

# Reviews

## || **Unbecoming subjects: Normalization and its discontents in Catalonia**

**Helena Buffery**

Josep-Anton Fernández, *El malestar en la cultura catalana. La cultura de la normalització 1976-1999*. (Catalan culture and its discontents) Editorial Empúries, Barcelona 2008, 401 pp.

Of the numerous recent studies which attempt to diagnose and address the state of contemporary Catalan culture, *El malestar en la cultura catalana* is undoubtedly both the most searching in scope and the most rigorous in its use and recognition of the implications of contemporary cultural theory. Focusing on the period between 1976 and 1999, and thus overlapping with another key recent text, Kathryn Crameri's *Catalonia: National Identity and Cultural Policy 1980-2003* (Cardiff: Univ. of Wales Press, 2008), Josep-Anton Fernández covers some of the same ground, in identifying both the importance of language and culture to contemporary projections of Catalan identity and pinpointing the centrality of a project of normalization to post-dictatorship cultural policy. However, Fernández is far more conscious of the necessity to explain these phenomena in terms of the continuing subordination of Catalonia within the Spanish state, whilst attending in detail to the concurrent pressures of globalization. Thus, the considerable malaise the author reveals in the Catalan cultural field, as manifested in often acrimonious debate over literary value, the relationship between language and culture, and the marketability of Catalan cultural products, is identified as a symptom of a crisis caused both by Catalonia's recent —and continuing— history of political and cultural subordination, and by the wider global crisis associated with postmodernity. In order to do full justice to the complexity of the Catalan cultural problematic, Fernández organizes his study into two main parts. The first contextualizes and diagnoses the cultural crisis, through analysis of critical discourse on Catalan culture in the 1980s and 1990s, carefully outlining the epistemological frame for his approach and situating his response as one that is committed to an emancipatory agenda. For him, “un tal posicionament [...] comporta, també, una actitud de resistència contra la normalització, és a dir, contra l'estandardització de les pràctiques socials i culturals, i contra la invisibilització o naturalització dels processos de dominació” (23). Chapter 1 focuses on the normalization process, tracing its roots in the “Projecte inacabat de la modernitat catalana” and revealing its underlying ambivalence, as a project that seeks to naturalize Catalan identity as the unmarked norm but was born of resistance to the subordination of Catalan culture. Chapter 2 classifies and critiques current crisis discourses, showing that their discomfort with the contemporary Catalan cultural field stems either from political dissatisfaction with the naturalization of Catalan identity, or from culturalist criticism of the limited achievements of normalization. In Chapter 3 he places

these discourses and processes within the wider context of a postmodern crisis in cultural models, diagnosing the “Triple condició postmoderna de la cultura catalana”. All three chapters point to a crisis in the production and legitimation of cultural value, whose impact at a symbolic level has brought about a crisis in identification, at the level of identity discourses and representation.

The second half of the volume goes on to explore the wider cultural manifestations of this triple crisis in terms of discourse, project and process. In Chapter 4, “El producte Catalunya: la crisi dels discursos de legitimació” the author proposes that the erosion of legitimating discourses about Catalan culture is in part due to the particular problems of creating a Catalan culture market, but also to Catalonia’s dependent status, and its government’s feeble capacity for cultural legitimation. In Chapter 5, he explores the crisis in production of value through the overarching metaphor of “Terror à la delicatessen”. For him it is the very process of normalization that has provoked this crisis, rather than the shift to mass cultural products identified by other cultural critics, because of its inability to generate belief in the value of Catalan cultural products. Finally, Chapter 6 explores the effects of the struggles for hegemony in and on the symbolic field, through close analysis of a wide range of cultural texts. Arguing that the crisis in the production and legitimation of cultural value has led to a crisis in representation, by which Catalan discourses, practices, images and symbols have become invisible in mass culture, losing their capacity to represent their surrounding society, Fernández goes on to show how this problem has been addressed in relation to different levels and scales of identity discourses.

The study is impressive in its combination of a rigorous theoretical grounding with expert attention to sociocultural context and detailed and sensitive analysis of cultural texts.

Whilst the conclusions are controversial in tone, due to his employment of metaphors of monstrosity and more playful recourse to queer theory, his insights are searching and deserve fuller consideration. His diagnosis of the underlying conditions of Catalan culture is wide-ranging and compelling, and we should not complain —as many others have— that the solutions he proposes in his conclusion appear disappointingly simplistic in comparison.

Whilst he here reveals his own position to be fundamentally Queer, and thus committed to the interrogation of normative discourses, it would be unfair to expect him to come up with solutions that suit everyone. Fernández certainly convinces of the need to stop pretending to be normal and face up to the subordination of Catalan culture, if anything is to be done to address the current crisis ■

## || An exceptional patrimony

Enric Sòria

Agustí Centelles, *La maleta del fotògraf*  
(The Photographer's Suitcase)  
Destino, Barcelona 2009, 136 pp.

Just recently, the future of Agustí Centelles' photographic archive has become a controversial issue. The photographer's sons, Sergi and Octavi, have broken off negotiations with the Generalitat de Catalunya and have decided to bequeath it to the Spanish Ministry of Culture, which will send it to the Historical Memory Archive in Salamanca. The heirs, most displeased with the Generalitat, claim that it made no proposals worthy of their father's legacy, something the Ministry has done. The Generalitat refutes this imputation, accuses the ministry of being disloyal and condemns the loss of patrimony that the archive's move will signify. As has been said, these photographs are the result of a Catalan's view of his country and it makes no sense for them to be kept and shown elsewhere. For its part, the ministry states that making copies of the photographs, so that the Generalitat can conserve them too, will be no problem.

I do not know how such a sorry affair will end. This is not the place to talk about it, but rather to speak of a magnificent book of photographs by Agustí Centelles, *La maleta del fotògraf*, which documents his time in the French concentration camp of Bram, just after the end of the Civil War. However, the controversy is significant. Some may be surprised that the ownership of a few photographs should give rise to a dispute, because photography is in fact a reproducible art, but there is symbolic added value: Agustí Centelles was an exceptional photographer, probably the most renowned Spanish photo-journalist in the world. He was able to capture in images complex, often dramatic situations with striking synthetic power; this fills his snapshots with life and at the same time endows them with a rare emblematic irradiation. Who has not seen the photo of the assault guards fighting against the insurgents behind a precarious parapet of rubble and dead animals in Barcelona on July 18<sup>th</sup>? Quite rightly, it has been said that Agustí Centelles is the Catalan Robert Capa. His photographs are a compendium of the Civil War, but they are also an appeal and at times a cry. They record profound upheavals and also reveal them, and they therefore move all those who look at them time and again. Moreover, Centelles was a man committed to his time and his country; he was therefore no stranger to exile and neglect and he bore witness to what he saw. This also stirs up controversy.

Agustí Centelles was born in El Grau in Valencia in 1909, but his family moved to Barcelona the following year, and the photographer lived and worked in this city until the republican defeat forced him into exile. Two texts, one by Francesc Espinet and Joan Manuel Tresserras, and the other by Teresa Ferré (who has also chosen the photographs), give us a good account of the history of Catalan photo-journalism and the vicissitudes of Centelles in exile. The photographer went first to the camp at Argelet: a long strip of beach packed with the defeated, where many refugees died in the midst of totally indescribable conditions of famine, wretchedness and lack of hygiene, unworthy of a civilised country like France. After that he was moved

to the camp at Bram, where things were better and where he was authorised to take photos. He spent a few months there, along with thousands of refugees.

*La maleta del fotògraf* is a photo-reportage of life in the camp at Bram. Centelles' intention was for the images to illustrate the diary he was writing at the time, in very rich and lively Catalan. It would have been good to reproduce the diary here —as its author wanted the words and images to mutually reinforce each other— but it has been published in another edition. In any case, the photographs speak for themselves.

The images are divided into themes. Firstly, the physical space: the big huts, the overcrowding, the open countryside on the other side of the bars. Then, the arrival, with the pitiful bundles, in the mud and rain and the shadow of the gendarmes. The moments of calm, or of yearning, next to the omnipresent barbed-wire fence; the everyday life of the prisoners, their jobs, their few amusements, having a bath, shaving, mealtimes. The growing cemetery (a distressing photo: death also lurks in these images), the music and dominoes, the letters to faraway relatives, the ever-present problems with sleeping. Then, no less touching, the portraits: lost hopes, the iron will to live, an indomitable pride, despite everything. This is a world of men truly alone, of prisoners with a past and an uncertain future. Fatigue and powerlessness struggle on their faces with the desire to resist, and with hope. Meanwhile, they continue to do things. They commemorate, for example, the 14<sup>th</sup> of July, they parade and take photos. At times they smile, sadly, as they hold the bugle announcing a mock bullfight or listen to the melody of a *paso doble*. Bitterly and tenaciously, life goes on. The photographer shows it as it is, ably capturing the volumes, the shadows and above all the gestures (the liberation of sleep, the automatism of pain or surprise, the brief instants of forgetting). When all is said and done, he lived this life too. The captive Centelles once again proves to us what a great photographer he was, because he was able to capture in images, without emphasis or subterfuge, clear and hard, his truth, which was also that of many. This is his patrimony and now it is ours too ||

|| **Greek world,  
Homeric times**  
Lluís Solà

Jaume Pòrtulas, *Introducció a la Íliada. Homer, entre la història i la llegenda* (An Introduction to the Iliad. Homer, between History and Legend), Bernat Metge, Barcelona 2008, 585 pp.

After the publication of the very interesting *Lectura de Píndar* (Reading Pindar, 1977) and the various texts on the Greek world that have followed, we might have expected another important study on ancient Greek poetry. However, Jaume Pòrtulas' latest work, *Introducció a la Íliada. Homer, entre la història i la llegenda*, far surpasses any expectations that we may have had. The work is surprising for its thoroughness, intelligence and maturity.

In the first place, the book we have, or ought to have, in our hands is clearly neither an introduction nor an essay, but a study, the result of long and well-researched work, of a life devoted to the classical world. Perhaps we ought to call it the realisation and development in a text over 500 pages long of the conception of the Homeric world that Jaume Pòrtulas

has arrived at. Moreover, the text is evidently just one part, the first part, the way in to the interpretation of the words of *The Iliad* that must necessarily complete it. And yet, not only is the author able to use his very considerable knowledge of Greek civilisation in general to review the many influences that the text of the *Iliad* had from it, he also knows how to frame the Homeric constellation within the other great epic universes of India and the Near East.

Indeed, there can be no doubt whatsoever that in the conception and the writing of the *Introducció a la Íliada* Pòrtulas always had in his mind's eye a series of different goals that he had to fulfil, but which in him were profoundly, unitarily, interwoven by passion and vocation we might say, and for some time. Perhaps it is what indeed characterises the importance and the scope of the value of this work. On one hand, the author had to have a solid command of the situation and the horizon of specifically Homeric and, more generally, Hellenic studies in all senses, which have been multiplying above all in the West for three hundred years. On the other hand, it was also convenient for him to have paid well-researched and continuous attention to the influence that the Homeric world and the Greek world in general has had and still has on Catalan culture, especially on the great figures, and on the reflection that it has aroused. Lastly, and fundamentally, the author had to have the knowledge and the sensibility to understand the far-off but inexplicably immediate and active presence of the word in Homer's poetry. It is a fact that Jaume Pòrtulas, wisely, never ceases to progress in the work, advancing all three goals, each of them at the level and according to the level that suits a study of this kind.

*The Iliad* is without doubt the great poem of Greek Antiquity, and was one of the substantial elements nourishing what we call classical culture or civilisation. It is obvious that in a consideration such as the one that Pòrtulas undertakes of the origins and the formation of a poem that has exerted such a huge influence for so many centuries, the questions that have perforce to appear cannot be limited strictly to one discipline. They are and can only be questions also fundamental for the understanding of man's humanity, yesterday and today —political, religious, linguistic, historical, geographical questions— to mention but a few. In theory, every great poem is a world unto itself. In fact, if the Greek world and, especially, the Greek word still continue to fascinate us it is because they ask us profound questions about our condition, about our meaning, about our humanity. Listening to and studying a major text like *The Iliad*, we eventually listen to ourselves, we study ourselves and we ask questions about ourselves. This is one of the values implicit in the methodical, tenacious and, at the same time, passionately critical research to which Jaume Pòrtulas' reflection has been devoted —between the examination of the poem and what Western men have thought and believed about Homer and his world, from Plato to Goethe, from Riba to Leopardi.

In fact, implicit or not so implicit, one of the crucial themes of the *Introducció a la Íliada*, the theme, in short, around which all the other themes have to be set, each in its proper place, is the question of the meaning. There is in every thorough piece of research work into the text of the Homeric poems the inescapable request for meaning. The two terms, history and legend, that Jaume Pòrtulas uses in the second part of the title of the work already refer, subtly but inexorably, to the need and to the underlying conflict. The reflection on the almost uninterrupted dialogue, in all kinds of forms and genres, that first in Greece itself and then all over the ancient world, via the European

Renaissance to the last three centuries, the dialogue that Western man has maintained then, in each period and according to each period, with the constellation of *The Iliad*, constitutes both an investigation into the problems of all kinds that the text presents and an investigation on meaning, the poem's and mankind's. Just because some eminent thinker may have believed that he had definitively taken the "legend" out of the "history" does not mean that the former has disappeared from the human condition.

Pòrtulas spells out, demandingly, expertly and, often, rather sarcastically, the multiple vicissitudes of this dialogue, or of these dialogues. Through the "history" and the "legend" the temporary, ambiguous, unstable condition of the members who establish the dialogue appears, and the inevitably constructive dimension of the interpretation, which is inherent in such a condition. The configuration of meaning from the meaning to which the word in Homer's epic leads us, and the history of this configuration, its continuity and its constant modification, is one of the enigmatic processes that the poem of *The Iliad* and the great works lead us to. The goal is to grasp and establish the truth of the text, i.e., the meaning, and Jaume Pòrtulas never ceases to compare the various ideas that we have of it with the source they are based on: the text, the poetry, the universe of Achilles and Hector, the fact of the power, of the fury, of the pain, of life and of death. Due to the receptiveness, the elasticity of vision, the breadth of judgement and the firmness of the hand on the rudder, the *Introducció a la Íliada* wholeheartedly enters this never-ending essential dialogue.

Just as Pòrtulas' systematic reflection is applied to the complex stratification of meaning that the reception of Homer's texts has given rise to, in different forms and expressions, from the earliest thinkers and the major Greek tragic authors, via the leading philosophers, writers and scholars of later periods to those of the present day, the study also applies itself methodically, and perhaps even more passionately, to the function that the Homeric word has performed in Catalan culture. For there is a fact: only from the place can we speak of the place, of the place and of the other place. Purely for the importance that *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey* have had for Maragall, Riba and Bartra, to mention but three illustrious poets, Pòrtulas' work could not fail to become part of the reception that corresponds to us and, as a result, of the natural circulation of our things in the world and of the world in our things.

There are those who might consider that Pòrtulas' book deals with far-off, strictly archaic things. If we pay closer attention, we shall see that what happens is just the opposite. The work in fact tackles, on highly structured levels, more or less outlined or more or less vague, and Jaume Pòrtulas manages to control the relief of these levels very well, clearly topical issues, which appear in the fundamental debates of the culture of the contemporary period. Issues absolutely valid in the order of contemporary intellectual interests like that of the origins in general and that of the origins and the formation of the conceptions that make up the substratum of our view of the world, issues like that of the interpretation of ancient and not so ancient texts, issues like that of the possibility and the necessity of ancient man's relationship with modern man.

It would not be going too far to claim that questioning the origins has always been, especially in our time, a very important concern. The foundational value we have given to the great literary and religious texts is one of the chief aspects of this concern, in fact one

of the obsessions, we might say, of the modern age. *The Iliad*, *The Mahabharata* and the Bible, besides their inexplicable perfection, are constellations that have exerted and continue to exert an imponderable gravitational attraction. Besides the perfection, then, or just that, they are an intrinsic part of this perfection, they contain the seeds of the view of the subsequent world, they contain the elements making up our world, they contain us —to what extent we do not know.

Pòrtulas, with immense information, with intelligence and, if I might say so, with irony, goes about showing us the itineraries of this obsession. They are the never-ending labyrinths of any important crucial inheritance. There can be no doubt that he knows that he too is inside the labyrinth, that he can only go forward by revolving around, but only around, the substance of Homer's poetry, and that the great legacies most surely impose on us in return the duty and the torment of interpretation.

The centuries-old debate over the figure of Homer has in the end become a debate over the figure of the author, over the necessity and the function of an author, and it paradoxically constitutes, as Pòrtulas' text continually reminds us, a not inconsiderable element of this legacy. In the presence or in the non-presence of an author it seems that a certain sense of poetry itself is put to the test. Namely, it seems that we must continue to wonder whether the author is a creator, a receiver, a transcriber or a medium. If it is the world that speaks, it is the language, the tradition or the ego. Perhaps the poems of Homer achieve supremely what is the most difficult to achieve, and that makes them, among other virtues, unsurpassable: the disappearance of the person of the poet in favour of the word, of the expression.

Not only does Jaume Pòrtulas, from start to finish of *Introducció a la Íliada. Homer, entre la història i la llegenda*, very much bear in mind the complexity and the fragility of the poetic word, forged always in an irreplaceable time and place, but also the language with which poetry is spoken about. Far removed from the eccentric *koines* that in today's world often seem indispensable in reflections on the authors of Antiquity or on scientific issues in general, this is a book written in the appropriate language, markedly well written, succinct when necessary, but also complex, sinuous, always mature, tasteful and exemplary. It shows incontrovertibly that presenting a model work of research on the word of Homer in the language of Ramon Llull, in Danish or in Armenian, is not a crime.

Pòrtulas seems to know perfectly well that nowadays the quantity of literature written about Homer is not only immense but worryingly immense. The author does not actually say so, but he continually allows it to be understood. The author, however, also allows to it be understood that he is convinced that if the works of Homer have not succumbed to such an implacable onslaught it is thanks to the vital power of the word that dwells within the poetry ||

## II The resistance of ideas

**Oriol Farrés**

Xavier Serra, *Història social de la filosofia catalana. La lògica (1900-1980)* (A Social History of Catalan Philosophy. Logic [1900-1980]), Afers, Catarroja 2010, 270 pp.

Right from the first pages of Xavier Serra's *Història social de la filosofia catalana. La lògica (1900-1980)*, one idea becomes established: it is impossible to know the history of Catalan philosophy —and to be more exact, of contemporary Catalan philosophy— without paying strict attention to the context. This means that we have to bear in mind, in the words of the author, “the academic and social conditions and the historical circumstances”. In short, a conscious, deliberate and meticulous historiographical effort is necessary. Obvious though this requirement may be, it has not always been observed, and this is most surely one of the reasons why a work with this ambition must be welcomed and celebrated. Another reason, by no means unconnected with what I have just said, is Serra's wish to go beyond lamenting the philosophical deficit in Catalan culture. Apart from deploring the poverty of our philosophical literature, it is important to get to the bottom of things and discover the reasons for it. *Història social de la filosofia catalana* furnishes hypotheses, documentation and research on this point. It does not get bogged down in tear-jerking stereotypes.

If philosophy is in itself already a broad, many-faceted discipline, its social history is virtually beyond reach, regardless of the fact that on this occasion it is geographically centred on the Catalan-speaking Countries. Here, however, the field is marked out to start with: logic. It is no coincidence that between 1900 and 1980 the great majority of the outstanding names in Catalan philosophy had some connection with mathematical logic and its reception. Joan Crexells, David García Bacca, Josep Ferrater Mora and Manuel Sacristán stand out in the front line. However, Joaquim Xirau, Jaume Serra Hunter and Eugeni d'Ors, for different reasons, are also included here. The impact of modern logic in Catalonia —the overcoming of scholastic logic and its stale Aristotelianism— is the salutary lesson this book presents. At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, with Josep Daurella i Rull's horrific and soporific Fundamental Logic classes at Barcelona University —classes on the “bones of Thomism”, which Josep Pla and Pere Bosch Gimpera have written about— and with Pere Maria López Martínez's equally tedious ones at Valencia University, it did not seem that logic could be at all interesting. Despite everything, this dull scene changed.

Serra traces and tells the story of this revitalising, although eventful, change in Catalan philosophy. The real starting point, however, is not to be found in the official nature of the chairs of Logic. It corresponds to Bertrand Russell's stay in Barcelona from March 29<sup>th</sup> to April 3<sup>rd</sup> 1920. Russell was invited for the Philosophy Seminar at the Institut d'Estudis Catalans, in other words, by Eugeni d'Ors and, therefore, the beginning of this story does not take place in the university world —it goes without saying that the book's title, of Russellian overtones, reflects this thesis discreetly. The man who really profited from the course that Russell gave, however, was not Ors, but his disciple Joan Crexells, whose

premature death prevented his interest in logic bearing all its fruits. García Bacca, Ferrater Mora and Sacristán also had to start from scratch. The history of contemporary logic—and of the effort to construct an analytical school—in the Catalan-speaking Countries is no exception to the general rule: it was marked by interruptions, resumptions, exile and the epic resistance of a few self-taught men. Only much later would this perseverance be rewarded in university lecture theatres. Serra writes: “Academic life needs, above all else, continuity. This continuity, however, has only rarely, if ever, existed amongst us. The few long-term cultural undertakings that we have been able to benefit from have had to suffer regrettable periods of interruption, generally for political reasons (the Spanish dictatorships). Furthermore, the consistency of the academic system, subjected to Spanish university centralism, has always been precarious. The opposite of academic normality is starting from scratch. The story of the reception of mathematical logic is, in this respect, exemplary.” (pp. 132-133).

*Història social de la filosofia catalana. La lògica (1900-1980)* is not just a scientific, well-researched study of the reception of mathematical logic and the long death throes of its mediaeval namesake, which is no mean achievement. Based on the field of the philosophy of science and language, Serra moreover reflects pleasantly on fundamental questions, tests bold interpretations on various subjects and touches on important episodes in our cultural history. Phenomenology and Marxism, the two other major schools of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, do not come within the scope of this book. With a bit of luck, all that may come in the future ||

## || The double in literature

Enric Sullà

Eduard Vilella, *Doble contra senzill. La incògnita del jo i l'enigma de l'altre en la literatura* (Double Versus Single: the Mystery of the Self and the Enigma of the Other Self in Literature), Pagès editors, Lleida 2007, 219 pp.

The first thing that meets the eye about this book is the title: *Doble contra senzill* (Double Versus Single). An expression that gets quite an intriguing explanation at the end of the book: “*Double?* Who knows: *Single*, certainly not” (p. 203, the italics are in the original). In fact, the subtitle has already given us the ingredients of questions difficult to answer: on one hand, the enigma of the other self, which may be a double (according to reading operations and cultural traditions) and inseparable; on the other, the mystery of the ego, by no means single. It is right to say that Eduard Vilella deals with the issue of the double in this essay, but it would be wrong to say that he restricts himself to that. Perhaps the key lies in the description of the work’s genre: an essay that won the 2006 Josep Vallverdú Prize. For it could be the typical university monograph, but it is not. True, he does not forsake any of the demands of academic discourse—rigour and depth of analysis, the effort to make concepts clear and define problems—but the exposition resorts to the expression of the essay with regard to the personal, the direct communication, with particular emphasis

on the expositional clarity and agility. All of this, along with a notable command of the language, makes *Doble contra senzill* a work unusual in Catalan publishing.

Vilella states that his aims are the study of the “thematic magma of the double in literature, the problems linked to its description, its historical status, its theoretical f in comparative literature” (p. 15). To be precise, he devotes specific attention to the matter of the double in history, paying particular attention to the Romantic double and its typology (pp. 16 and 17), and restricts his field of study to the narrative, above all “to the narrative of the ego and the representation of its complexity in the age-old issue of the double” (p. 19). But, what interest can there be in yet another book on the double, a topic that has produced a very abundant bibliography? The justification derives from the fact that Vilella is able to frame his undertaking in a very broad, current problem, which grants the double a pre-eminent place: the crisis of the ego, for in post-modern times “individuals are flexible, liquid, dynamic, they do not resign themselves to just one formulation for their whole lives” (p. 12). Indeed, the “double, secret companion, *alter ego*, look-alike, has been with mankind since time immemorial, contrary to the idea that we are made of one single, comfortable piece” (p. 15, the italics are the original ones).

The essay starts with an “Introduction” (pp. 11-19), which manages, in a few pages, to expound not only the aims of the book, but also to present the problem of the crisis of the subject precisely and efficiently (and a well-chosen bibliography). The four chapters in the first part of the book, “The Field of the Double. A Description”, are indeed designed to provide a broad and very complete characterisation and description of the “field of the double”. So, the first chapter, “Essential Presentations” (pp. 23-43), does what it says and is obliged to do: thoroughly present the issue to be discussed. The second chapter, “Why the Double and Romanticism?” (pp. 45-69), examines the period (German Romanticism) and the output (with Jean Paul Richter and E.T.A. Hoffmann leading the way) that have helped to consolidate the “canonical” figure of the double (p. 61) and have generated for it a name that has become successful: the *Doppelgänger*. The third chapter, “A History of Affinities” (pp. 71-99), broadens the context of the analysis towards the presence of the phenomenon of duplication and the double in archaic cultures and in the contributions of anthropology. Chapter four, “Personal Frenzies” (pp. 101-128), offers a complete overview of the double from the perspective of psychoanalysis.

In the second part of the book, “The Theory and History of the Double. A Proposal”, we find the most detailed analyses of the literary subject of the double. Chapter five, “Typological Cracks” (pp. 131-155), goes over the most important bibliography that has proposed types for the double and comes to the conclusion that it contains “many contributions that study the appearance of the subject in very restricted areas and, at the same time, it shows the often distorting tendency of seeking a ‘universal type’ of the double” (p. 151). Chapter six offers a most useful “Theoretical Recapitulation” (pp. 157-203), in which Vilella, in a series of observations that he has made along the way, dares to formulate his definition of the double: “We would use the word double [...] for the figure who embodies the profoundly felt experience of a continuity or semblance, whether psychic or physical, *latent or manifest, extraordinary*, between two characters [...] for which the limits of the identity-difference relationship are sorted into themes, in the echo of a close and problem-causing link with the depths of the individual’s existence” (p. 169 and also 183; italics are original). Despite this definition Vilella notes

that there is not one “core of meaning that each period develops” in the theme of the double, but a dynamic of diverse materialisations conditioned by writers and readers in different periods and circumstances (p. 176). He therefore agrees that the double is a theme, but opts to characterise it as a thematic field, an archipelago or a constellation (p. 165). A series of analyses that explain why this book, excellent for its intellectual rigour and easy to read for its expressive power, has managed to place the interest and the validity of the subject of the double in a thoroughly modern perspective ||

|| **The Jewish legacy  
in Valencia:  
a pioneering study**  
**Marilda Azulay**

Manuel Civera, *Morvedre hebreu (segles XIII-XVI)*  
(Hebrew Morvedre [13th-16th centuries]), Afers, Catarroja 2009, 428 pp.

After nine years’ research, Manuel Civera (Sagunt, 1947) and the Afers publishing house offer us this work which —as the author says— sets out to make a historical interpretation of late-mediaeval Morvedre (now Sagunt) and, at the same time, bring knowledge of the Jewish quarter of Sagunt up to date, revealing its prominence and significance in the social, cultural and political context of the *comarca* (county). This is based on a thesis: the exceptional nature of the Hebrew material heritage of Morvedre and the prominence of Hebrews —Jews and *conversos*— in the shaping of the history of the *comarca*, a melting pot of Jews, Christians and Muslims.

The process has consisted fundamentally in collecting scattered information, organising it, rereading it and interpreting it. The result of all this is a structured text in which the abundance of recorded data means that any one area of study could be the subject of an independent development. As opposed to those who confuse, distort or are indifferent to the Jewish presence in Sepharad (the Iberian Peninsula), this book extracts a reality from the silence and the darkness: Hebrew Morvedre.

The institutions and their leaders, such as the Jewish quarter and the rabbinate, are identified; the parish structure of the town is explained and, within this, in the western part of the parish of Sant Bartomeu, in the centre of the town, the Jewish quarter with the three successive boundaries, the streets, courtyards and squares, the synagogue and its urban surroundings, the butcher’s, the houses and the important buildings.

Also identified and explained are the three Jewish cemeteries in use until 1492, the hypogea and the mausoleum of the noble Isaac Atzar. But it also deals with human issues: a parallel reflection on being Jewish and the places in the Jewish quarter of Morvedre, a Jewish quarter that, thanks to this study, both what remains of it and that which is beyond material survival may be visited.

We also meet people here marked by the *caperó judaic*, or the badge, while they were Jews; and also those pointed to and accused of being Judaisers, many condemned, once they were converted. People with a certain way of believing and living, of moving

around and of being from Morvedre with those beliefs; a community of craftsmen, doctors, merchants, farmers... who worked and sold their produce in the *comarca*, the Peninsula and the Mediterranean. The names and surnames, and the nicknames, of the men and women of Morvedre are noted. Names handed down from generation to generation along with the memory of those who bore them. Among the families, Constantini, Saragossà, alias Puig de Pasqües, an example of social integration and the virtual disappearance of the lineage during the 18<sup>th</sup> century; Sant Feliu, Legem, Cofe, Vives, Atzar, Berenguer, and so on. All in all it follows a chronological pattern in which, with the prospect of conversion ever present, the attack by the Union on Morvedre and the sabotaging of the Jewish quarter in 1348, the war with Castile, the pogroms of 1391, organised “to destroy records of debts, material goods and the death of important people”, and the sheltering of the Jewish community of Morvedre in the castle become significant. The castle also took in a considerable number of Jews who were fleeing from the attack on the Jewish quarter of Valencia, making Morvedre the centre of Judaism in Valencia. And then there were Pope Benedict XIII’s bull of 1413 and the “concessions” granted by Alfonso V, in 1419, in the face of the Jewish community’s request for its books to be returned and to be exempted from wearing the badge. And the appointment of the Inquisitor General of the Crown of Aragon, Tomás de Torquemada, in 1483, and the implementation of the plan to expel the Jews from the Peninsula.

Passing through these pages are people who had to decide in the face of a death edict “to every male or female Jew, old or young, of any age, who may be or is in any part of the kingdoms and lordships after the established period expires”. Manuel Civera speaks of disbelief and consternation; Isaac Abravanel wrote: “wherever the royal decree and its force of law reached, the Jews felt great sorrow, great terror”. The author also looks at (and now in the contemporary period) follows the trail of those who yielded to conversion, many concealing and pretending to have given up their past. Others left in ships, like the one chartered from the Genoese Francesco de Grimaldi by the attorneys of the Jewish quarters of Morvedre and Xàtiva on May 7<sup>th</sup> 1492, moored on the beach of Morvedre to embark a thousand people bound for Pisa and Naples: a movement not just physical, but also mental, social, affective and cultural. As Edmond Jabès wrote, “The exile [...] takes two parallel roads: that of his memory and that of his footsteps. It is his footsteps that betray him, never his memory”.

*Morvedre hebreu* accompanies us in a responsibility: “remembering the past, forging the future”. It is to be hoped that this work, based on research and reflection, and also on proposals and suggestions, may encourage people both to get to know and love Hebrew Morvedre and to produce new studies revealing the importance of Valencia’s Jewish past. It is to be hoped that, from the trails established, education policies, research centres and projects, and the evaluation and teaching of the Jewish legacy may be introduced, a treasure subjected to “a scrupulous investigation of *ethnic cleansing* like that suffered for so long by so many families and individuals suspected of having Jewish ancestry”, as Gonzalo Maeso has written. We hope that, as in this book, it is done out of respect for memory and beliefs ||

## II Investigating art, capturing the enquiring gaze

Narcís Selles

J. F. Yvars, *Trencar les formes*  
(Breaking the Forms), Edicions 62, Barcelona 2009, 541 pp.

After the books *Jocs sense temps* (1992), *Al temps de les formes. Notes d'art* (2000) and *L'espai intermedi. Apreciacions entorn de l'art modern* (2001), this year a new collection of articles in Catalan by J. F. Yvars has appeared, *Trencar les formes* (2009), a compilation of several texts written by the brilliant essayist over the last few years. Beyond their compositional structure and the fact that they are compilations, what these four books have in common is basically the wish to deepen knowledge of works and authors that are representative of Western artistic modernity. In the latter the reflection is implicit in the way he deals with specific expressions of the creative act.

The new book is divided into two sections whose articles, although they deal with similar themes, occasionally even the same ones, correspond to different types of functions and narrative models. Indeed, whilst those in the first part are texts of great depth that thoroughly investigate the subject they are studying, they question it from multiple angles and set out to offer personal views of it and/or shed light on shadowy or little considered areas. Those in the second part are more synthetic and have a more immediate purpose, without however losing conceptual density or critical perspicacity, and gaining on the other hand a certain sharpness and wittiness. This different treatment has to do with the provenance of the collected materials, depending on whether they correspond to exhibition catalogues, which allow for a greater development of argument and description, or to newspaper and magazine articles, which require greater conciseness.

The first thing I would point out about Yvars' way of working is the clever concordance between the material nature of his writing and the perspective from which he approaches the artistic phenomenon, so much so that one seems to be reflected in the other. In his case, the way of talking about and the way of perceiving art share a marked formal wish, that which has to make the aesthetic experience and the production of meaning possible. The rhetorical device constructed by the author, of great linguistic precision and a high suggestive capacity, maintains, through its discursive specificity, multiple echoes of affinity with the values and the characteristics that he tends to reveal of the works of art upon which his gaze alights.

J. F. Yvars usually develops his writing, characterised by the use of *le mot juste*, elegant, relaxed expression, just a touch ironic, weaving a dense network of connections that refers to a kind of interlocution in many voices and on many sides. Firstly with the particular work of art, and with the world of the creator and his desires, motivations and interests, even with the perception that the artist has of his own work; but at the same time with those aesthetic productions more or less contiguous more or less distanced from the work under consideration, which he uses to capture, from close up or afar, specific meanings. The author also establishes a worthwhile

exchange, encompassing acceptance, qualified agreement or dissent, with the interpretations that other analysts have made of a certain aesthetic contribution.

Most of the works and artists dealt with lie in the centre of the modern current; in fact in some cases Yvars himself has had the indisputable merit of contributing to the general reconsideration of standpoints and careers that were not initially part of the mainstream. Occasionally, we could say that the interpretative essay shows up a certain underlying tension with the works of artists who have questioned modernist values, whether by establishing new links between high art and mass culture or opting for diverse heteronyms, but even in these cases the author is able to press the right button that brings them close to his particular universe.

In the rich polyphony that Yvars composes, the expert gaze of the connoisseur combines with the artist's intuition, highbrow aesthetic speculation with a solid historical grounding, and the enlightening poetic discovery with the development of skilled investigative strategies bordering on detective work ||