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V. Pere Calders Vs. "Realisme Històric"

Poetic Rhythm in Pere Calders' Short Stories **Moraima Donahue**

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POETIC RHYTHM IN PERE CALDERS' SHORT STORIES

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It is well documented that Calders was a very rebellious writer who would not allow himself to be considered as fitting into any mold. On one of the few occasions when he actually expressed his literary views, he insisted that the writer be permitted "una total llibertat per al somni," which reflects one of the most important features of his literary output: the vast expanse of his imagination. He refused to follow "literary trends and fashions" stating that they "fluctuate as the pendulum of taste swings between, at the one extreme, myth and unreality and, at the other, mimetic realism."

Amanda Bath very cleverly compares this freedom with the freedom painters experienced when photography was invented. Just as painters no longer had the duty "of faithfully representing reality," so, she contends, writers have "been liberated by the cinema, television and published mass media from the obligation of disseminating facts". She finds this idea in Calders himself and cites his urge to "buscar altres noms a les coses per veure si es poden expressar amb una altra profunditat o una altra dimensió."¹

Calders has been defined as a magic realist. It would be useful to keep in mind that the term "Magic Realism," recently fashionable in describing the literature of the absurd, or, more to the point, the literature of the supernatural, did not originate with the critics and writers who promoted it with such energy and enthusiasm. As J.A. Cuddon points out in his *Dictionary of Literary Terms*,

The term was coined by Franz Roh and used in the title of his book *Nach-expressionismus, magischer Realismus: Probleme der neuesten europäischer Malerei* (1925). He was concerned with the characteristics and tendencies discernible in the work of certain German painters of the period, especially the *neue Sachlichkeit* artists of Munich. Their work was marked by the use of still, sharply defined, smoothly painted images of figures and objects depicted in a somewhat surrealistic manner. The themes and subjects were often imaginary, somewhat outlandish and fantastic and with a certain dream-like quality...Gradually the term came to be associated with certain kinds of fiction...In due course the term caught on in literary circles and was used by critics (521).

¹. This passage and those that follow have been translated from the Spanish original by the author.

Cuddon goes on to state that the term was later applied to the literature of Borges and Gabriel García Márquez and several other authors, such as Italo Calvino, John Fowles, Günter Grass, Emma Tennant, Angela Carter and Salman Rushdie (Cuddon 521-22). "Magic" together with "realism" became, if you will, a household word to describe the kind of literature that dwells in "bizarre, skilful time shifts, convoluted and even labyrinthine narrative and plots, miscellaneous use of dreams, ...the element of surprise...the inexplicable" (Cuddon 522). These writers, and they are numerous, will argue that what we consider realistic is very limited in its scope and that what goes on in our minds, including dreams, is just as real as anything that defines human physical experience.

The absurdity of Pere Calders's characters arises not so much out of the fact that they are common, insignificant people, representatives of a society that cannot free itself from the daily boring routines which enslave them in a fruitless existence, but rather that they are, for the most part, men that have explored to crevices of the brain where fantasy resides in a dormant state. It is these multiple brain cells that allow the protagonists of Calders' short stories to give free rein to their imagination and so permit them to bring forward a creative world of a different kind of reality, not the one we perceive through our senses, but another one which is just as real.

Some of Calders's qualities, not always appreciated enough, are the enchanting melody of his language, the symphony of his words, their rhythmic quality, his use of metaphors, the symbolic beauty of his phrases. In Calders, the beautiful, sober Catalan language takes on an extraordinary flexibility. The word has been lovingly controlled, not artificially, but with intelligence and knowledge and above all with rhythm. It has the nakedness of everyday speech, but also the force of its lyric peacefulness. In order to show how Calders's themes are informed by his language and his tropes, I will try to weave together three of his most significant stories.

THE ABUSE OF TECHNOLOGY IN "LA CIÈNCIA I LA MESURA"

In "La ciència i la mesura," one of the stories in *Cròniques de la veritat oculta* (1951), a millionaire wants to build a special playroom in his castle for his three sons, but he doesn't want a room for the boys to have fun, he wants them to have a learning experience through the use of sophisticated games that will improve their minds. Thus he sends abroad for technicians and architects who will develop the ultimate playroom. For this purpose he decides to demolish one wing of his castle. Calders describes it beautifully: "... la pedra vella féu sentir el seu crit per tota la comarca, i trossets del segle XV s'incorporaren al vent i a

la pols. Els teodolits tancaren miques de paisatge dins de quadrícules imaginàries i unes parets de meditada naixença van alçar-se sota el padrinatge de la ciència." The passage illustrates the underlying theme suggested in the title of the short story: science has little respect for the arts and humanities and none for historical values. There is a striking metaphor in "La ciència i la mesura" which describes the labor of the workers when putting on a roof on the castle's wing: "Però va arribar el moment d'estendre l'amorosa volada del sostre, i els treballadors plantaren bandera..." (Gutiérrez 82). The expression "amorosa volada," which is meant to simply describe how the roof came to be placed on the construction, is indeed worth noting inasmuch as the author chooses a striking poetic description to portray a common action.

The children's wishes are never taken into consideration. As is customary with children of all ages when their fun is strictly programmed, they are not at all interested in participating in the adults' scheme, so they sabotage the construction of the playroom in most ingenious ways. Their father tries first to punish, then cajole his sons without result. Finally the room is completed. One of three partitions with different colors is assigned for each of the boys. They are forcefully brought into their own partition and made to play with games that were not of their choosing and told: "—Apa, a jugar." The whole town is invited to watch the spectacle: "Els nens anaven d'un joc a l'altre... Trobaven en les seves joguines la fredor que els sentinelles troben, durant les nits d'hivern, en els canons del seus fusells..." (Gutiérrez 90). The reference to "sentinelles" and "fusells" is important because there is a subtle underlying reference to tyrannical governments that claim to work for the betterment of their citizens. One could almost read it as an allusion to Franco's regime in Spain.

The father continues to demand that his children engage in the chosen games in the playroom. They refuse and the millionaire consults with his technicians who advise him to chain the boys inside their assigned areas and direct their games with a long cane. They still refuse to cooperate with the plan: "Ho van provar així. Però, ¿qui podia vèncer l'obstinació d'una raça com aquella? Al cap de vuit dies justos els nens es van corsecar i la indignació del millionari el va deixar sense bleix." In his fury the father, absolving himself from any responsibility in the whole affair, grabs the technician and nails him to the wall "com una papallona damunt l'escut d'armes del castell" (Gutiérrez 92). It is quite evident that Calders has succeeded through a work of fiction in denouncing the kind of patronizing society and government that try to impose their will on its citizens and in showing that these same governments do not usually accept the responsibility of their actions and, if anything goes wrong, tend to blame those they have chosen as the executors of their laws.

THE IDIOTIC EFFECTS OF WAR IN "EL BATALLÓ PERDUT"

Often Calders' fiction has a historical reference, be it social, political, or otherwise. One evident theme is his hatred of war, but even when the subject is depicted, he does not do it as an outright accusation or out of personal indignation. He has commiseration for the human lives that wars destroy, and the suffering they bring about. He also underlines the stupidity of man that tries to resolve conflicts through killing and destroying. The overall effect is that of deep sadness. In the story "El batalló perdut," although the war is at the centre of the story, the language used has again the rythm, gentleness and symbolic beauty that so distinguishes the prose of Calders. He first expresses his views through a story being told by a narrator who is asked by a group of comrades whether he knows a Christmas story. The narrator says he does, and explains that his story pertains to "his war." Notice the elegant use of metaphors:

-Sí. Em sé la meva. Fou durant una guerra, també la *meva* guerra. Hi ha tanta passió pels temes i un amor tan gran pels punts de vista que potser no existeix ni un sol home de la nostra generació que no hagi participat en un conflicte bèl·lic, o almenys que la seva vida no s'hagi vist modificada d'una manera fonamental per topades militars.

La meva guerra fou petita, si se la compara amb les obres mestres del gènere...El cas és que la meva guerra tingué tot el que calia, la tristesa i el dolor necessaris i la sang, sàviament repartida per boscos i carrers...La veig...obrint-se com una flor, com una taca, en el rostre i el pit d'amics meus, xopant la roba i les corretges, oferint a la vida exigües sortides fluvials. (Gutiérrez 212)

He continues relating an experience he and a fellow soldier, Joan Almós, had when they were fighting this war. Their job was to investigate the enemy's position and then report to headquarters. On this particular day, Christmas Eve, after a grueling battle in which their side had suffered heavy losses, he says: "L'enemic feia ostentació d'abundància de material, amb una prodigalitat excessiva, una mica de nou ric" (Gutiérrez 214). The two men had been ordered to go into the battlefield and then give a detailed assessment of their losses of men and weapons, in particular of their 12th battalion. They leave at dawn. The images created by Calders when describing the ambiance in which they travel and what they see, are worth noting: "...ens arribava el so de les ràfeges d'una metralladora. Breus, llunyanes, com els nusos d'una mà oculta que repiquessin damunt la fumassola." Almós is very much affected by the fact that this is Christmas Eve and that his family will be celebrating the holidays without him. His friend meditates on these words and the pain they make him suffer: "...despertaven alguna cosa que jo obligava a dormir dins el pit amb una gran punya, perquè

quan es deixondia em pujava per la gorja ocasionant-me ofec. Breus, llunyanes, com els nusos d'una mà oculta que repiquessin damunt la fumassola" (Gutiérrez 216). The two soldiers are devastated by the sight of their comrades that have been killed and of the eerie atmosphere that permeates the countryside. Not a sound is heard; it seems as if the war has come to a halt:

Ens adonàrem llavors del silenci que ens anava empresonant, impropï d'una guerra per petita que fos. Era un silenci solemne, que recollia les nostres paraules i ampliava el brogit de les pedres que feiem rodolar amb les botes. Havien cessat tots els sorolls esdevinguts familiars: el regular de les armes automàtiques, el feixuc esclat dels obusos, els tiroteigs aïllats, la remor dels avions...(Gutiérrez, 218).

In this passage one cannot help noticing the confusion of reality and unreality, which we know is a favorite technique of Calders when he wishes to invest a story with an air of mystery. One of the dead men they come across died with a finger pointed in a certain direction. The narrator wonders if destiny has a way of leading them into something inevitable. Whatever the reason and without knowing why, the two men follow the path the dead man's finger pointed to. When they reach the top of a hill where their steps had guided them, they find that the fog, which had engulfed them right along, has dissipated and at the bottom of the hill they see a valley; in it a multitude of men.

Not knowing whether they are friends or enemies, they cautiously make their way downhill avoiding being seen until they ascertain whether these people are friends or foes. Soon they become aware that at least some of them are soldiers belonging to their side of the conflict and that they are in an enclave within a wire fence: "Tenien un posat greu, gairebé no es movien i el fred, gelant l'alè de milers de boques, posava cimeres blanques al cap dels silenciosos guerrers" (Gutiérrez 220). The two comrades are so astounded by their discovery, that they forget their former precaution and make their presence known. One of the men, a captain, who incidentally is not inside the fence, but on the outside, notices their presence. The two men are relieved when they see he is one of their own. He motions to them to come closer.

The soldiers gathered within the fence come from both factions of the war, which makes it even harder for our heroes to understand. An interesting detail surfaces in the telling of the story: "Això no obstant, en ésser a prop, ens adonàrem d'una mescla incomprensible. Els nostres uniformes, vells, esparracats, alternaven sense que passés res amb els de l'enemic, igualment bruts i miseriosos." From this account the reader recognizes that Calders may be evoking the Spanish Civil war of 1936, brother against brother, symbolically depicted by the reference to the uniforms the soldiers are wearing, in both cases

"igualment bruts i miseriosos." Almós asks the captain what kind of camp this is. He answers it is a "classification camp." Neither man had ever heard this title before, but since they are used to taking orders, they enter the camp. Almós asks questions of those within the wire fence, no one answers. He is surprised by the whole incident and turns to his friend incredulously:

"—Segons el bon sentit, no hi ha res del que veiem. S'hauria de tractar, per anar bé, d'una allucinació. Però et veig a tu tan real!" (Gutiérrez 222). He then approaches a soldier who, because of his extreme youth, appears to come from one of the last levies. The young man cannot give him any information as to the nature of the camp, but he does know one thing, he says: "D'aquí en sortiríem per a integrar tres columnes principals: morts, desapareguts i fugitius" (Gutiérrez, 224). He supposes that in his case he will be sent to the death column, and shows the two men why he came to this conclusion. The exact words chosen by Calders to define the incident must be quoted to show the stunning beauty of his symbolism: "Va apartar-se el sarró que duïa pengim-pengiam i ens mostrà en el costat dret de la guerrera una taca d'un vermell fosc; quan respirava a fons, la taca s'humitejava reflectint punts de claror. Després, la roba absorbia la sang novament i tornava a regnar la tristesa mat de l'uniforme" (Gutiérrez, 225-6). Almós and his friend shudder when they observe this spectacle and start feeling symptoms of discomfort and pain not experienced before and which they attribute to the sight before them, reflex action. The narrator is convinced he has a back pain and does not dare touch his back. Almós brings his hand to his neck and then looks at his palm. He does not want to accept what the young soldier is telling him, nor what he sees, which seemed to quiet his anxiety since he retorts:

No pot ésser que es prescindís tant dels valors entesos. Els morts haurien d'estar-se quiets, preferentment estirats a terra, els fugitius agitats i afanyant-se, i els desapareguts no es veurien, senzillament. Per molt que s'hi especuli, el nom fa la cosa o almenys ajuda a indicar-la amb una gran aproximació. (Gutiérrez 226)

The loudspeakers in the camp start to sound out a list of names. Those that were called gather in columns, make their silent way out of the camp and are never seen again. The first name heard is Almós. His friend tries to push him to explain to his superiors that he cannot follow these men, that he must rejoin his brigade; but he finds himself feeling the "cansament de parlar contra el fat i em vaig limitar a ajudar-lo a recollir les seves coses." Almós has a final request: "De tu depèn que visqui en el record... Evoca'm almenys, cada Nadal, i aconsegueix que els meus ho facin." To which the narrator responds that there is

no need, that he is alive, he can touch him and listen to his words: "I mentre es perdia en la boirada, barreiant-se amb altres ombres, el meu amic em contentà: 'No, això no. Encara temo més aquesta horrible mort petita'" (Gutiérrez 228). These were his final words.

The men who at the beginning of "El batalló perdut" had asked if the narrator had a "Xmas story" to tell and have listened intently to his narration, want some answers: "—I a tu, per fi, com van classificar-te?" and surmise that since he is with them he must have been able to survive. The narrator replies that he is not sure and that "...i a més ignoro qui sou vosaltres. És incompreensible que, després de tants anys, conservem tots al damunt aquestes restes. Mireu-vos: tu portes botes de soldat i tu una caçadora amb una ensenya. Tu seguixes usant una antiga gorra militar i tu no et separes de la teva cantimplora de campanya. I aquesta palidesa que tenim..." One of them thinks this is due to the fire's reflection on the white walls, but the other does not accept this explanation and further tells the group that it may be so, however: "...tots sofrim com xacres d'una senectut inexistent, el gotejar d'aquesta sang de la qual no ens atrevim a parlar mai. De vegades, un canvi d'esperit i no de temps, ens fa sentir el mal de la carn oberta." They insist this is proof that they live. But the narrator does not accept this explanation and continues saying: "—Qui sap! O prova que la ferida és la menuda porta per on ens ha de passar tot el cos fins a desaparèixer. Hi ha tantes maneres de morir..." One of them suggests they should change the subject of the conversation, however it doesn't seem there is any other theme they are interested in, or can talk about, and hoping that the rest will not notice, each man: "...es va prémer els costats, o el ventre, o el pit, o el cap. D'una manera sorda, insidiosa, estenent-se com la fronda d'una roja vegetació, els molestava el dolor aquell que volien bandejar de la conversa" (Gutiérrez 230).

RELIGIOUS SUPERSTITION VERSUS ART IN "LA VERGE DE LES VIES"

Xebo Canabal in "La Verge de les vies" is a patient and deep-thinking man whose job in life is to be a signalman in a railway crossing near Nonoalco bridge and who "seguia lènguidament el camí d'un núvol blanc que s'anava transformant a poc a poc per dibuixar una cresteria rosada." He is happy with his modest job because it allows him to contemplate "el vaiverejar de la gent tot filant els rudiments d'una filosofia. En aquells primers temps, l'home creia haver realitzat un ideal llargament acaronat per ell i els seus ancestres: viure amb una gran economia de moviments, tenir hores senceres per a deixar vagar les idees, sense els sobresalts que proporcionen les responsabilitats." He soon tires of this occupation he has chosen and looks for something

else to distract him from what he now finds is a boring way to spend one's time. He decides to engage in conversation with passers by, truck drivers or workmen who stop by to refresh themselves by drinking water from a tap close to the railway barrier. Their conversations would go as follows, with Xebo speaking first:

—Què s'explica?

L'altre no es precipitava mai. Com que ja era sabut el que calia respondre, no portava pressa. Per fi, deia:

—Aquí, només. Passant-la...

Calders explains: "Aquesta frase tancava tota la profunditat de pensament que havien rebut com a herència, i es quedaven aclaparats, durant una estona. 'Aquí' volia dir el món, el seu petit univers tal com el coneixien. 'Només' significava la poca importància de les coses terrenals. I 'passant-la' feia referència a la vida i a la seva manera de fugir inexorablement" (Bath 20).

Soon this new found contentment also vanishes. He continues to experience a great dissatisfaction with his life. He knows something is missing, but does not quite know what it is. One day a young boy comes by and with a piece of chalk draws a rudimentary eagle on the black surface of the metal box that houses the railway signals. When he leaves, Xebo goes over to examine the drawing on the signal box. With a damp cloth he erases what the boy has drawn and realizes that the clean black surface is "exercint una triomfal atracció" on him. With his accustomed thinking process, he meditates on this experience and decides to go out and buy a box of colored chalks. The next day he puts his inspiration to work and draws some flowers on the same box. This first attempt does not please him, but he has no intention to give up his new ambition and continues to erase and then draw other subjects. After several unsuccessful efforts, he draws an Indian bird-seller. This time he is pleased: "...per l'íntima satisfacció que experimentava es podia afirmar que quedava adscrit des d'aleshores a una vaga classificació artística. Seria figurista, primari, infantil, amb una tendència (sempre en pugna amb les aptituds naturals) cap al realisme."

Even before completing his work he is aware that people have gathered around him to admire the drawing. Different persons have different ideas as to the identity of the bird-seller. They each see a resemblance of an acquaintance or a member of their family. A woman says: "—S'assembla al meu cunyat" whereas one of the workmen exclaims: "—El que són les coses. També s'assembla al meu..." A bus driver expresses his own opinion: "—També és el cunyat de donya Cuca" and so on. That night Xebo was so excited by his artistic work

that he was unable to sleep. He wants the morning to come quickly so he can erase what he has done the day before and create something new. However, "sentia la pena de la pròpia destrucció." And "amb la nova inquietud creadora alimentada durant l'insomni, va posar-se a dibuixar una noia dreta, hieràtica, que aguantava una flor vermella amb una de les mans" (Bath 24).

He is now so engrossed in this work that he resents any time spent away from it; however at the same time he feels a certain unease: "No tenia l'aptesa de formular d'una manera clara les seves idees, però el turmentava una sensació d'esclavitud nova i desconcertant." By now he has acquired a critical eye and realises there are ways to improve the picture, for instance: "L'ull esquerre de la noia era més gran que l'altre i la tija de la flor que duia en una mà quedava fora dels dits que l'havien de prémer i, per tant, flotava misteriosament en l'aire. Però un encant especial es despenia de la figura i ell mateix era sensible a l'imperatiu d'aquesta gràcia, ja que no s'atreví a corregir els errors." Unaware that he is being watched, he hears someone say: "És la mare de tots." Xebo turns his head and sees the apprentice who goes back and forth across the tracks as a daily routine. Xebo explains it is only a picture of a girl and nothing else. The other stands quietly for a while, and then states: "Qui sap! Jo dic que és la mare de tots..." He leaves totally convinced he is right. Xebo is very angry at the man's dogmatic statement, especially since he, the creator, denies this man's stubborn perception: "Un pudor que no podia explicar-se i un respecte que el dominava confusament, li feien rebutjar la idees de donar a la figura altres atributs que els profans." He proceeds to erase the drawing of the girl but with "la mica de pena que li feia sempre el valor fugaç de la seva obra" (Bath 26).

Canabal expands the subjects of his skill by drawing "illustrations from real life" including political cartoons. His fame grows, tourists want to take his picture while at work. A photographer is sent from a magazine in Mexico City and an article is written about him. He is not impressed by all this glamour, but his notoriety has been a source of inspiration for his fellow countrymen: "El fet que un home s'obrís camí sense ajut d'altri, donava alè a l'esperança popular" (Bath 28).

People came from all over and stood watching him create this wonderful world which most often they could recognize and identify themselves with. He continues to be greatly admired, except for one critic, the apprentice, who informs him that: "...no faràs res com la imatge aquella. Vas cometre un pecat esborrant-la i ara tens les mans contaminades..."—Tot el que fas és mundà, afegí... Gairebé no movia els músculs de la cara ni modulava la veu, però d'una manera misteriosa donà a aquesta darrera frase un to execratori."

Xebo is challenged and decides he is going to again draw a figure

of "una donzella i un halo que nimbava tota la figura. Omplí el fons amb diminutes estrelles i deixà per al final resoldre l'ambiciós propòsit de dotar la imatge d'un rostre diferent dels que havia fet fins aleshores, que expressés la tendresa i la beatitud que considerava apropiades" (Bath 36). He succeeds. While in the process of drawing the figure of the young girl, he is unaware that the "donya Cuca" mentioned before, an old woman from the snack stall, has been watching: "S'havia cobert el cap amb el seu xal, i ajuntava les mans com si es posés a orar." Xebo's admirers now show unusual signs of reverence towards this new drawing. The men remove their hats, the women, imitating Cuca, join their hands together in prayer. The next morning the apprentice comes by and is delighted by the picture. He kneels down as in worship and says: "—Ara sí, ara sí! Això no ho toquis pas, que aquí s'ha de quedar..." Canabal is delighted by this outburst of enthusiasm and decides to leave the picture for everyone to see for two or three days. The people that come to view his last masterpiece bring candles, flowers, potted plants, all of which are put at the "foot of the image": "Tothom s'estava una llarga estona davant del dibuix acolorit, amb el posat sever i la callada tristesa dels indis. Era una tristesa externa, perquè una eufòria oculta els feia pensar en velles danses i en l'explosió de petards i de coets. Aclucant els ulls, veien colors vius, flamejant per la reverberació d'una continguda violència" (Bath 38).

The next day Xebo is aware his work itself has become the focal point of awe and admiration and that people are completely ignoring the artist. He is miffed by this lack of attention and does not want to accept that the picture has taken on a personality of its own and the creator is no longer important. The long line of people who come to view the drawing is similar to the worship rendered to the Virgin of Guadalupe. People approach Canabal's drawing on their knees, paying her the same kind of worship given to the painting in the Mexican basilica. Xebo is appalled at this display and tries to convince the worshippers that this is a "pecat que anaven a cometre pel vici d'exagerar" (Bath 40), but to no avail. He keeps insisting it is only a drawing and tells them he intends to rub off the image and everything will then return to normal. The crowd's reaction is hostile. "Sense saber-ho, Canabal sofria l'antiga amarguesa de l'home devorat per la seva obra. Seguint un impuls irat, agafà un drap i va insinuar el gest d'esborrar el dibuix. Però hi havia una guàrdia permanent que el deturà."

Xebo frets all night. When he gets up and goes to see his work, he finds that a glass has been placed around his drawing and there is no possibility of tampering with it. He meets the apprentice who gleefully tells him his job is done and now he can detach himself from the whole experience: "—Ja pots estar content, fill meu. Les teves mans han estat

les escollides. Renta-te-les bé i no facis mai més res..." Canabal now knows his glory is past: "Ell havia estat l'origen d'aquella mobilització popular i ara el deixaven al marge, l'obligaven a sentir-se aliè i sobrevingut" (42). He is suddenly inspired by a thought, he would buy a blackboard and do his drawings next to the signal box. When the apprentice hears this, he is furious and threatens him with smashing the blackboard if he should dare try such a thing: "Canabal recollí la veritable força que contenia l'amenaça i tingué el convenciment que el seu art acabava de morir." With this turn of events, the poor man sadly realises that he has to look for something else to fill his life and imagination, so he tries to go back to meditation and contemplation. However, this is no longer possible, his life has changed. He was touched by his artistic inclination and bringing it forth is the only way he can be satisfied.

He now hates his work. He is trapped by what people have made of what he had the intention of creating, simply a young girl: "—Aquest dibuix em va perdre... és com si m'haguessin tallat les mans i les tingués presoneres entre la capa de guix i el metall." An old woman hears him express himself thus and is terrified: "—No digui això, senyor Xebo! Pensi que el podrien castigar..." to which he responds he intends to always say whatever he thinks and that given the chance, he will break the glass and destroy his creation. At this new outburst the crowd, which has now surrounded him, becomes very hostile and warns him he is blaspheming and will be punished for it. They lose all the respect and admiration they once had for him and expect him not to be around for long: "—Encara. Però és un fet. Jo no voldria tenir, com ell, la consciència bruta i estar-me sempre tan a prop de les vies" (Bath 44).

A few days later, as if Providence had heard the people's prediction, a dreadful accident occurs at the railway pass. For an unknown reason, as a locomotive approaches, Xebo is not able to close the barrier. He signals to a bus driver who is about to cross the railway pass to stop. The man either ignores the red flag or he does not see it, and a horrible accident takes place. Xebo is hit by flying debris. A woman points him out and has him arrested as the cause of the accident. When the policeman arrests him, "Canabal no presentà la més lleu resistència; de cop i volta va semblar-li que tot allò li era estrany i en el fons s'alegrava pensant que d'altres mans tindrien cura del seu destí. I que s'acabava un episodi de la seva per a començar-ne un altre, amb la possibilitat de liquidar el desconcert i el ressentiment." He is sent to jail and the Bus Company and the National Railway trade accusations about who is to blame for the accident. Xebo is accused of being negligent: "—Així, dibuixaves durant les hores de treball? Dropo!" He won't admit this is true and is then threatened with

transportation to a penal colony. He is terrified at this possibility and, moved by panic, turns to God: "No hi ha hagut mala intenció, és evident. Mai no he volgut faltar a ningú. Que se'm perdoni! Vet aquí que un es deixa portar per un impuls natural i pecca, cosa difícil de preveure. Sense estudis, es perd el carril de vista sense adonar-se'n." After agonizing over this new feeling of guilt, he makes a promise to himself: "Si se'm salva, molt bé. Ho tindrè present tota la vida. Si no, m'acabaré de perdre deliberadament, amb la qual cosa no veig que ningú hi guanyi res. Apa!"

Eventually he is exonerated of any wrong doing when the Railway Company proves that the bus driver was driving while intoxicated, and so Xebo is released from prison. When he asks for his job back, he is told: "-De cap manera," to which he replies that it was proven that he was not guilty. The response from his immediate boss is: "Precisament per això. Si sense ésser culpable t'has trobat en un embolic tan gros, el dia que en fessis alguna, ens ensorraries a tots" (Bath 48). Not knowing where to turn and convinced in his ignorance of the power of those above him, and not knowing about trade unions to which he would have had recourse, he does not ask for their assistance. To seek justice from the judicial system is out of the question: "Pel que d'ell pogués dependre, estava decidit a deixar descansar la llei per la resta dels seus dies."

He has one more important thing to accomplish, namely to go to the railway crossing and visit the shrine of his creation. With this in mind he "sets off barefoot from his house" and with feet bloodied by the harsh terrain he must cover, finally arrives at his destination. Once there he waits patiently in line for his turn to reach the drawing:

El posseï un fervor veritable i volia mostrar el seu agraïment. Alçà la mirada i es trobà amb el seu dibuix, amb cada una de les ratlles i les taques de color que coneixia tan bé. Per no distreure's, aclucà els ulls i procurà concentrar-se, però havia vist una cosa que el preocupava. Obrí novament els ulls i va comprovar, en efecte, que una de les mans de la donzella era més gran que l'altra. No se n'havia adonat mai, però aleshores ho veia amb una claredat absoluta...Es tractava d'allargar els dits de la mà dreta i, ja que s'hi posava, faria més estrelles en el fons i donaria uns colors més vius a l'halo. Estava segur que tindria més encert en un nou intent, perquè la figura que contemplava no li plaïa. Tingué un sobresalt per aquest pensament, que va semblar-li poc adequat, i es penedí de donar entrada a idees al marge de la promesa que l'havia portat allí.

His artistic instinct tells him that the drawing could be very much improved if he were given the opportunity: "...i aleshores va acarar-se resoltament a la donzella i la sentí com a cosa seva i ben lligada a les vies i, per tant, a la terra" (Bath 50). He knows that his natural gift has not left him and that he must create again, "la Donzella que dibuixaria

si les seves mans fossin de debò ungides amb la gràcia. La veia clarament i podia parlar-hi i agrair-la. Podria demanar-li altres coses...Xebo Canabal va fer una altra prometença: si li fos permès d'arribar a Sinaloa, si la germana de la seva mare que vivia allí li donava allotjament i assistència, pintaria la Donzella, tal com no se la podria imaginar mai el macip." He leaves the area and shouts to the snack vendors: "Tot ho veieu petit, vosaltres. Allà on jo vaig ara, si la meua veu és escoltada, sorgiran enormes parades, immenses piràmides de llavors de gira-sol..." I somrigué amb esforç, d'una manera paradoxalment trista, per tota la pena que li era reservada fins a arribar a Sinaloa" (Bath 52).

* * *

I hope to have shown how, in the broad literature of the fantastic that has been written, the stories discussed in this essay represent a uniquely Caldersian perspective concerning the experience of the mind and the spirit of the "little people." Endowed with a rhythmic sense for his language, Calders creates a world of the subconscious which emerges from his writings in his choice of metaphors, images and symbols in order to develop themes such as the use of technology at the expense of the humanities, as in the case of "La ciència i la mesura," the devastating and idiotic effects of war in "El batalló perdut" and religious superstition which destroys the creative art in people and their world, as in the case of "La verge de les vies."

The most important aspects of human behavior are destined to doom humanity, inasmuch as they follow the path to destruction of all that is sacred, the intellect, peace and understanding among all peoples, and Art's freedom of expression.

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