *I si canto trist* (1974), which repeats the successful balance between ethics and aesthetics where, as Marqusee described with regard to Dylan, songs “conjure up a particular universe, forged as a response to public events of immense importance, where themes of acute social relevance rub shoulders with the despair induced by this same social context”. The album includes Llach’s majestic adaptation of Màrius Torres’s verse, the “Cançó a Mahalta”. And, coming at this song from the opposite direction, I would like to consider how this symbolist-inspired composition, plucked from the pantheon of pure poetry, betrays a brazen political commitment as impactful as the verse of the social realist school. As with Baez’s melodic confession, the poem describes at the simplest level the frustrated relationship of love between the tubercular poet and his muse, Mercè Figuera, both of whom were interned in the sanatorium at Puig d’Olena, Sant Quirze Safaja, in the 1930s.

Corren les nostres ànimes com dos rius paral·lels.
Fem el mateix camí sota els mateixos cels.

No podem acostar les nostres vides calmes:
Entre els dos hi ha una terra de xiprers i de palmes.

En els meandres grocs de lliris, verds de pau,
Sento, com si em seguís, el teu batec suau.

I escolto la teva aigua tremolosa i amiga,
De la font a la mar, la nostra pàtria antiga.

Striking from the start is the simple yet intense musicality of the piece which renders Llach’s interpretation as evocative as the Baez offering. The same lyrical crescendo and excitation, balanced by the deepest of cadences, is almost overpowering. The rhythmic fluency and diction—enhanced by the repetition of the second line of each doublet—conveys magnificently the toing and froing of the fluvial drift which Torres evokes so emotively within the temporal flux.

Once again, on the superficial level—and consistent with the biographical account—the narrative is a plangent incantation to the impossibility of affective union. Thus constrained, the lives of poet and muse run parallel and, despite the intimacy of this proximity, cannot be merged or brought closer. In line with the Symbolist transformation inherited by the *poesia pura* tradition, however, allusion and metaphor are seen to imbue the discourse with a much more generic, or basic dimension, lifting

the experience from the frustration and failure of the individual context. As with Baez's song, the composition is as much about literature as it is about love. The insistent reference to waterways, of course, harks back to the origins of Western verse: that is to say, to the trope of Heraclitus —the vision of life as inescapable, aquatic flow— which would become a constant in the later European tradition. In this respect, the oscillation of Llach's phrasing and the coming and going of the insistent, undulatory rhythm is especially impressive.

Indeed, this same layering is mirrored in the depth of the lexis which, despite its constraint, is resoundingly evocative. The parallel rivers, for example, not only evoke the immediacy of the personal experience celebrated among the tributaries, rivulets and flood channels which feed into the Riera de Tenes at Sant Quirze Safaja, but return us inevitably, in true symbolist fashion, to the generality of their millenary counterparts, the similarly parallel Tigris and Euphrates. It was here, in the fertile crescent of Mesopotamia (in Greek the "land between two rivers"), that our civilization first dawned as the course of Western culture, "de la font a la mar", becomes superimposed on the particularity of this location.

In keeping with this melding of individual and universal, there is a corresponding drift towards union, albeit of a more ethereal nature, which transcends the explicit notion of inescapable separation. In the first couplet, a tension is established between division, on the one hand, as "*les nostres ànimes*" are seen as "*dos rius paral·lels*", and unity, on the other, as they traverse "*el mateix camí sota els mateixos cels*". The second couplet underlines the intransigence of this apposition which cannot be fused despite the syntactic effort to conjoin (*no podem acostar les nostres vides calmes/ entre els dos hi ha una terra de xiprers i palmes*). However, the situation is resolved in the final lines with characteristic symbolist elegance as unity is envisaged on a deeper metaphorical plain.

The effect is achieved sensually in the third couplet where separation is superseded by a synthesis conveyed by transferred epithet. In the scopic conflation of "*meandres grocs de lliris*", for example, the adjectival quality is not limited to the lilies but also becomes attached, or transferred, to the meanders. This synaesthetic amalgam is further enhanced by the chromatic fusion implied by the lexeme "*verds de pau*" where abstraction is compounded in the metaphor with the inclusion of the quality of hope conveyed by the colour green in the Mediterranean tradition. Indeed —and again in true symbolist vein— this oneness is confirmed conceptually by the essence of the beloved as perceived sensuously rather than cerebrally, "*sento (...) el teu batec suau; escolto la teva aigua, tremulosa i amiga*".

Here the power of zeugma —wherein disparate elements are connected grammatically— and sibilance, which enhances the same conjunction phonically,

underline the allusive union and its intensity. To this effect, the grammatical status of the word “amiga”, understood both as a noun and an adjective, is also noted. More to the point: just which noun do the final adjectives qualify? Is it “la teva aigua” or the “pàtria antiga”? Or, as I suspect, a mixture of both.

Needless to say, the implication of aural and visual elements here is of fundamental importance. Whilst imagery and euphony might impress with their sensuousness, their corresponding faculties are also instrumental in the perception of transcendence. The point is significant within the pure poetry tradition. It was precisely through the senses, the etymological root of aestheticism, that a pathway to the absolute could be perceived, as is appreciated so diaphanously in Torres’s magnificent amalgam of lyrical values. Here again, mention should be made of the sensuality of Llach’s musical version with its rich diction, controlled crescendo, climactic apostrophe and plangent, reiterated cadence.

Curiously —and despite the aesthetic surge— the final line effects a surprising return to the present and its immediacy. Life as an inevitable flux may be lamented as general to the human condition. The poetic landscape may well evoke, in its primordially, the permanence of human experience from its inception at the dawn of civilisation. However, the “pàtria antiga” of Torres and Mahalta is not only mythic or archetypal; it is also ancestral and current. Catalonia has an ancient history of its very own from the medieval age onwards. And, just as with Espriu’s Sinera, the insistence on the scenery and topology of Sant Quirze Safaja requires the accompanying acceptance of the immediate dimension to the experience. In fact, the relevance of the word “pàtria” in the contemporary discourse of key political figures from Prat de la Riba to Francesc Macià, necessitates it. In this way, the poem is no mere wistful evocation of the life flux within the perennial reservoir of continental culture. It is also a lament for Catalonia and its precarious condition during the Second Republic, Civil War and aftermath. From this perspective, the condition of the nation is parallel to that of the lovers where the frustration of failed (geo)physical consummation finds compensation in the fact of an irreplaceable spiritual immanence.

In this respect, I hope to have touched not only on the singularity —by this I mean excellence— of the cultural contribution of the Catalan-speaking countries but also to have indicated the centrality of their voice —and indeed that of its critical response— to the mainstream of the European experience. Catalan history, like its language and culture, is not marginal, eccentric or peculiar but representative of the experience of peripheral nations of Europe and America —those millions of souls who have survived, kicking and screaming, the long night of empire, centralist repression and institutional neglect.

As such, the experience of Catalan speakers forms an intrinsic part of European

modernity from the Baltic states, now mercifully restored, to the Celtic fringe of our own islands down to the Iberian Peninsula, eastwards across the islands to Italy, the Balkans, the Black Sea and beyond. And our Society, which reaches seniority in 2019 as it completes its sixty-fifth year, should and will continue to promote awareness of this experience and the national, cultural and linguistic riches it supposes.

However, just as Màrius Torres and Mahalta cannot escape the very physical presence of their country and its condition, despite their immersion in the poetic tradition, our Society should and will showcase not only the cultural artefact but also defend vigorously the democracy, freedom and respect which are the rights of all nations and their members. These were the values of our founders—both academics from these islands and political refugees from the brutality of centralist repression. Both strands run parallel, like the rivers evoked by the poet. And both are inseparable parts of our mission. With the “terra de xiprers i palmes”, a synecdoche for the Catalan-speaking areas, lying permanently between them.

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