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Translating the Thousand Voices of Gualba **Mary Ann Newman**

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TRANSLATING THE THOUSAND VOICES OF GUALBA*

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One would be ill-advised to begin a paper on *Gualba, la de mil veus*¹ (*Gualba of the Thousand Voices*) by Eugeni d'Ors without offering at least a sketchy plot summary. This is significant, as Ors does not represent a marginal strain of overlooked literary history but is, instead, a major author whose body of work has been eclipsed by his political decisions. Still, considering the dictum that texts must be allowed to speak for themselves, it is telling that some authors' lives are so overwhelmingly present that their texts are buried alive.

Gualba, la de mil veus is a novel of incest that Eugeni d'Ors writes in order to express his despair at the outbreak of World War I, which he characterizes elsewhere as a European Civil War. Eugeni d'Ors was at the height of his literary and political influence in 1915 when he wrote *Gualba*. His entire system of ideas, known as *Noucentisme*, celebrated the notion that in the *Nou-cents*, the 20th century, civilization—read Europe—was on the verge of attaining its full potential. As Ors put it, in a prologue to *Gualba* written in 1935 for a new edition:

When the Great War was declared it caught unawares an entire generation installed, with a false sense of security, in one of the most delightful gardens of Culture that humanity has ever known. Just as the fire of the earth's center spilled hotly over the exquisitely elegant tiles of Pompeii, so, too, a river of historical lava, anarchic and nationalistic, sought to bury us.²

What the phrase "delightful garden of culture" referred to was the triumph of Classical laws of proportion and irony in both modern art and modern society. Ors felt this triumph to be imminent, and the outbreak of war in Europe was, in his eyes, an atavistic impulse that immersed Europe in barbarism. His first literary response, in 1914, was

* An earlier version of this paper was read at the meeting of the North American Catalan Society, attended with the support of the Bard College.

¹ Eugeni d'Ors, *La ben plantada/Gualba la de mil veus* (Barcelona, 1980). Quotes from the text, which will be referred to as *Gualba*, will appear in English in the body of the paper and in Catalan in the footnotes. All translations are mine.

² "La Guerra Gran sobtà, en declarar-se, tota una generació instal·lada, amb il·lusió de redós, en un dels més deliciosos jardins de Cultura que mai la humanitat hagi conegut. Així el foc central de la terra, vessant-se, calcinador, sobre els mosaics elegantíssims de Pompei, així a nosaltres un riu de lava històrica, anàrquica i nacionalista, cuidà submergir-nos" (*Gualba*, prologue 117).

to write *Tina i la Guerra Gran*, a meditation on Europe framed as a fictional correspondence with a young German girl he had met on a holiday in the mountains. This book sets out his feelings regarding Europe's cultural unity, an attitude that leads him to take a pacifist stance in World War I. In 1915, however, he turned to narrative fiction and produced *Gualba of the Thousand Voices*.

Though the thousand voices are revealed early in the text to be the singing of the mountain springs and brooks, these are not the only voices in question. Many of the voices present in *Gualba* are those of authors and characters to whom reference is made in the course of the novel. Principal among them are Shakespeare and the characters from *King Lear*, the drama that the protagonists, Alfons and Tel·lina, will be translating during their summer vacation. In the course of this vacation, the two characters, father and daughter, become embroiled in a scenario of repressed desire that leads ultimately to an incestuous incident. Ors elaborates on this issue in the same 1935 prologue:

Where better than in the turbation of incest to translate Panic distress? I have often said that the victories of classicism begin threefold, at the dawn of human civilization, with the prohibition of incest, with cooked food, and with the silhouette of the bison, reproduced with analytic discernment on the walls of the caverns.³

Every aspect of *Gualba* conspires against father and daughter to return them to the threshold of civilization. No element in the text is innocent of their atavism. The village of *Gualba* seethes with what in the novel are called "larvae," the traps of temptation laid by the siren song of the thousand voices that will destroy the "perfect friendship" —as the father characterizes it— between him and his daughter. Nature contains larvae, music contains larvae, and, in the proper conditions, even culture—in this case, the act of producing culture, the translation of *King Lear* into Catalan—contains its own larvae.

In this paper, I wish to discuss the importance of translation as the device by means of which the thousand voices are to be interpreted. The presence of translation as a metaphorical activity underlines, according to Derrida, the need "to compensate for that which multiplicity denies us."⁴ Unity versus multiplicity, implied from the

³ "Enlloc com en la torbació de l'incest no es tradueix el pànic trasbals. Tinc dit sovint com les victòries del classicisme comencen triplement, a les albes de la civilització humana, amb la prohibició de l'incest, amb el menjar cuit i amb la silueta del bisó, reproduïda per analític discerniment a les parets de l'interior de la caverna" (*Gualba*, prologue 118).

⁴ Jacques Derrida, "Des Tours de Babel," *Difference in Translation*, ed. and trans. Joseph F. Graham (Ithaca, 1982) 186.

outset in the "thousand voices" of the title, is the core dilemma of *Gualba*, as it is in all of Ors's oeuvre. Faced with dispersion, polyvalence, Ors characteristically opts for the resolutions of order and harmony, "concentricity" instead of "ex-centricity," the "Classic" as opposed to the "Baroque." The deliberate posing of the multiple as the fabric of *Gualba*, and the use of translation as a device which, by constructing bridges, reveals the breaches that necessitate them, points to the plays of political and cultural unity and multiplicity that the text is concerned with. The choice of *King Lear* as the text to be translated serves as a further illustration of how, in Ors's view, the abdication of legitimate authority—desertion of duty—leads to chaos.

In Eugeni d'Ors's own words, *Gualba* is a "romantic book, inhabited by Panic anguish."⁵ In a few words, *Gualba, la de mil veus* is the tale of a widower and his daughter, the above mentioned Alfons and Tel·lina, who embark on a summer vacation in the mountain village of Gualba. Alfons is a forty-five year-old widower and Tel·lina is his eighteen year-old daughter. They intend to organize their summer into periods of work and play,⁶ devoting the mornings to a critical translation of *King Lear* that the father, a Barcelona businessman, wishes to publish the following winter, and the afternoons to relaxation and excursions through the surrounding countryside. This orderly arrangement of their days, however, is no defense against the flux that awaits them in Gualba.

Translation, in fact, turns out to be one of the principal sources of temptation. Following the precepts of Ors's *Noucentisme*, translation, an act of transmission of culture, ought to be a healthy channel for father and daughter's intellectual impulses. According to a passage from a later novel by Ors, the best way to stave off temptation is "to make a work of art."⁷ But, in *Gualba*, translation itself is the occasion of danger. Traditionally, the prescriptions and proscriptions that surround translation always involve scenarios of transgression, the most famous of which is, of course, *Traduttore, traditore*. This is not by chance.

Translation reveals the breaches between languages, confronting human beings with their inability to communicate, with their

⁵ "llibre romàntic, l'angúnia pànica l'habita..." (*Gualba*, prologue 118).

⁶ This is an important element in Orsian thought. The backbone of the *noucentista* society he hoped to create was to be a well-balanced citizen defined as "l'home qui treballa i qui juga."

⁷ In this 1916 novel, *Oceanografia del tedi*, the character, *Autor*, is tempted to abandon a rest cure prescribed by his doctor and approach a beautiful woman sitting in the chaise longue by his side. Faced with this dilemma, *Autor* meditates: "Com resistirà aquí la temptació aquest home las, qui ha esta l'home de la perpetual bullida? Una passió de curiositat l'ha pres. Per quin mitjà s'afanquiria de la passió? Pel mitjà etern, canonitzat per Goethe: fent una obra d'art." (54).

separation from nature and from one another. Many of the strictures that surround translation derive from its use in western tradition as a tool of religious propagation. The sense of the Book as a holy document containing essential truths⁸ that somehow inhere to the source language text and are therefore only imperfectly transportable to the vernacular has trickled down into the literature regarding all translation. Meaning slips away, meaning is lost, meaning is betrayed. The distance between vehicle and message, sound and sense, or signifier and signified, is never better revealed than in the act of translation.

This is a very slippery device to employ as the central action of a novel. And, in the case of an author such as Eugeni d'Ors, whose intellectual edifice is constructed on the idea of an antagonism between humankind and nature that emerged as a result of original sin,⁹ it is a significant one. Ors is concerned with translation from the outset. Beginning with the *Glosari*, all of Eugeni d'Ors's work can be seen as a isolation or identification of texts to be translated. His newspaper articles are known as glosses, a reference to the notes in the margins of religious manuscripts, the origin of the word "gloss." His glosses are commentaries in the margins of human experience. The existence of a gloss presupposes a loss of knowledge, a shift in understanding, a message obscured by the passage of time. This is, essentially, Ors's message: Both Nature and the human Culture that emerges in response to Nature's power, are grand texts to be translated. When the fall of man placed him in a no-longer harmonious relationship to his surroundings, all phenomena were left open to interpretation; indeed it is the human task to carry out this interpretation.¹⁰ Regarding Gualba, specifically, the presence of many voices in a complex

⁸ In the text that serves as a point of departure for almost all present-day considerations of translation theory, "The Task of the Translator," *Illuminations* (New York, 1968), Walter Benjamin makes this anagogic aspect of literary translation explicit while discussing the viability of translation itself: "One might, for example, speak of an unforgettable life or moment even if all men had forgotten it. If the nature of such a life or moment required that it be unforgotten, that predicate would not imply a falsehood but merely a claim not fulfilled by men, and probably also a reference to a realm in which it is fulfilled: God's remembrance. Analogously, the translatability of linguistic creations ought to be considered even if men should prove unable to translate them" (71).

⁹ Though this idea is implicit from his first writings, Ors made it explicit and expanded upon it in the article titled "Le Pêché du Monde Physique" which he wrote for a collection edited by François Mauriac in 1938, titled *L'Homme et le Pêché*. This article has been reprinted in *Els Marges* 22/23, Curial (Barcelona, 1981).

¹⁰ In a *glosa* of 1908, *Obra catalana completa*, Ors states this eloquently: "Oh, la Música, l'Amor, considerats com a aspectes de ciència!... ¿No és això d'eterna doctrina, després de tot? No sabem ja que eren contingudes totes les Arts i les Passions totes -totes les 'humanitats'- en el fruit de l'Arbre de la Ciència, que Adam, nostre pare, va gustar?..." (597).

allegorical terrain—both textual and topographical—cries out for allegoresis, represented in the novel by translation. Each new text interprets—translates—its predecessor, revealing a new voice that must, in turn, be translated.

According to Roman Jakobson, in an opinion echoed by Steiner, Derrida, et. al., there are at least three types of translation: intralingual, referring to the translations effected, for example, when a word is defined within a language; interlingual, what he calls “translation proper,” which is translation from one language to another; and intersemiotic translation, or transmutation, in which linguistic signs are conveyed by means of non-linguistic signs.¹¹

In *Gualba*, all three types of translation are present, often in hybrid form. The interpretive act is so central that each acoustical occurrence is occasion for translation, is perceived as containing meaning, and is examined for its proper interpretation. For example, in the first chapter, “The Arrival,” father and daughter awaken to hear a thunderous noise. The daughter asks her father, “And so, what is this great roar?”¹² Her father interprets it for her: “It is the voice of Gualba, my friend, explaining Gualba to us.”¹³ The narrator then adds a further clarification: “It was not one voice, but a thousand voices.”¹⁴

These voices open the following chapter: “It was a thousand voices. It was the generous hymn of a magnificent organ.” The progression “roar—voice—thousand voices—hymn” is then extended to reveal the physical origin of the sound in the rivers, streams, rivulets and cascades of Gualba. These waters, described in minute detail in Chapter 2, are further metonymized, first into types of speech¹⁵ and then into an entire orchestra of musical instruments.¹⁶

All of these transformations are characteristic instances of the deferral of definition that is central to the novel. They are also characteristic of the very definition of “translatio” which (as is evident in the Catalan cognate, “*traslladar*”) contains the sense of motion from one side to another. A phenomenon, a roar, is isolated and questioned. Its interpretation leads inevitably to another interpretation which, in its turn, is broken down and questioned. The very act of translation provides a metonymic pointer toward the next occasion of translation.

¹¹ Roman Jakobson, “The Linguistic Aspects of Translation,” *Theories of Translation*, ed. Rainer Schulte and John Biguenet (Chicago, 1992).

¹² “I, doncs, què és aquesta remor tan gran?” (*Gualba* 120).

¹³ “És la veu de Gualba, amiga meua, que ens explica Gualba...” (*Gualba* 121).

¹⁴ “No era una veu, eren mil veus” (*Gualba* 122).

¹⁵ “...ara llencen un mugit formidable, ara canten, ara parlen, ara parlotegen, ara ploren...” (*Gualba* 122).

¹⁶ To cite only a few: *orgue*, *violí*, *viola*, *fagot*, *xirimia*, *clarí*, *bombarda*, *trompeta* (122).

The specific instance of interlingual translation in *Gualba* is the translation of *King Lear* into Catalan. The presence of this text immediately suggests a number of the issues with which the novel is concerned. First, as has been widely recognized in the psychoanalytic literature on Shakespeare, there is a hidden incest theme in the relationship between Lear and his daughter Cordelia. Both Cordelia's silence, that is, her inability to speak of her love to her father, and Lear's insistence on hearing her avowal of love above all others, signal the feelings they are denying. Cordelia's silence in *Lear* is paralleled by Tel·lina's silence in *Gualba*. As the action progresses, Tel·lina has less and less to say.

The use of *King Lear* points to a political and ethical theme echoing in *Gualba*. Lear's decision to divide his kingdom up among his daughters before his death brings about the political fragmentation which ultimately leads to war and the destruction of his realm. And, by abdicating his paternal authority, by throwing himself "on the nursery" of his daughters, he is ultimately responsible for the tragedy that befalls Cordelia and himself. Similarly, it is Alfons's abdication of his fatherly authority—his desire to be united with his daughter in a "perfect friendship"—that brings on the disaster in *Gualba*.

Still, though interlingual interpretation is the central action of the novel, intersemiotic translation, Ors's forte,¹⁷ is the environment. One of the pivotal scenes in *Gualba* contains a reading of its landscape that will serve as a good example. The landscape Alfons and Tel·lina are observing is described by the narrator. This analysis, too, follows the Orsian categorization of even natural phenomena into Classic or Baroque.

The beauties of the Montseny are composed of vegetal pomp and music of greens, marvelously simple and sumptuous. The landscapes of Catalonia are rather muscular and gristly. A scant fuzz of bushes, occasional barbs of pine, do not quite conceal their structural nudity. But,

¹⁷ In his introduction to *Lo barroco*, Ors offers a truly tour-de-force division of Nature and Science into Classic and Baroque (which will merit the sarcasm of Lezama Lima in his article on the baroque in *La expresión americana*): "La danza de las estrellas, ¿no evoca en ritmos, pasos y figuras, alguno de los esquemas predilectos del barroquismo? Cuando, en su empeño de someter el universo todo a las leyes lúcidas de un sistema, Keplero denuncia la estrechez de la concepción de los antiguos, según la cual los astros se mueven en órbitas circulares y propone otro esquema donde el módulo es una curva más compleja —la elipse, con sus dos centros—, ¿no estiliza el saber astronómico en guisa, no ahora clásica, sino barroca? Y, por lo que concierne a nuestro propio cuerpo, a la andadura y aventura de nuestra sangre, Harvey —Kepler de la biología—, ¿no cumple, con su reemplazar una imagen fija y estática por otra dinámica, al descubrir la circulación de esta sangre, una hazaña pareja al acto creador de los artistas cuando, (...) parecen movidos por una voluntad de burla de las exigencias del peso, en una loca acumulación de las 'formas que vuelan'? Pero, como en el vino, Dionisio vive en la sangre" (prologue 13).

in Gualba, the landscape could be said to be covered over with a feathery softness, akin to a fat bird. Gualba plumps herself up at the water's edge like a fleshy duck.¹⁸

The contrast between the lean, simple, architectural lines of the ideal Catalanian landscape and the flabby, carnal, musical landscape ("music of greens") the two characters are observing leaves no doubt about the sinful, sensuous pull of Gualba. Ors often identifies music with the soft and formless –Baroque– and architecture with leanness and form –Classic. The presence of geometrical form is paramount in Ors's Classical canon. Characterization of the landscape as both as a musical presence and a formless entity imbues it with a negative moral charge:

Seen from the heights, there is something too soft in it, something corrupt, as in the vegetation on a mud bank. One's gaze, emerging from the dry serenity of the peaks, cannot contemplate it without feeling a strange distress.¹⁹

This analysis is offered by the narrator who is voicing the father's point of view. This voice goes on to clarify the source of the distress. However, clarification, as we will see, leads to another, clumsier, instance of obscuring:

One day, on an excursion, the friend was stubbornly obsessed by a baroque comparison. "Gualba," he said to himself, "is the leafy puberty of the Montseny." He didn't say this word to his friend, of course. But, on seeking out her eyes, he saw that she unconsciously averted them, averting them as well from the landscape below–like someone who has been caught in the unhealthy curiosity of a shameful sight.²⁰

Though this scene appears early in the text, establishing the characters' habit of taking late-afternoon hikes, it actually occurs late in August, as their vacation is drawing to a close. By that point, father and daughter are helpless before the landscape. It reflects back to them their own repressed desire. But, in this scene, in the word that the

¹⁸ "Les del Montseny són fetes aquí de pompa vegetal i de música de verds, meravellosament múltiple i sumptuosa. Aparen els paisatges de Catalunya més aviat musculosos i nerviuts. Lleus borrisols de bardissa, rares pues de pins no n'arriben a amagar l'estructural nuesa. Però, a Gualba, el paisatge es diu cobert de blanor de ploma, així un gras ocell. Com un ànec molsut, ell s'estarrufa vora les aigües" (*Gualba* 130).

¹⁹ "Vist de l'altura, hi ha en ell alguna cosa de massa bla, alguna cosa de corromput, com en una vegetació de llot. L'esguard, sortint de la seca serenitat dels cims, no sap contemplar-lo sense una manera de torbació estranya" (*Gualba* 131).

²⁰ "Un dia, en l'excursió, a l'amic va obsessionar-lo tossudament una comparança barroca. 'Gualba—ell se deia—és la frondosa pubertat del Montseny.' Aquesta paraula no la va dir a l'amiga, és clar. Però, en cercar els ulls d'ella, va veure que ella, inconscientment els esquivava, i els esquivava del paisatge de baix, també—així algú que ha estat sorprès en la insana curiositat d'una vergonya" (*Gualba* 131).

father does not say to this daughter, another breach is opened, and another translation is initiated. What does it mean to say that "Gualba is the leafy puberty of the Montseny"? That it is a young part of the landscape, verdant and lush? Is "puberty" a shameful word because his daughter is pubescent and he is calling attention to the difference between their ages? These interpretations are valid but, in light of the scene that has just been described and the embarrassment both characters felt, they are partial. It must further be surmised that "puberty" is a substitution. The word Alfons left unsaid, both to his daughter and to himself, is "pubis." This moment, this "shameful" scene that they witness together, marks a shift in their relationship, from father and child to equal adults, from denial to guarded awareness.

Curiously, and significantly, the act of translating is only *seen* in *Gualba*. Translation appears as performance, but the actual linguistic process of transforming *King Lear* into Catalan does not appear. There are no direct quotes from *King Lear*, only insinuated textual analogies. In a play that parallels other instances of hearing divorced from seeing in the text, the characters are not heard translating—Alfons never asks Tel·lina how she thinks they should translate "serpent's tooth"—, but they are seen translating, as if being observed from behind a window or, of course, onstage.

This performative aspect of translation underlines the dramatic nature of the text Alfons and Tel·lina are translating. The two characters translate aloud, one dictating and the other copying out the text. In this way, day by day, they actually reenact *King Lear*. At first, it is the father who dictates and the daughter who transcribes but, as the novel progresses, Tel·lina begins to translate as well while her father acts as scribe, in much the same way that King Lear in the drama is reduced to childlike dependence on his daughters, while Cordelia emerges as his defender. Thus, these scenes of translation are at once reenactments of *King Lear* and enactments of their own unspoken feelings. As we shall see, their positioning reveals translation and incest to be parallel motifs in *Gualba*.

In Chapter 30—the text has thirty-seven chapters—, titled "Shakespeare," a translation scene appears. At this juncture, according to the narrator, father and daughter are no longer interested in doing an scholarly edition. "No, no wisdom, no criticism. Just passion that seeks expression in rapid and tumultuous translation..."²¹ The ellipsis at the end of that sentence fragment leaves open the question of what that passion is to be translated into.

²¹ "No, res de saviesa, res de crítica. Passió només que cerca expressió en traducció ràpida i tumultuària..." (*Gualba* 171).

The narrator suggests sublimation as an explanation for their frenzy:

Now their mornings are full of frantic work. Are father and daughter seeking to forget or, on the contrary, are they unwittingly seeking the exhaustion of the longing that consumes them?²²

A concrete and pessimistic definition of love had been offered by Alfons in Chapter 28, titled "What Plato Doesn't Know About Love." This definition, arrived at in the course of the meditations on love that increasingly occupy Alfons's thoughts, anticipates and frames the actions later witnessed in the translation scene.

As for the beautiful drama in which Plato reproduces for us the amorous quest, our own experience takes his scheme to be full of truth. But he speaks of a one-way process that comes to an end on being satisfied. Our lover's heart knows that in truth the process is infinitely renewed. Anguish, quest, satisfaction, new anguish, new quest... This makes love and anguish identical, for satisfaction lasts no longer than the kiss that glides between two longings...²³

The reference to Plato's *Symposium* reveals another of the concerns –the larvae– being dissected in this novel. The voice of Plato in his meditation on love enters the chorus, along with those of Shakespeare, Freud, Kant, and sundry characters from world literature and Catalan folklore. And this description of the pitfalls of love presages the translation scene which, in turn, describes a scene of sexual passion.

The normal regularity of the distribution of the work at the beginning, one dictating, the other writing, is long since lost: now they move and exchange roles frequently, like lovers overcome with ardor. Now it is she who, from one moment to the next, wrests the book from his hands and begins to sing, or indeed to howl, the abundant and tragic verb. It is he who at times cries out in extenuation and must take the written page in hand and copy it in order to learn to cry again.²⁴

²² "Ara els matins són de treball frenètic. Hi cerquen l'oblit pare i filla, o bé al contrari, sense sentir-ho, hi cerquen l'exasperació de l'anhel que els consum?" (*Gualba* 171).

²³ "Del bell drama en què Plató ens dona transsumpte de la recerca amorosa, el nostre experienciament en pren l'esquema com veritable. Mes aquell parla d'un procés únic, que en la satisfacció troba fi. El nostre cor d'amants sap que en veritat es tracta d'un procés infinitament renovellat. Angúnia, recerca, satisfacció, nova angúnia, nova recerca... Això fa amor i angúnia idèntics, que satisfacció és el temps d'un bes, que lliscava entre el doble anhelar..." (*Gualba* 169).

²⁴ "La normal regularitat de la distribució feinerà en el principi, l'un dictant, escrivint l'altre, prou s'ha perdut: ara muden i entrecanvien sovint son gest, com amants que l'ardor solleva. És ella qui, per moments, li pren de les mans el llibre i es posa a cantar o bé a udolar el verb abundós i tràgic. És ell, qui a voltes s'extenua en un crit, i

Their new reading of *King Lear* emerges after this description of their activity. They had started out feeling more sympathy for Cordelia, for her circumspection, her sense of order, but at this point, they are only interested in the "mad old" King.

What is most important is that, in this chapter, *King Lear*, translation, and the act of love come together. "Shakespeare is sweeping them away. And Shakespeare is, within their consciences, just one more larva."²⁵ The love scene that appears veiled as translation in Chapter 30 is particularly important, as it, in turn, anticipates a blank that will appear two chapters later, in circumstances that the end of the translation chapter had foreshadowed precisely, to wit: After working for twelve hours, Alfons and Tel·lina are so weak at the moment of their goodnight kiss at the top of the stairs, that one of the oil lamps "slipped momentarily from someone's hand." Tel·lina cries out at this point, realizing the danger of a fire. This is a warning, one they choose to ignore.

Two chapters later, this scene is repeated, with variations. The narrative voice informs the reader that "That afternoon, too, they had worked on their *King Lear*." The use of the possessive "their" reinforces the statement that they are "possessed" by the "pain and madness" of its atmosphere. Once again they find themselves at the top of the stairs:

...both of them were trembling, just as the dying leaves, whipped by the unleashed storm, trembled outside. They trembled and could not seem to part, and joined their trembling in misery. Then an abominable thing occurred. The oil lamp slipped from his hand. From above, where his hand held it, it fell to the middle of his daughter's breast. Her eyes were on the verge of closing. The diabolical essence spilled out and spread, instantly becoming a torrent of flames. And the girl was fully swathed in them, her clothing, her hair, her very flesh. And she howled, and he howled, as wild animals howl. And she was on the ground, twisting on the lyre of the flames. And he hurled himself upon her, arms spread, to press out the flames, with his body, with his face, with his hands... Lord, I tell of the horror as it was. I tell of the fire as it was.²⁶

per saber cridar de nou, ha de prendre en les seves mans la pàgina escrita, i posar-se a copiar-la, per tal d'aprendre a cridar de nou" (*Gualba* 171).

²⁵ "Shakespeare se'ls emporta. I Shakespeare els és, dins la consciència, una larva més" (*Gualba* 171).

²⁶ "...tremolaven tots dos, talment les fulles ja caduques que, fora, flagel·lava la ja desfermada tempesta. Tremolaven i no sabien separar-se i miserablement ajuntaven el tremolor. Aleshores s'esdevingué una cosa abominable. La làmpara de petroli va escampar-se de la mà d'ell. D'amunt, on la mà la tenia, caigué al mig del pit de la noia que ja tancava els ulls. L'essència diabòlica vessà, s'escampà, fou tot d'una un torrent de flames. I en fou la noia tota vestida, en les robes, en els cabells, en les mateixes carns. I ella udolà i udolà ell, com les feres udolen. I ella fou en terra, que es torcia en la lira del foc. I ell s'hi precipità a estrènyer les flames, amb els braços oberts, amb tot el cos, amb la cara, amb les mans... Jo dic, Senyor, l'horror com va ser. Jo dic l'incendi com va ser" (*Gualba* 175-76).

Those are the last words of Chapter 32, "The Fire." The following chapter, "The Day After," opens "And in punishment for having yearned for the ultimate company, each of them, on awakening from the fire, found himself alone."²⁷ The parallel with the chapter on translation in which first they "howled" Shakespeare and then the lamp fell from Alfons's hand is more than patent. In the first instance, the act of translation performs a love scene, a scene of sexual passion. When the fire occurs, the actual sexual scene is elided, but its effects are visible in the estrangement of the following day. The role of translation as an act of transgression proves here to be one more larva, never mentioned, but underlying and explaining all the voices of *Gualba*. *Gualba* is Babel.

If Western tradition begins with "the Word," that word is forever shattered with the destruction of the Tower of Babel. After the Flood, "nations spread abroad upon the earth." Even so, these nations were not entirely disunited. As Genesis 11 tells it, "Now the whole earth had one language and few words."²⁸ Construction of the Tower was an act of hubris on the part of men, who wanted to "make a name for themselves." However, rather than destroy the Tower, the Lord's response was: "Behold, they are one people and they have all one language; and this is only the beginning of what they will do; and nothing that they propose to do will now be impossible for them. Come, let us go down, and there confuse their language, that they may not understand one another's speech."²⁹

The proliferation of languages is the consequence of man's sinful pride; the propagation of war is the consequence of Lear's prideful desire to hear himself praised by his daughter, to hear her speak of her -forbidden- love for him. Ors's concern with the consequences of hubris in World War I, with the misunderstanding of one another's speech, with the fragmentation and scattering of men and the destruction of the Tower (in the case of the *Nou-cents*, the City -"one of the most delightful gardens of Culture that humanity has ever known"- the European dream he espoused), led him to posit incest as the mark of man's imperfectly achieved and easily revoked "civilization" and translation as both the punishment for humankind's sin and the hallmark of its capacity for interpretation.

Gualba, la de mil veus is a novel that yields readings as multiple as the voices in the title. Indeed, just as they do in the novel, each possible interpretation opens the way to yet another. It is a commonplace of the criticism of *Gualba*, both in Ors's time and now, to berate Ors for writing a "baroque" book when he advocated absolute adherence to

²⁷ "I en càstig d'haver anhelat l'extrema companyia, cadascun d'ells, en despertar de l'incendi, es trobà tot sol" (*Gualba* 177).

²⁸ *The Holy Bible* 8.

²⁹ *The Holy Bible* 8-9.

the Classic. It is useful to read the book as a map of Ors's worst fears in the event of the failure of the Humanistic venture he held so dear. It would not be unfair to say that Ors, in *Gualba*, deconstructs³⁰ his perfect Classical garden to reveal, not the Baroque, which is still in his terms a cultural construct, but formlessness itself.

Much more will have to be said about this novel. Both Ors's profound general interpretation of human culture as both man's bane—for it revealed his sinful nature—and his glory—for it produced beauty and knowledge—and his specific use of the multiplicity of languages, of voices, and their intrinsic need to be translated in order to express this paradox can be explored for its implications for Catalan as well. Ors writes *Gualba* in Catalan—he cannot help but be aware that his entire oeuvre in 1915 contributes to the multiplicity he describes and superficially appears to decry. As *Gualba* shows, Ors, contrary to received notions, is not a simple reductivist, prescribing Classic aspirin for Baroque ailments. Let us give his works the complex readings they deserve.

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³⁰ Jacques Derrida has concerned himself at length with the significance of translation. Regarding the story of Babel, he has this to say in "Des Tours de Babel," *Difference in Translation*, ed. and trans. Joseph F. Graham (Ithaca, 1982): "The 'tower of Babel' does not merely figure the irreducible multiplicity of tongues; it exhibits an incompleteness [*inachevement*], the impossibility of finishing, of totalizing, of saturating, of completing something on the order of edification, architectural construction, system and architectonics. What the multiplicity of idioms actually limits is not only a 'true' translation, a transparent and adequate interexpression, it is also a structural order, a coherence of construct. There is then (let us translate) something like an internal limit to formalization, an incompleteness of the constructure. It would be easy and up to a certain point justified to see there the translation of a system in deconstruction."