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The Joan Gili Memorial Lecture Series

Editor's Introductory Note to the Series

It is with great pleasure that the *Journal of Catalan Studies* relaunches the publication of the edited Joan Gili Memorial Lecture Series. In its 1999 issue, and in memory of his death in Oxford on 6 May 1998, the *Journal* published a full biography of Joan Gili, detailing his life as an antiquarian book-seller, publisher, translator and defender of Catalan letters.¹ Given Gili's contribution to the Society, as founder member in 1954 and later President, it was unanimously agreed that the keynote at its Annual Conference would henceforth be given in his name. With an illustrious list of speakers since its inception in 1999, the range of topics comprising the Joan Gili Memorial Lecture Series are a testimony to the enduring strength and dynamism of the field.² Moreover, in the true spirit of the Society and of Gili himself to disseminate and promote Catalan culture, it was agreed that these lectures should be edited and/or translated to be made available for future consultation. This task, which was originally undertaken by the Anglo-Catalan Society's Occasional Publications (ACSOP) in the form of printed pamphlets until 2011, will now be resumed in digital format as part of a dedicated section in the *Journal's* standard issues. The first lecture for publication as part of this revived series is that delivered by Jaume Pérez Montaner at the 58th Annual Anglo-Catalan Society Conference held at the University of Sheffield in November 2012. Originally presented in Catalan as “Fuster i Estellés: 20 anys després”, following with ACSOP tradition, the text has been translated into English (by Dominic Keown) and edited for publication by the *Journal*.

¹ The full text can be found at:

<https://www.uoc.edu/jocs/2/articles/jgili/index.html> [accessed 10 December 2023].

² A list of the lectures 1999 to 2011 with their accompanying texts can be found at:

<https://anglo-catalan.org/wp/publications/joan-gili-memorial-lectures/> [accessed 10 December 2023].

Twenty Years Without Joan Fuster and Vicent Andrés Estellés

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It is not that Catalans – or Valencians – have any great fondness for the type of commemoration implied by the title of this lecture. However, I have no doubt that, given the political and social situation of our country and its literature, such acts of remembrance are always appropriate to extend the horizons and influence of our most significant authors, affording them an audience which is more widespread than the norm. Equally valid – and important – of course, is the fact these retrospectives afford the opportunity to re-read these same writers and rediscover aspects of their creativity which had slipped by unnoticed; or to celebrate that their work lives on still and may continue to be a significant fount of knowledge and inspiration.

Recently, in 2012, we observed the ninetieth anniversary of the birth of Joan Fuster (1922–1992) and the twentieth of his passing. It is also sixty years since the publication of *Nosaltres, els valencians* (1963), his groundbreaking thesis confirming the Catalan basis of Valencian identity. Six decades have also passed since the first entry of his *Diari 1952–1960* (1969), whose first offering was the booklet *Figures de temps* (1957), winner of the first edition of the Josep Yxart Prize. It is also just over forty years since the publication of *Literatura catalana contemporània* (1971), his seminal overview which has become both touchstone and *point de départ* for any and every appreciation of Catalan letters in the modern age.

The above affords quite a list – albeit brief or incomplete – of reasons for recent Fusterian celebrations which, in the main, have had their focus on a whole host of activities and publications like the “Simposi Internacional Joan Fuster, figura de temps,” held at Barcelona University in early May 2012; or a fairly long list of books of which the most worthy of mention would be Pau Viciano, *De Llorente a Marx: Estudis sobre l’obra cívica de Joan Fuster* (2012) and, especially, Josep Iborra’s monograph, *Humanisme i nacionalisme en*

l'obra de Joan Fuster (2012), both of which appeared in the Publicacions Universitàries de València.

Recognition of the contribution of the cultural *agent-provocateur* from Sueca should, of course, be considered in conjunction with the poet Vicent Andrés Estellés (1924–1993). With the aim of remembering the twentieth anniversary of his death, the so-called Acadèmia Valenciana de la Llengua – the institution established locally by the controlling state parties to supplant the Institut d'Estudis Catalans and legislate redundantly on the language of the Valencians – decided to name him “writer of the year,” programming numerous events to this effect. Worthy of mention amongst these are the itinerant exhibition on the poet's life and works, a voluminous collective study devoted to his output, *L'obra literària de Vicent Andrés Estellés: Gèneres, tradicions poètiques i estil* (2013), edited by Vicent Salvador and Manuel Pérez Saldanya, together with a series of grants to relevant popular institutions mainly in the sphere of education – such as the Escola Valenciana – in order to raise consciousness about the poet from Burjassot.

As with Fuster, the importance of Estellés has grown exponentially over recent decades, transcending even the ever-restrictive limitations which sadly configure the world of verse. Besides the numerous studies devoted recently to his work, which it would be impossible now to mention in any exhaustive manner, I would like to reflect more particularly on another related area. I refer, of course, to the function of this writer as catalyst for a variety of initiatives that explore the myriad of possibilities implicit in his verse with regard to the performing arts. Indeed, Xavier Fàbregas had already glimpsed this fact previously when he declared in his prologue to *Oratoris del nostre temps* that Estellés's eclogues “contain dramatic material of the first magnitude and incite the imagination to creativity” (1978, 8–9).

Manuel Molins was one of the first to try to bring this poetry to the stage in a series of plays, including *Crònica especial* and *Vaixell de boira*, two theatrical projects of 1976 nipped in the bud by the censorship of the time. That same year, his stage version of “Oratory on the Death of Victor Jara” (1978) was performed, albeit fleetingly, at the University of Alacant. It is, however, only latterly that scripts inspired by Estellés's verse have begun to be produced in the theatre, to great acclaim from audience and critics alike: *Poseu-me les ulleres* (Put us on my specs) from 2010, written and directed by Pep Tosar; *Coral romput* (Broken chorus) directed by Joan Ollé in 2008; or the documentary *Cos mortal* (Mortal body)

(2009), written and directed by the talented newcomers Carles Chiner and Antoni Sendra. It would be unthinkable also not to single out for mention the magnificent collection of critical articles devoted to the poet and edited by Lluís Roda which formed the extraordinary number of *Reduccions*, the specialist poetry journal of the Universitat de Vic published in April 2011.

As we reflect on the career of this irrepressible duo, the first thing that stands out is that, unlike the great majority of writers from Catalonia – but completely in keeping with the experience of most of their Valencian counterparts of the post-war period – both Joan Fuster and Vicent Andrés Estellés started their literary adventure writing or publishing in Spanish. Fuster with texts on the history of his hometown in the local and provincial journal, *Víspera: Revista de las fiestas valencianas*. His first articles (1945; 1945b) offer a clear example of his constant interest in anything related to the history of his locality. As do the numerous, chronicles and reviews which appeared in *Verbo*, or *Cuadernos literarios*, the journal he co-directed with his friend José Albi. Poetry, on the other hand – and apart from very few exceptions like the collection entitled *Barro de siempre*, submitted unsuccessfully for the Adonais prize – was written directly in the mother tongue.

Vicent Andrés Estellés's beginnings were not dissimilar; or were even more affected by the dominant influence of Spanish verse of the moment. Such a reaction might only be considered logical for a particularly young poet, resident in Madrid as a student at the school of journalism during those early post-war years. This is true to such an extent that, bearing in mind his output as a whole, we could talk about his early writing being in no small way heir to or even representative of the aesthetic of *Garcilasismo*, so much in vogue at this time in Spain and which extended its influence throughout the 1940s and well into the 1950s. In keeping with the retrospective martial virtues of the regime, this tendency found, in the diaphanous, neoplatonic verse of the Castilian courtier and soldier Garcilaso de la Vega (1501–1536), the nobility of a virtuous spiritual order whose compensatory allegory offered a means of lyrical escape from the dictatorship and its sordid reality of death, famine, injustice, and corruption.

And Estellés's verse of the period offers numerous consistencies with the work of those contemporaries who published in reviews such as *Garcilaso*, *Fantasía*, and so forth; although perhaps his own creative discourse of those very early

years tended to coincide more with the neo-romanticism characteristic of a rival journal, *Espadaña*, and other publications less overtly compliant with the regime and more consonant with the difficulties and problems of a country which lay entirely in ruins. This element becomes patent with reference to many of the poems which were written and published in Spanish, particularly the collection *Pájaros en la niebla* published in 1945 in precisely one of these magazines, *Fantasia*. Similar qualities may well be also characteristic of some of the early work written in Catalan; although these may be seen to have more in common with the new tendencies of the moment, crystallized by *Hijos de la ira* (1944) by Dámaso Alonso and *Sombra del paraíso* (1944) by Vicente Aleixandre, which, in the austerity of their tone and acute realism of their social projection were to establish a complete rupture with the previous aesthetic of lyrical escapism as embraced by *Garcilasismo*.

It is curious to observe, as have many perceptive commentators, the evident correspondence between some of the stylistic traits apparent in the poetry of Joan Fuster and that of Estellés's first lyrical essays in Catalan. These would include a penchant for chaotic enumeration and frequent recourse to the disjunctive to connect concepts with little or no interrelation; though it is also true that these are also features common to the verse of Pablo Neruda and Vicente Aleixandre. It is also worthy of note that, many years later, Fuster was wont on more than one occasion to express his regret that the work of the distinguished Romanist Leo Spitzer, author of such monographs as *La enumeración caótica en la poesía moderna* (1945) so dear to the essayist's heart, had fallen into oblivion. Any reader of Estellés's output of the 1950s – from his masterful first book of eclogues, a nail in the coffin for the irrelevance of *Garcilasismo*, to the sordid banality of the challengingly confrontational *La clau que obri tots els panys* (written between 1954 and 1957 but not published until 1971) – could not fail to be impressed by the relevance of such deliberation.

The first encounter between Joan Fuster and Vicent Andrés Estellés seems to have taken place sometime towards the middle of July 1953, when Fuster was just beginning to put some distance between himself and the axis of Xavier Casp and Miquel Adlert. From their position of power at the Torre publishing house, this pair of cultural impresarios were to orchestrate and direct interest in the vernacular in the first two decades of the dictatorship though, in subsequent years, they would side with the linguistic secessionism of the anti-Catalan movement of the locality. In a

letter dating from the end of that same month of July of 1953, Fuster was to write to Santiago Bru from his hometown of Sueca that:

[A] couple of weeks ago I was present at a meeting of the literary grouping of 'la torre' on Cirilo Amorós where their new lyrical acquisition was presented to me; Andrés Estellés, that is. He seems like a decent lad, of pleasant conversation and amusing proportions. The poems of his I read were really quite good. I note, however, that he has become 'torrefied' a touch too swiftly...

(2006, 233-234)

From these accounts it is clear Joan Fuster is one of the writers and critics who most quickly realised the exceptional quality of Estellés's verse. His vast interest in every possible area of knowledge and, in particular, in literature of every possible type is already well established when he comes into contact with Estellés. It defines what Josep Palàcios refers to in his prologue to the *Obra completa/ Complete Works*) as "Two preliminary half-notes, played in rehearsal" and "the *progression* of Fuster's style a style which will continuously keep opening possibilities both in content and form for writers to come, particularly those from Valencia, although not exclusively so" (2002, LXVII). Possibilities which are probably beginning to take shape in the 1950s, affecting the most distinguished members of that same generation; and whose currency continues still, in terms both of content and form, in this second decade of the twenty-first century.

"The poems of his I read were really quite good," were Fuster's very words. And this was to be the first of the praise which would grow in tandem with the appearance of the early collections of the poet from Burjassot. A few months later, on November 22 of that same year, 1953, another poet with an excellent nose for new lyrical talent, Agustí Bartra, wrote to Fuster with reference to the *opera prima* of 1953, *Ciutat a cau d'orella* (City in the hollow of the ear): "In Estellés one senses the voice and stature of an authentic poet. We will be talking about him again in no time at all" (Fuster 1998, 216) Fuster's reply could not be clearer: "You think highly of Estellés. And I share your opinion. Only yesterday he was named as finalist in this year's Óssa Menor literary prize with a book entitled *Donzell amarg* (Bitter youth)" (1998, 222). A couple of months later Fuster's review of *Ciutat a cau*

d'orella appeared in the journal *Pont Blau* (1954, 162–64). And a year or two down the line, in a letter to Josep Maria Llompart, dated the 27 October 1956 and commenting on the state of literary material in Valencia—scarce but good in quality in his view—he places the poetry by his friend from the *horta* at the top of the tree. “For example, there is Andrés Estellés, who has some amazing stuff ready for publication” (2002, 301). Or again in his communication of 28 May 1958 with the distinguished Valencian philologist in exile Manuel Sanchis Guarner, he considers that *La clau que obri tots els panys* (The key which opens every lock) “is a great book” (2002, 256). There is also the praise that he heaps onto the poet in a letter to Josep Pla on 13 April 1962, when mentions the “extraordinary Vicent Andrés Estellés” (1997, 124). Towards the end of that same year, on October 19, 1962, he replied to a letter from the Catalan literary critic Joaquim Molas who, together with the Barcelona intellectual Josep Maria Castellet, was preparing what was to become a seminal anthology of Catalan poetry of the twentieth century:

Estellés has not published anything else, I don't think, since *Donzell amarg*. He has a collection in press called *La clau que obri tots els panys*, which, in my opinion, is a good book. From time to time (merely) even very realist and all. With a most amusing local dimension which your highly refined metropolitan antennae will not quite manage to pick up. However, Estellés is a strange creature, and the book, its proofs already corrected, is dying a death in the bottom drawer of the publisher—the blessed Institución Alfonso el Magnánimo of the Diputació Provincial de València. Estellés is a poet of greater quality than the majority of Palaus, Triadús, Barats, Romeus, etc., of my generation (which is his as well). His three works in print give no indication of his output which is fabulously expansive, ingeniously obscene in certain passages and of a very irregular quality. It is a particular shame that it remains largely unknown. The fault is his, of course.

Apart from Estellés there is little to write home about regarding the local poetry scene. A certain Rafael Villar has dashed off a couple of books, but he's a real prune.

(2010, 442–443)

It is certainly startling to reflect that, despite the fulsome praise of Fuster's words, the celebrated and extensive anthology of Castellet and Molas, *Poesia catalana del segle XX* (1963) ended up

including only three poems by the master from Burjassot: “Goig del carrer,” “Dama d’anit,” and a fragment of the “Third Eclogue.” In a lyrical world which was divided in the eyes of these Catalan anthologists by a schism imagined between the preferred “commitment” of realism and the “escapism” of aestheticism, he was perhaps not “realist” enough for their taste. Or did they take him to be a closet “formalist”? The “realism” they preached, one assumes, would inevitably exclude the lesser realities of Estellés, or those of avant-garde writer Joan Brossa, who did not appear at all in the book.

Be that as it may, what is patent is that Estellés’s poetry burst onto the scene as a revelation in the 1970s with the publication of *La clau que obri tots els panys* (1971), the *Llibre de meravelles* (1971b) and the first volume of the Complete Works in the following year. And definitive recognition of its quality would be cemented by the magnificent introduction by Joan Fuster which appeared in that first volume, “Nota provisional i improvisada sobre la poesia de Vicent Andrés Estellés” (1972b), obligatory reading for all those who want and have wanted to delve into the work of our poet.

Fuster’s fears about the impending “torrefaction” of the young Estellés were not to be confirmed. Quite the opposite. This would be flagged up by the writer from Sueca himself approximately a year after the entrance of Andrés Estellés into the Casp-Adlert circle, in a short note penned on 25 May 1954:

Interview with V. Andrés Estellés. He tells me he has put some distance between himself and the Adlert clan. He related some small incidents he has had with them. Estellés seems to be an over sensitive type of lad and, quite naturally, this would bring him into conflict with the crudity of Adlert and his system. He read me some poems from a new book he is putting together. I liked them.

(2004, 78)

The months later, on 10 August of that same year, back home from his participation in the Poetry Congress held in Santiago, he writes:

I’ve spent the afternoon with Estellés. He has broken all contact with the Casp-Adlert clan. It was inevitable. He told me that what set the ball in motion was the letter to *Destino*,

published in the number dated 31 July. Whichever way you look at it, that letter is utterly stupid. It says nothing new save for a couple of adjectives, disrespectful in tone, directed against people in the Institut [d'Estudis Catalans]...

(2004: 165-66)

The controversy had arisen from an article by Miquel Dolç, “Lorenzo Moyà yesterday and today” (1954, 23) in which the Majorcan poet outlined his opinion against the use, in literary language, of dialect and geotopical peculiarities. A few Balearic writers, like Blai Bonet, Josep Maria Llompart, and Jaume Vidal Alcover, disagreed with the deliberations expressed by Dolç. The Valencians of the Torre Group, for their part, took the side of Bonet, Llompart and Vidal Alcover in a letter entitled “Unity and Exclusion” also published in *Destino* (1954, 20). The document carried the signature of Miquel Adlert, Vicent Andrés Estellés, Maria Beneyto, Santiago Bru, Vicent and Xavier Casp, J. Garcia Rigal, J. Sanç Moia, Joan Valls, A. Verdaguer and Rafael Vilar. Joan Fuster declined the invitation which had been extended to sign the “manifesto.”

For his part, Estellés—who had initially agreed to sign it broke for the time being, if not for longer, with the representatives of that group. The letter under debate, according to the version offered by Joan Fuster, was directed principally against the Institut d'Estudis Catalans—especially the distinguished philologist Aramon i Serra—and in favor of the position defended by Manuel Sanchis Guarnier and Francesc de Borja Moll from the editorial board of the *Diccionari Català, Valencià, Balear*.

We can observe a certain concern on Fuster's part regarding Estellés's character and, in particular, his excessive susceptibility. Responding to a letter from Majorcan lexicographer Aina Moll requesting contributions from Valencia for the end of year review, *Cap d'any 1958*, which was published by Raixa, Fuster was to answer:

I trust I will be able to talk to Estellés tomorrow or the day after: we will see if I can get anything out of him; it is not going to be easy because Estellés is a very complicated lad; and I have the impression that recently he is terribly annoyed about Catalan literature *in genere*: annoyed or offended, whatever (I have no desire to know which). But I will put all my powers of diplomacy at your disposal to see if I can calm him down and get a few verses off him.

(2002, 155)

We have no way of knowing the reasons for Estellés's annoyance, but we can be sure that Fuster's diplomatic efforts failed since, at the end of the day, the Valencian contribution to that number of *Cap d'any* were limited to the "Literary Panorama in Valencia of 1956-1957" by Joan Fuster and the article "Principles, Doubts and Approximations" by Josep Iborra.

The relationship between Joan Fuster and Vicent Andrés Estellés – as with the one between Sanchis Guarner and doyen of Valencian popular short stories Enric Valor – was, in general, a friendship based on a mutual respect between writers and intellectuals who stood up for the language and culture of their country in conditions which were by no means favorable. There are, however, innumerable moments of intense cordiality and close collaboration between the two authors which went far beyond the realm of literature. Fuster, for example, as a great friend of the Estellés family, was delighted to accept the invitation to act as godfather to the poet's daughter Carmina. And, as our writer from Sueca recalls in a brief aside, the pair conspired together to achieve a small space for the vernacular in a magazine which was published in Valencia. In a letter sent by Joan Fuster to Manuel Sanchis Guarner, dated 16 July 1958, he confides that himself, journalist and activist Vicent Ventura, and Andrés Estellés had taken control of the weekly *Clima* and that they would endeavor to publish a few pages every week in Catalan (2002, 259). As was to be expected, the venture failed; it certainly was no easy matter at that time for a minimal publication in Catalan to evade the control of the weighty censorship of Spanish fascism.

That is not to say that amidst this cordiality and comradeship between the two intellectuals there were not moments of slackness. There was a long period, for example, between 1962 and 1970 when it seems that relations between the two men had dried up altogether. Once more Joan Fuster leaves us a record of this in his habitually succinct manner. In a letter from Sagunt on 7 July 1970, Santiago Bru reveals that a poem by Estellés with the device "the river's balustrade, for example" was candidate for the *Flor Natural*, a prize in the *Jocs Florals*, the poetry competition organized by the Rat-Penat, one of Valencia's key cultural groupings.

Bru writes:

You can tell that it's the best of the lot; but we've got to make sure about the punctuation. Heaven forbid that some 'official' or for that matter 'officious' element takes an interest and is blinkered enough to refuse to allow the poem entry because it is too modern... or purely and simply because they don't understand it.

What is more, Bru considers that Fuster will have to give it the top mark of ten since he believes that the poem is far and away the best piece of all those he has read. He adds a further sentimental reason: Estellés's mother is seriously ill and would love to see her son win the *Flor* prize (2006, 279). Fuster replies on the 15th of the same month and says:

It has been exactly eight years since the last direct or indirect manifestation of my friendship with Mr Estellés. Whatever the case, there has been the odd element, or odd elements in the plural, of animosity. All of which, however, is not of the slightest concern. My opinion about Estellés the poet has not changed and you can be assured that if the powers that be in the Rat put me on the jury, my vote will be for him and will be as effusive as you request. I have no reason to believe that in the last twenty-four hours Divine Providence has furnished us with any better poet nor one, moreover, taken by the whim to aspire to the prize of a *Flor Natural*.

(2006, 281)

Estellés won this prize in 1970; but what could this "animosity" be which dates from 1962, as is alleged above? It is easy to see that Fuster's words exude hurt rather than harshness, complaining about a situation which he did not quite understand or which he may well have preferred to let lie. It may well have been caused by some insignificant matter which upset the highly sensitive poet. Bearing in mind, however, that this particular period was one of the most brutal of Franco's repression given the high level of social belligerence caused by strikes, workers' demands, and student protests exacerbated by the Press Laws drafted by *apparatchik* Minister for Propaganda, Manuel Fraga to which should be added, on the Valencian front, the virulent campaign against the person of Joan Fuster who had recently published his famous trio of works advocating the Catalan basis to Valencian national identity *Nosaltres, els valencians* (1962), *El País Valencià* (1963), and *Qüestió de noms* (1963) the alleged

distancing between himself and Vicent Andrés Estellés might be taken as more understandable.

What follows is nothing more than a hypothesis; but perhaps this apparent distance might well be explained in very human terms by one word: that is to say, fear. Fear is an emotion which best defines the situation of ordinary folk throughout the dark years of the Francoist dictatorship. As a journalist, Estellés was well aware of this and even more so as just another man in the street with a wife and family to look after. Fuster himself had had his eyes opened to this a few years earlier, as he mentions in a letter to Catalan cultural activist Joan Triadú dated 30 April 1955 where, in a discussion about possible contributors from Valencia to a review in São Paulo, he refers to Estellés and comments:

You cannot count on him for a publication of this type: he is really frightened. He is a journalist by profession and, although he plies his trade in a private firm, he is fearful about the possible consequences which will be most probably uncomfortable.

(2009, 286)

The prophecy was to prove accurate in 1978 when, in a vicious act of secessionist xenophobia, the poet was dismissed from his position as editor of the Valencian daily *Las Provincias* after winning the *Premi d'Honor de les Lletres Catalanes* (Award of Honour for Catalan Letters), awarded by the government of Catalonia. Moving back to the 1950s and its ethos of foreboding, however, we might appreciate in similar fashion the words Fuster writes to Albert Manent, on 21 May 1955, after being asked to invite Estellés to participate in a homage to Josep Carner, doyen of pure poetry in the early years of the century, and to forward this invitation on to his address on Misser Domingo Mascó, 17, 29a:

Estellés is a lad who finds himself in a very peculiar predicament – far too involved to explain in a letter – and it is certainly worth ‘grooming him’ with affection. You are already familiar with some of his poems. I know much more of his stuff and feel that he is the most valuable of all the young writers in Valencia today.

(2010, 159)

Should this hypothesis be correct, we have on the one hand an Estellés who, as an ordinary man in the street, was to bear witness to and suffered in his own skin the pervasive effects of Franco's repression whilst endeavouring for reasons of self-protection to remain on the sidelines. There is then another Estellés who, as a poet, reacted forcefully, in a huge part of his work, against the dictatorship, its crimes, and its ethos. Exemplary of this commitment would be a simple, precise, and beautiful poem from *Horacianes*, drafted in reaction to the shameful situation reigning in the 1960s, which is almost telegraphic in its scheme and consciousness:

this miserable year,
 m.cm.lxiii. a.d.,
 will be much remembered and most bitterly.
 vicent ventura, exiled in munich or paris;
 joan fuster, in sueca:
 the neighbours say he types away at night
 and a shadowy prestige spreads abroad ;
 sanchis guarner runs around town perplexed;
 i write and wait in burjassot,
 whilst through the streets of valencia
 people, obscene, scream and burn a book.

(1974, 268)

Faced with a situation whose adversity was overwhelming, the line "I write and wait in Burjassot" might perfectly describe the mental state and lack of communion experienced by Estellés during those years of relative or alleged abandon. Despite any putative enmity, however, it should also be remembered that this most memorable of collections was composed explicitly as an apology for his estranged friend—a type of creative defense against Fuster's vulnerability in this most brutal of contexts. Commentators have argued persuasively how the book being burnt by the mob in the above poem was most probably *Nosaltres els valencians*; and, despite any alienation, the notes to the first edition of *Horacianes* are indicative of the poet's commitment to his colleague in the face of the vitriolic attacks from the anti-Catalanist Right: "I started it [*Horacianes*] as a joke; subsequently, the yobbish assaults to which my dear friend Joan Fuster was subjected in Valencia, with no one to defend him, turned it into a type of journalistic chronicle" (1974, 308).

The 1970s, nonetheless, were to register an important and positive change for the poet. This was perhaps due to the success

of his many publications which were rising exponentially in number; or because the end of Francoism was drawing nigh, and political commitment, with mobilization and demonstrations, was beginning to have its effect. In 1970, Estellés wrote the ten poems on the subject of his relationship with Fuster which jointly bear the longest of titles – a pretty poem in itself – which begins: “About when Joan Fuster and Estellés were still very small...” (1982: 183); and in the summer of 1972, as we are told in the same reference, he accompanied novelist and historian Montserrat Roig on a visit to Joan Fuster’s house, including a tour round the Albufera and lunch in Cullera. A year later he wrote the prologue to *Poemes satírics del segle XV: I. Lo procés de les olives* (València 1497) in facsimile edition with transcription by Josep Palàcios, published by the Societat Bibliogràfica Valenciana as a gesture of encouragement to Fuster.

During these years, the bard of Burjassot worked tirelessly with Fuster and Sanchis Guarner on the promotion of Catalan in Valencia; in 1975, along with Joan Fuster, Manuel Sanchis Guarner and Vicent Ventura, he was one of the major signatories to the manifest *Nosaltres ciutadans del País Valencià*. Or, to continue with another example of the numerous activities in this sphere, in 1979 he took part in management of the Club Ramon Muntaner, a cultural entity created towards the end of 1978 for the defence of the Catalan speaking areas and their unity, being elected spokesman for Valencia together with Fuster and their publisher Eliseu Climent.

Joan Fuster and Vicent Andrés Estellés have also suffered the incomprehension and even the ill-will of their contemporaries. A well-known review of the *Llibre de Meravelles* (1971), a collection which is paradigmatic of all that is good in Estellés, which appeared in the Valencian magazine *Gorg*, was to censure its popularism and lack of innovation. Its author, one of the poets of the so-called generation of the 70s, was incapable of understanding the excitement, subversion and the intertextual game being played with the best of the Catalan lyrical tradition which Estellés’s verses betray beneath their apparent simplicity. Many years later another poet, in whom I had confided that Estellés had asked me to organise and prepare the edition of the *Mural del País Valencià* (1996), replied that I should not accept the charge as it might well compromise my credibility as a poet and a critic. These may be simple anecdotes, but they demonstrate how people are often led by clichés and other types of received

wisdom. In my opinion, the relevance of the *Mural* and the importance of its appearance leaves little room for discussion.

It is not by chance I think I am correct in saying that the two stand-out authors in Catalan letters of the second half of the twentieth century were Valencians. And I would also like to think that this assessment is totally valid, not for reasons of a visceral or provincial nature, but rather because it was and is a formula borne out of sheer necessity. We, the Valencians, needed them *tout court*. And we continue to need them, much more than any other Catalan region, as advocates, touchstones, and guarantors of the national basis of our collective identity. The drive and determination afforded our literature by these two writers has proved a *sine qua non* for the possible reconstruction of our country. Both authors share a diction, at once particular and direct, which is typically Valencian. It is an idiom that springs from the countryside, from the farming belt, the rural world that was subsequently able to adapt itself to the city. Their life and work is a lesson and a triumph. In them we found – and can find still – not so much the strength of the convert but rather the strength of those capable of re-discovering their own language, of re-shaping it and making it relevant to the time and place in which they were destined to live.

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