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## ***The Achievement of J. V. Foix*** **David H. Rosenthal**

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## THE ACHIEVEMENT OF J. V. FOIX

DAVID H. ROSENTHAL

*L'antic museu, les madones borroses,  
I el pintar extrem d'avui! Càndid ra:::pell:  
M'exalta el nou i m'enamora el vell. (1: 49)<sup>1</sup>*

*(The ancient museum, the faded madonnas,  
And today's extreme painting! A naïve sudden impulse;  
The new inflames me and I'm in love with the old.)*

(J. V. FOIX, "EM PLAU, D'ATZAR" — I LIKE, AT RANDOM)

J. V. Foix (b. 1893), whose career covers nearly a century, remains the acknowledged master of avant-garde Catalan poetry. Since 1917 he has been closely associated with his nation's artistic vanguard, including such internationally known painters as Salvador Dalí and Joan Miró, both of whom he presented in their first one-man shows. In addition to his poetic and journalistic activities (he has edited magazines like *Trassos* (Pieces), *La Revista Catalana* and *Monitor*), Foix is also, as it happens, the prosperous owner of two fine pastry shops. His customers sometimes ask him if by any chance he has a son who writes those strange poems with the long titles.

Foix and Joan Salvat-Papasseit, both of whom emerged in the 1910's, were the first Catalan poets to combine the wide stylistic and intellectual range and the directness of speech we often associate with modern poetry. Salvat died early — in

<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise noted, citations from Foix are to *Obres completes*, 3 vols., Barcelona, Edicions 62, 1974, 1979, 1985. Page numbers are indicated parenthetically.

1924 — but Foix went on to forge a style and vision that have by now made him a leading European writer. In a fictitious “Lletra d’Itàlia” (Letter from Italy) at the beginning of his book *Poemes en ondes hertzianes* (Poems in Electric Waves, 1919), Salvat commented that “Aquí a Roma es murmura que per a comprendre a En Foix de Sarrià hom deu llegir a Sòfocles primer”<sup>2</sup> (Here in Rome it’s rumored that to understand Mr. Foix of Sarrià one should first read Sophocles). The choice of Sophocles is somewhat arbitrary, but Salvat’s meaning is clear enough: part of Foix’s subject matter is culture itself.

Foix was indeed far more steeped in culture than his self-taught friend Salvat. Like Carles Riba and other more traditional poets, Foix sought to draw into his work what he conceived as an entire Mediterranean tradition. This effort at synthesis is perhaps clearest in early sonnets like “Si pogués acordar Raó i Follia” (If I Could Reconcile Reason and Madness), whose form is classically Petrarchan and uses Ausiàs March’s characteristic Romance decasyllables:

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

—Que el cor encén i el meu neguit desvia—  
De mots, de sons i tons, adesiara  
Fes permanent l'avui, i l'ombra rara  
Que m'estrafa pels murs, fos seny i guia

Del meu errar per tamarius i lloses;  
—Oh dolços pensaments!, dolçors en boca!—  
Tornessin ver l'Abscon, i en cales closes,

<sup>2</sup> *Poesies*, 6.

Les imatges del son que l'ull evoca,  
 Vivents; i el Temps no fos; i l'esperança  
 En Immortals Absents, fos llum i dansa! (1: 75)

(If I could reconcile Reason and Madness  
 And on clear morning, not far from the clear sea  
 My mind, that lusts for joy,  
 Could make the Eternal present. And with fantasy

—That the heart inflames and my uneasiness turns aside—  
 Of words, sounds, and tones, could  
 Occasionally make today permanent, and that strange shadow  
 That mimics me on walls, be good sense and guide

For my wanderings among tamarisks and tombstones;  
 —Oh sweet ponderings! Sweetness in mouth!—  
 They might make the Secret true, and in sheltered inlets

Bring alive sleep's eye-evoked images;  
 And time might not be; and the hope  
 of Absent Immortals, light and dancing!)

Divided into two arbitrary grammatical units (lines 1-4 and lines 5-14), the sonnet really makes one long, closely-knit period. The tone is ecstatically meditative and suggests Ramon Llull's efforts to join intellect and feeling:

Acompanyaren-se memòria e voluntat, e pujaren en lo munt de l'amat, per ço que l'enteniment s'exalcàs, e l'amor se doblàs en amar l'amar<sup>3</sup>

(Memory and desire came together and climbed the beloved's [i.e. God's] mountain, so that understanding might increase and love be redoubled in loving the beloved.)

<sup>3</sup> *Llibre d'amic e amat* in *Obres essencials*, Barcelona, Selecta, 1957, 1: 265.



In this context the word *folia* (madness) also suggests Lull, who often appears in his own books under the *senhal* of Ramon lo Foll (Ramon the Mad).<sup>4</sup>

Also evoked, however, are a series of "classical" balances between the Apollonian and the Dionysian, transience and eternity, imagination and reality. Thus, in the poem, Reason and Madness are followed by a subtler dichotomy: on the one hand, the clear morning air and the Mediterranean Sea, symbolic of Greek rationality; and on the other, Foix's own individual sensibility "that lusts for joy". These dichotomies are joined together by the creative act itself. The Eternal can be made concrete through the poet's "fantasy ... of words, sounds, and tones".

Thus explained, the argument sounds rather dry. In the poem itself, however, Foix manages to impart a sense of breathless intellectual adventure that keeps the reader on the alert. He does so, in part, by constantly linking abstractions with emotionally charged language. Two examples are "my mind, that lusts for joy" and "with fantasy That the heart inflames". Another instance is the fascinating shift from the abstract "Oh sweet ponderings" to the vividly sensory "Sweetness in mouth!" The poem's syntactical structure — the way it slowly builds toward its final "light and dancing!" — also contributes to the emotional impact.

A glance at the quotations Foix uses to introduce his early sonnet sequences — from Guido Cavalcanti and Dante, Ausiàs

<sup>4</sup> Foix frequently cites Lull at the beginnings of his books. The most significant of these citations comes at the beginning of *Les irrealis omegues* (1: 191): "On pus scura és la semblança pus altament entén l'enteniment que aquella semblança entén" (Where the semblance is most obscure the understanding that comprehends that semblance is most elevated).

March and Llull, Bernart de Ventadorn and Jordi de Sant Jordi — will suggest some of his poetic models and give a more precise idea of what “Mediterranean tradition” means here. The link to the *stilnovisti* and to March and Llull is particularly evident. Like their work, Foix’s poetry is at once densely speculative and passionate. Foix seeks what T. S. Eliot, speaking of the English metaphysical poets, called “a direct sensuous apprehension of thought, or a recreation of thought into feeling”.<sup>5</sup> In addition to Foix’s medieval and early Renaissance sources, there is also an effort to reach back toward classical antiquity. This aspect is most obvious in the juggling of opposites (“make the Eternal present”, “make today permanent”, “and that strange shadow be good sense and guide”). In “If I Could Reconcile ...”, the Reason-Madness balance also suggests Nietzsche’s Dionysius-Apollo dichotomy. In the sonnet’s final tercet these opposites are brought into a kind of Platonic tension by the imagination: “Bring alive sleep’s eye-evoked images; And time might not be; and the hope Of Absent Immortals, light and dancing!” In these lines Foix condenses a tremendous amount of thought and feeling. The imagination, conceived of here as closely akin to dreams, can make the transient permanent and turn the idea of the gods into a concrete ritual of artistic celebration.

At the time he wrote “If I Could Reconcile ...” (between 1913 and 1927, according to an introductory note), Foix was also publishing experimental prose poems. In these, images of the Mediterranean past often mingle with current artifacts to produce an atmosphere of sinister distortion like that in many of Dali’s paintings:

<sup>5</sup> *Selected Essays*, New York, Harcourt Brace, 1950, 246.



En percebre de lluny el meu rival que m'esperava, immòbil, a la platja, he dubtat si era ell o el meu cavall o Gertrudis. En acostar-m'hi, m'he adonat que era un fal·lus de pedra, gegantí, erigit en edats pretèrites. Cobria amb la seva ombra mitja mar i duia gravada al sòcol una llegenda indesxifrable. M'he acostat per a copiar-la, però al meu davant, badat en ple sorral ardent, hi havia únicament el meu paraigua. Damunt la mar, sense ombra de vaixell ni de núvol, suraven els guants enormes que calça el monstre misteriós que et persegueix cap al tard sota els plàtans de la Ribera. (2: 22)

(When I spied my rival in the distance, motionlessly awaiting me on the beach, I wondered if it were he, my horse, or Gertrude. As I approached, I realized it was a stone phallus, gigantic, erected in the far-off past. Its shadow covered half the sea and an indecipherable legend was inscribed at the base. I went closer so I could copy it, but before me, lying open on the burning sand, was only my umbrella. Upon the sea, without shadow of ships or clouds, floated those enormous gloves worn by the mysterious monster who chases you toward evening beneath the Ribera's plane trees.)

Foix has continued to publish prose poems throughout his career, but his sonnet-writing period ended in the late 1920's. Since then most of his work in verse has been unrhymed, structurally more open, and often distinguished by long explanatory or scene-setting titles. When the poetry has a specific historical context, these titles — together with the dates at the end — can be very useful. One poem, dated September 1936, opens with a scene from the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War:

A L'ENTRADA D'UNA ESTACIÓ SUBTERRÀNIA, LLIGAT DE  
MANS I PEUS PER DUANERS BARBOSOS, VAIG VEURE COM LA  
MARTA SE N'ANAVA EN UN TREN FRONTERER. LI VOLIA SOM-  
RIURE, PERÒ UN MILICIÀ POLICÈFAL SE'M VA ENDUR AMB ELS  
SEUS, I VA CALAR FOC AL BOSC (1: 241)

(AT THE ENTRANCE TO AN UNDERGROUND STATION,  
BOUND HAND AND FOOT BY BEARDED CUSTOMS OFFICIALS,  
I SAW MARTA SET OFF IN A TRAIN FOR THE FRONTIER. I

WANTED TO SMILE AT HER, BUT A POLYCEPHALOUS MILITIAMAN CARRIED ME OFF WITH HIS MEN AND SET FIRE TO THE WOODS)

In other cases the titles may be more complicated, but they usually attempt to orient the reader. "Al peu d'una muralla ciclòpia ..." (At the Foot of a Cyclopean Wall ..., 1935) opens with a clearly etched scene involving two figures: a pulley-adjusting mechanic and an uneasy observer, perhaps the poet himself, "watching the sea with an old book in my hand":

AL PEU D'UNA MURALLA CICLÒPIA L'HOMME DE LA GRANOTA  
BLAVA, MÉS ALT QUE TOTS, ENCERAVA CORRETGES I AJUSTA-  
VA POLITGES. DE TANT EN TANT, DES DE LES PREGONESES  
D'UNA ESTRANYA VISERA, EM MIRAVA, SORRUT. JO FEIA EL  
DISTRET TOT MIRANT EL MAR, AMB UN LLIBRE VELL A LA MÀ

En falla i son conec aquell qui escampa  
Vora la mar, pels rocs antics oberta,  
Falsos estels, marcits, coberts amb fulls impresos.  
Torxa en mà, l'he seguit entre avions bipèdals  
Quan, d'amagat, n'ungeix els engranatges  
En el·líptics hangars i garites sagrades.  
L'he vist, reial, en cova marinera,  
Com si vestís draperies de molsa  
A sol colgant

—quan les ombres palmades  
S'ajoquen pels torrents i espïen les naixences—,  
O en clos murat

—quan les hores ancoren  
Als ports mentals—  
brogent i voltat d'eines  
Mesurant els avencs estel·lars i llur fronda.

És el menhir de l'alba selvatana,  
Remorós de flors d'aigua i llum flairosa,  
El muscle adolescent i sangós de migdia,



L'ocella de la tarda, exiliada  
 Entre hèlices romeves, moridores,  
 I evanescents motors, a la pista captiva,  
 L'androgín de la nit, generós de semences,  
 Ombrant les solituds de prades primitives,  
 Present pertot on cobegem els cossos,  
 Flama perenne als merlets de les calmes,  
 Brisca cantaire a les blavors boscoses,  
 Forma ancestral als nocturns de les cales,  
 Claror de freixe en el congost del somni.

És l'Etern Inconcret que vaga per les dunes:  
 —*Llum en ta faç quan em mires i calles*—  
 O forada els penyals amb punxons impalpables:  
 —*Obre esguards infinits damunt la mar vermella,*  
*quan surten fora port les barques de l'encesa*  
*i modulen llurs cants veus pregones i humides*—.  
 Invoca déus novells per les platges abstractes:  
 —*El teu nom exaltat per gates tramuntanes,*  
*quan grana el goig, defalleixes i preguntes*—.  
 Crema brossa immortal en els barrancs maresos:  
 —*Floreix ton cos amb fulla i flor ignorades*—.  
 Cova obscurs animals en imminents boscatges:  
 —*Quan l'ombra de tots dos és la Sola Ombra.* (1: 219-220)

(AT THE FOOT OF A CYCLOPEAN WALL, THE MAN IN BLUE  
 OVERALLS, TALLEST OF ALL, WAS POLISHING LEATHER STRAPS  
 AND ADJUSTING PULLEYS. FROM TIME TO TIME HE LOOKED  
 AT ME FROM BENEATH HIS STRANGE VISOR, TACITURN. I  
 PRETENDED NOT TO NOTICE, WHILE WATCHING THE SEA  
 WITH AN OLD BOOK IN MY HAND

In fable and sleep I know that man who,  
 Among ancient rocks near the open sea,  
 Scatters fake faded kites covered with printed sheets.  
 Torch in hand, I've followed him among twin-engine planes  
 When in secret he anoints their gears  
 In elliptical hangars and sacred watch posts.

I've seen him, regal, in a cave by the sea  
As if dressed in moss  
Beneath a setting sun

—when the hand-shaped shadows

Retire into streams and see births —  
Or within a closed wall

— when the hours anchor

In mental harbors —

humming and surrounded by tools,  
Measuring stellar chasms and their foliage.

It's the menhir of forested dawn  
Rustling with waterflowers and scented light,  
Muscle, adolescent and bloody, of midday,  
Bird of the afternoon, exiled  
Among wandering mortal propellers  
And evanescent motors on the captive runway.  
Night's androgyne, generous with seed,  
Darkening the solitudes of primitive meadows,  
Present wherever we covet the body,  
Perennial flame on the battlements of calm,  
A singing breeze in the leafy blueness,  
Ancestral form in the nocturnes of inlets,  
Brightness of ash trees in the canyons of dreams.

It's the Eternal Ungraspable wandering through dunes:

*"Light on your face when you see me and grow silent".*

Or it pierces boulders with impalpable drills:

*"It opens vast vistas above scarlet seas  
when fishermen's boats set sail in the darkness  
and deep humid voices modulate their chants".*

It invokes new gods on the abstract beaches:

*"Your name exalted by gay northwinds  
when joy runs to seed, you faint and you pray".*

## Immortal burning speck in the ocean's ravines:

*"Your body bursts forth in unseen leaves and flowers".*

It hatches obscure creatures in imminent groves:

*"When the shadow of both is the Single Shadow".)*

It is helpful to know here that Foix was an aficionado of amateur aviation and a member of the Catalan "Penya de l'Aire" (Aviation Circle).<sup>6</sup> "At the Foot ..." opens in a mood of mystical adulation for the mechanic. Foix knows him "in fable and sleep", describes him in terms suggesting Poseidon ("regal, in a cave by the sea") and Hephaestus ("Humming and surrounded by tools, Measuring stellar chasms and their foliage"), and even follows him "torch in hand". In the poem's first section, the realistically presented mechanic in his overalls gradually evolves into a god of airplanes who "anoints their gears In elliptical hangars and sacred watchposts."

At the same time, Foix develops a strain of natural imagery centered on the sea. This imagery is woven into the portrait of the mechanic ("as if dressed in moss") and is played off against the artificial world of tools and planes — just as the clear sea, tamarisks, and sheltered inlets interact with Platonic ideas in "If I Could Reconcile ..." The mechanic is slowly enveloped in a nimbus of magic and ancient myth.

The second stanza continues and deepens this pattern, with natural and sexual imagery gradually gaining dominance over the mechanical. The mechanic disappears and we are left with the plane, which by now is as much a sexual presence as a machine:

Night's androgyne, generous with seed,  
Darkening the solitudes of primitive meadows,  
Present wherever we covet the body

The plane itself has become alive, a "bird of the afternoon" as

<sup>6</sup> This and other biographical details about Foix are taken from Joan Colomines's introduction to J. V. Foix, *Catalans de 1918*, Barcelona, Edicions 62, 1965.



well as a divine presence, beautiful and frightening, an "ancestral form" or "menhir".

This series of mystical parallels and correspondences is reinforced by the poem's incantatory quality. Though there is no rhyme scheme, the meter (decasyllables and Alexandrines) is regular within each stanza and underlines the mysterious prayerlike intonation. Another element in this atmosphere is the series of syntactically parallel lines beginning with nouns:

Flama perenne ...  
Brisca cantaire ...  
Forma ancestral ...  
Claror de freixe ...

These nouns are then linked to another series of nouns that locate them in imaginative space:

... als merlets de les calmes,  
... a les blavors boscoses,  
... als nocturns de les cales,  
... en el congost del somni.

A final element — the most obvious but the most important of all — is Foix's intensely lyrical imagery in lines like "darkening the solitudes of primitive meadows" or "a singing breeze in the leafy blueness". Such lines are at once literal descriptions of the plane and magical interpenetrations among mechanical, natural, and emotional worlds.

The poem's last stanza introduces still another element: the Eternal Ungraspable. With this transcendent abstraction, another speaking voice also enters the poem, first addressing the poet and then gradually merging with him in a final chant.

Here images of the sea mingle with images of fertility and birth ("when joy runs to seed", "It hatches obscure creatures") and with the repetitive songs of night fishermen. The result is a sense of both the oneness of everything and the miraculous possibilities of each individual object.

Though "At the Foot ..." is formally quite distinct from "If I Could Reconcile ...", the two poems do have a number of interesting similarities — in particular their effort to bind together such opposites as imagination and reality, concrete and abstract, old and new. The effort, in both poems, ends in Platonic unity and in the synthesizing nature of art, an art that makes the intangible specific and brings together all of man's experience. In an often-quoted "Lletra a Clara Sobirós" (Letter to Clara Sobirós), Foix describes the poet as a "mag, especulador del mot, pelegrí de l'invisible, aventurer o investigador a la ratlla del son", 1: 28 (magician, word-speculator, pilgrim of the invisible, unsatisfied, adventurer or researcher on the border of sleep). Though the word "magician" seems to emphasize the poet's role as inventor, the succeeding terms suggest that he is the revealer of a world that already exists, independent of his verse. This conviction of a prior poetic reality is even more explicitly stated in an earlier paragraph:

Si em llegeixes a mi —i temo que t'hi penses com qui vol contravenir el semàfor— recorda sempre que sóc un testimoni del que conto, i que el real, del qual parteixo i del qual visc, amb cremors a les entranyes, com saps, i l'irreal que tu et penses descobrir-hi, són el mateix. (1: 28)

(If you read me —and I'm afraid you're thinking of it like someone determined to cross against a traffic light— always remember that I'm a witness to what I tell of, and the real, from which I depart and live, with my insides burning as you know, and the unreal you think you'll find there, are the same.)

To achieve this synthesis, Foix relies heavily on the Catalan physical, cultural and historical landscape, one aspect of which is the Hellenic and Renaissance tradition that I have already discussed in some detail. Another aspect is the world of Pyrenean shepherds from which Foix's own ancestors came. This world forms the focal point of "El meus país és un roc" (My Country's a Rock), a poem dedicated to his family line and to Catalonia's rough mountain folk in general:

Lliberts, i durs, amb alous,  
 Llur fona en rosa de cercles  
 Colpia el menhir dels segles  
 En una tardor de bous.  
 Oh mels pures del paratge!  
 Recobrar, dels meus, la imatge,  
 Aigua enllà de l'hort furtiu,  
 Molls de rou de la caverna,  
 Hereus de la nit eterna  
 Amb els astres per caliu! (1: 254)

(Freedmen, tough, with freeheld land  
 In a circle of rhumbs their slingshot  
 Smote the centuries' menhir  
 In an autumn of oxen.  
 Oh, the pure honeys of that spot!  
 To rediscover my people's image  
 Water beyond the furtive garden,  
 Wet with dew from the cavern,  
 Eternal night's heirs  
 With the stars for glowing ashes!)

As is often the case with Foix, the date at the end — August 1939, immediately after the end of the Spanish Civil War — is significant. The poem's last four lines, coming after the celebration of a heritage that seemed mortally threatened,



are among the most poignant expressions of Catalan postwar sensibility:

Vaig i vinc de roc a roc  
 —O pasturo palets tosos  
 En un bosc de crits confosos—  
 I, en ser fosc, hi vento foc. (1: 254)

(I come and go from rock to rock  
 —Or pasture shaved pebbles  
 In a grove of wild cries—  
 And when it's dark, I fan the fire.)

The end of the war evoked some of Foix's very best work. Prior to 1939, he had been an ardent Catalanist and one of the leaders of Acció Catalana (Catalan Action), a conservative nationalist group that included a number of prominent intellectuals. An admirer of the French reactionary Charles Maurras, Foix had denounced the Catalan anarchists. He accused them, both in poetry and prose, of destroying the nation's classically balanced heritage and replacing it with Iberian fanaticism. Despite his often conservative positions, Foix was a highly respected figure during the 1930's. He led the separate Catalan delegation at the 1934 PEN Club Conference in Dubrovnik. He was also the literary editor and frequent columnist for *La Publicitat* (Publicity), a daily Barcelona newspaper.

With Franco's victory, of course, all this came to an end. For a time, the future of Catalan literature itself seemed in doubt. It might appear that Foix, whose verse had been so allusive and philosophical, would have been among those least equipped to express the mood of the postwar period. But in fact he did it better than virtually anyone else. Perhaps his outstanding poem from this time is "Vaig arribar en aquell

poble ..." (I Arrived in That Town ...). Once again, the date (1942) situates it historically and the title quickly establishes a tone of disorientation and nightmare:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Me'n vaig a la Font Vella:  
 N'han arrencat els bancs;  
 Ara veig el diable  
 Que m'espera al tombant. (1: 231-232)

(I ARRIVED IN THAT TOWN, EVERYONE GREETED ME AND I  
 RECOGNIZED NO ONE. WHEN I WAS GOING TO READ MY  
 VERSES, THE DEVIL, HIDDEN BEHIND A TREE, CALLED OUT TO  
 ME SARCASTICALLY AND FILLED MY HANDS WITH NEWS-  
 PAPER CLIPPINGS

What's the name of this town  
 With flowers on the steeple  
 And a river with dark trees?  
 Where did I leave my keys?

Everyone says "Good morning!"  
 I go around half-dressed;  
 Some people are kneeling,  
 Another offers me his hand.

"What's my name?" I ask them.  
 I look at my bare foot,



In the shadow of a barrel  
A puddle of blood is shining.

A cowherd lends me a book,  
I see myself in a window;  
My beard has gotten long.  
—What's become of my apron?

Just look at that crowd in the square!  
They must be waiting for me;  
I, who read them verses;  
They're laughing as they leave.

The bishop decorates me,  
The musicians have stopped.  
I'd like to go home  
But I don't know the side streets.

If a girl kissed me...  
What would my job be then?  
Now the doors close.  
Who knows where the pension is?

On a scrap of newspaper  
My photograph flutters;  
The trees in the square  
Wave goodbye to me.

What do they say on the radio?  
I'm cold, I'm scared, I'm hungry.  
I'll buy him a watch.  
What's his Saint's Day?

I'm going to Font Vella.  
They've pulled up the benches;  
Now I see the Devil  
Who awaits me at the corner.)

The clear, simple images that open the poem, and the innocent speaking voice, help create a mood of childlike bewilderment. Beneath this mood, there is also Foix's condition as a poet suddenly deprived of his audience:

Just look at that crowd in the square!  
They must be waiting for me;  
I, who read them verses;  
They're laughing as they leave.

It is not just poetry, however, but an entire culture that has been dislocated. Foix's photograph flutters on a scrap of newspaper, perhaps symbolizing the end of the Catalan press and of his position as a public figure. An entire national identity — and with it memory itself — has been obliterated. And Foix, who had striven to reconcile Reason and Madness, has now become a madman, a memoryless imbecile wandering through a town he does not recognize.

This atmosphere of disorientation is made grimmer by lines hinting at the poverty and bloodshed that followed the war:

I look at my bare foot;  
In the shadow of a barrel  
A puddle of blood is shining.

In general Foix plays down this element, allowing the panic to build as the half-naked speaker is mocked by the townspeople and cannot find his way home. Only in the penultimate stanza do public events suddenly burst into the open: "What do they say on the radio? I'm cold, I'm scared, I'm hungry." And in the final lines the devil, whom we met in the title, reappears. He awaits the amnesiac speaker, consummating the feeling of infantile terror.

"I Arrived ..." is one of Foix's most famous poems. In it, surrealistic imagery is played off against a colloquially direct tone in the same way that it was earlier against accumulated literary tradition. Whether Foix really *is* a surrealist has been debated among Catalan critics, but the poet himself has always denied it. Though in isolation some of his images may seem rationally inexplicable, they usually do fit into a coherent system of ideas, conceits, and personal myths. In a excellent study of Foix's work, the poet Pere Gimferrer describes his poems as transposing "en termes metafòrics o visionaris dades de l'experiència individual o col·lectiva del poeta" (into metaphysical or visionary terms data from the poet's individual or collective experience).<sup>7</sup>

The best explanations, however, come from Foix's own writings. He describes himself as an "investigador en poesia" (poetic researcher), one who "retroba, per mitjà de símbols nous, el permanent"<sup>8</sup> (rediscovers, by means of new symbols, the permanent). For him, the experimental verse of the 1920's was not so much a new form of consciousness as a new set of genres in which he could work. These genres demand the same discipline and craft as any other kind of verse. Thus Foix admonishes his fellow avant-gardists: "en els vostres versos sigueu durs i precisos"<sup>9</sup> (in your verses be hard and precise).

The language here is similar to much of Ezra Pound's criticism.<sup>10</sup> Though it seems improbable that either poet influenced

<sup>7</sup> *La poesia de J. V. Foix*, Barcelona, Edicions 62, 1974, 192.

<sup>8</sup> *Tocant a mà*, Barcelona, Edicions 62, 1972, 8.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>10</sup> E.g. Pound's "Second Set of Composition Exercises", *ABC of Reading*, Norfolk, Connecticut, New Directions, 1931, 66, where he begins: "1) Let the pupil write the description of a tree. 2) Of a tree without mentioning the name of the tree (larch, pine, etc.) so that the reader will



the other, there are a number of parallels between them. Both writers drew on the Mediterranean Middle Ages and Renaissance for inspiration, while using experimental techniques in highly individual ways. Both attempted — Foix more responsibly, I think — to reunite a Western culture they saw as fragmented and decaying, and brought together art and social reality partly by applying artistic standards to the latter. In Foix, this is expressed by his “poetic real” in the “Letter to Clara Sobirós”. But above all, the two poets both possessed a kind of literary perfect pitch: an ability to write verse at once lyrical and precise, intellectually demanding yet dense with feeling.

Beyond certain superficialities (such as his famous long titles), Foix has had no direct imitators in Catalonia. His poetry is perhaps both too rigorous and too idiosyncratic to form the center of a school. Nonetheless, he is recognized by younger poets and by the reading public as a monumental figure. Appearing early in this century, he — along with Salvat — marked off a broad area of sensibility that Catalan poets have been exploring ever since. This area, which ranges from the most immediate daily impressions to intricate philosophical speculation, is partly responsible for Catalan poetry’s diversity in the last fifty years.

DAVID H. ROSENTHAL  
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not mistake it for the description of some other kind of tree. 3) Try some object in the classroom. 4) Describe the light and shadow on the school-room clock or some other object.”