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Parlo...': A Catalan Voice from the Holocaust: Writer and Survivor of Mauthausen Joaquim Amat-Piniella Shatters Francoist Mandated Silence
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'PARLO...': A CATALAN VOICE FROM THE
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MAUREEN TOBIN STANLEY

ABSTRACT

Following the retreat to France of half a million Spaniards in the winter of '38/39 and as a result of the Nazi occupation, 10,000-15,000 Spaniards were deported to concentration camps. Among them was the writer Joaquim Amat-Piniella (1913-1974). His novel *K.L. Reich*, whose title alludes to the stamp impressed on all objects within the Nazi Reich's concentration camps, creates a fictional world that reflects the realities within Mauthausen. That author writes in a draft (without date), that with this story his wish was not to focus on the horrors, but rather to document ("manar un record"), and to relate the historical catastrophes of "cruelty, misery, suffering, but also hope." His poetic work *Les llunyanies* (The Far Away Lands) also reveals what Amat denoted as his "white hour," an awakening of conscience and consciousness, the insistence on what is human and humane precisely because he was able to endure four and a half years of brutality. In addition to his novel and poetry, Amat-Piniella's political efforts following his liberation promoted the reconciliation that resulted from a sense of justice. With his poetry, this native of Manresa expressed the gamut of his affective responses to Mauthausen. With *K.L. Reich*, Amat-Piniella gives voice to the Republicans whose exile led to a concentrationary sentence. With his activism, he did everything possible to vindicate the ex-prisoners and obtain for them their due "indemnización" (compensatory damages) and thus overcome the obstacles imposed by the repressive forces. In spite of numerous hurdles, Amat was triumphant.

It is estimated that 10,000-15,000 Spaniards were imprisoned in Nazi concentration camps with the implicit endorsement of General Francisco Franco's nationalist regime. Several Spanish literary and cinematic greats such as Mercè Rodoreda, Jorge Semprún and Fernando Trueba have showcased the Holocaust in their works, yet the cultural implications of the Spaniards in the camps remain largely unanalyzed. As part of Spain's critical, literary and legislative drive to recover its democratic past and denounce Francoist totalitarianism,

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scholarship must underscore the cultural relevance of this horrific historical reality.

In the immediate post-Second World War period there was a handful of unrecognized works by camp survivors (testimonials, novels, poetry) — many of which were unpublished until decades later. But it is not until 1977 (two years after Franco's death), that Montserrat Roig is inspired by the poetry and narrative of Nazi camp survivor Joaquim Amat-Piniella, and publishes *Els catalans als camps nazis*, a 500-page report on Catalanian survivors of Nazi camps (mostly Mauthausen). After three years of rigorous interviews with survivors, Roig learned that following the flight of half a million Spaniards from Republican zones into France in the final months of the Civil War, thousands of Catalanians came to be in Nazi camps for their involvement in battalions, in militarized labor companies, in the French Resistance or simply for being civilian refugees in France. This last category was deemed incomprehensible to the Catalanian survivors interviewed by Montserrat Roig, who then studied the case of what was thought to be 2,000 *civilians* shipped from Angulema to Mauthausen. Finding no proof (only oral testimony) of the internment of Spanish civilian refugees, she labeled it a "legend." In 2005, Montse Armengou and Ricard Belis publish in Catalan their comprehensive *El conboi dels 927* on these first civilian Spaniards (in effect 927) deported from Angulema to Mauthausen on August 20, 1940.

Eduardo Pons Prades deems the 1969 collective testimonial work *Triangle Bleu (Les republicains espagnols à Mauthausen)* by Mariano Constante and Manuel Razola to be the first reflection of Republican Spaniards in the Holocaust (Édition Gallimar, Paris) (41, 371). Several other Spanish male survivors—many of whom are Catalanian—have also published testimonial and memorialistic accounts of their camp experiences: Manuel Alfonso (1998), Joan de Déu Amill (1995), Ramon Bargueño (1999), Francesc Batiste (1999), Josep Borràs (1989), Emilio Caballero Vico (2006), Jacint Carrió (2001), Lluís Marcó (1998), Felipe Martínez-Robles (1999), Lope Massaguer (1997), Marcial Mayans (1999), Josep Salvat (1975) and Amadeu Sinca (1980) (Serrano i Blanquer 20). This list might also include the fictionalized accounts of survivors Joaquim Amat-Piniella (*K.L. Reich* [1963]) and Jorge Semprún (*Le Grand voyage* [1963], *L'écriture ou la vie* [1995], *Viviré con su nombre, morirá con el mío* [2001]).

Francesc Boix's photographs of the experience at Mauthausen as well as his testimony in the Nuremberg and Dachau trials need be recognized. Female testimonials are also of note. Approximately four hundred Republican women were in Nazi camps. Hence, the female testimonials compiled and documented by Neus Català (1984), like Mercè Núñez Targa's autobiographical account (1980) and Montserrat

Roig's five hundred page research tome are significant as female contributions to Spanish Holocaust studies.¹

Although testimonial works are published throughout the 1970s and 1980s, it is not until the late 1990s and the first decade of 2000 that critics and historians begin to show a serious interest in the exile, deportation, and incarceration of the defeated Republicans. Within the last seven years, the scholarship regarding Spaniards in the Holocaust is beginning to make headway. These works approach this topic from a historical or political perspective. Today, the drive to recover and reconstruct Spain's democratic memory is evident in the following studies: Genevieve Dreyfus Armand's *The Exile of Spanish Republicans in France* (2000), David Wingeate Pike's *Spaniards in the Holocaust. Mauthausen, the Horror of the Danube* (2000), Carme Molinero, Margarida Sala, and Jaume Sobrequès's *Una inmensa prisió: Los campos de concentración y las prisiones durante la guerra civil y el franquismo* (2003), David Serrano i Blanquer's *Les dones als camps nazi* (2003), Diego Caicedo's *Un español frente al Holocausto. Así salvó Ángel Sanz Briz a 5.000 judíos* (2005), Eduardo Pons Prades's *El Holocausto de los republicanos españoles: Vida y muerte en los campos de exterminio alemanes (1940-1945)* (2005), Rosa Toran's *Los campos de concentración nazis: Palabras contra el olvido* (2005), Montse Armengou and Ricard Belis's *Ravensbrück, l'infern de les dones* (2006), and Montse Armengou and Ricard Belis's *El convoy de los 927: Los republicanos españoles inauguran los trenes de la muerte en Europa Occidental* (2007).

In the last few years, previously neglected works such as Català's collection of testimonials and Amat-Piniella's survivor novel *K.L. Reich* have been republished. Furthermore, a literary award was established in Amat-Piniella's name in 2000. Legislative efforts of the last ten years are also bent on recovering Spain's democratic past. In recent years the Spanish government proclaimed the military uprising against the Republican government that began the Civil War an illegal act, and has taken on the task of identifying human remains within mass graves throughout Spain (from the early Francoist period). But the study of Spaniards in the Holocaust is just beginning to unfold. The study of Manresan writer and Mauthausen survivor Joaquim Amat i Piniella is a vital piece.

¹ I have previously published this list of male testimonial voices as context for female voices in "Female Voices of Resistance in Neus Català's *De la resistència y la deportación*." Please see *Female Exiles* edited by Tobin Stanley and Zinn.

JOAQUIM AMAT-PINIELLA

During Francoism, repression was de rigueur with the purpose of fostering, indoctrinating and perpetuating a mythical image of New Spain. Curiously, the repression whose object was to mythify the nation, also subverted the Francoist national motto of "One, Great and Free," especially the third term referring to freedom. In this essay I will explore the topic of freedom of speech (*libertad de palabra*), an inexistent freedom in the first decades of the Francoist Regime. There is no doubt that the term "free" did not describe the Republicans —neither those that remained on Iberian soil nor many of those in exile.

Following the retreat to France of half a million Spaniards in the winter of 38/39 and as a result of the Nazi occupation, 10,000-15,000 Spaniards were deported to concentration camps. Among them was the writer Joaquim Amat-Piniella (1913-1974). His novel *K.L. Reich*, whose title alludes to the stamp impressed on all objects within the Nazi Reich's concentration camps, creates a fictional world that reflects the realities within Mauthausen. Surprisingly, the narration lacks vengeance and rancor. In spite of the horrid conditions, Amat-Piniella humanizes both the inmates and those in charge of the camp. That author writes in a draft (without date), that with this story his wish was not to focus on the horrors, but rather to document ("manar un record"), and to relate the historical catastrophes of "cruelty, misery, suffering, but also hope" (Torner y Planell 1.148).² His poetic work *Les llunyanies* (The Far Away Lands) also reveals what Amat denoted as his "white hour," an awakening of conscience and consciousness, the insistence on what is human and humane precisely because he was able to endure four and a half years of brutality. In addition to his novel and poetry, Amat-Piniella's political efforts following his liberation promoted the reconciliation that resulted from a sense of justice.

With his poetry, this native of Manresa expressed the gamut of his affective responses to Mauthausen. With *K.L. Reich*, Amat-Piniella gives voice to the Republicans whose exile led to a concentrationary sentence. With his activism, he did everything possible to vindicate the ex-prisoners and obtain for them their due "indemnización" (compensatory damages) and thus overcome the obstacles imposed by the repressive forces. In spite of numerous hurdles, Amat was triumphant.

² This figure corresponds to the inventory number in the *Catàleg del fons personal de Joaquim Amat i Piniella. Inventaris i catàlegs de l'Arxiu [Històric Comarcal de Manresa]*, 2001, compiled by the director Jordi Torner i Planell.

The publication of *K.L. Reich* is a victory in itself. In spite of having been written in Catalan between 1945 y 1946, it was not published until 1963, and then, only in Castilian. The following document dated December 6, 1961, signed by Carles Barral, editor of Seix Barral, addressed to Amat proves most revealing. The following is stipulated: "a todos los efectos de este contrato, la versión castellana del libro objeto del mismo, originariamente escrito en catalán, será considerado como edición original, pasando a ser el original catalán, por efecto de este convenio, considerado a todos los efectos como una traducción regida por los pactos que regulan los derechos secundarios" (Torner 1.150). The stipulation mandated by Barral constitutes an insipid example of censorship, thus devaluing and, in effect, annulling the Catalan language with all that it entails. Catalan would have emblemized Catalan culture, heritage, history and ideologies, that it can be inferred, threatened the hegemony.

Regarding the publication, Amat's friend Carles Cid alludes to the difficulties and dangers of writing about the topic of Spaniards (of course, Republicans) in Nazi camps. He writes: "Tractar aquest tema en forma de novel·la sempre ho havia considerat difícil, quand no perillós. Però vos heu evitat tots els perills que haurien pogut sorgir gracies a que darrera de tot el que heu escrit bateixa un sentit de veritable comprensió humana" (Torner 2.30). In other words, Cid believes that Amat's novel does not polarize; it does not divide the world into the good and the bad, the conquerors and the conquered; rather it humanizes. In other words, by not assaulting the sensibilities of the censors, it was published.

As well as vindicating and giving voice to the former deportees through the written (and published) word, Amat also fostered solidarity among his compatriots with organizations such as the Amical Association of Mauthausen. An undated letter from Amat's friend Àngel Olivares, speaks to the relationship between two ex-deportee associations: the Amical Association of Mauthausen and the Federation of Ex-deportees.

Olivares's letter reveals his own, and I would believe Amat's, intentions. Olivares stresses the importance of "mantener latente el recuerdo de todos los caídos y conservar el espíritu de fraternidad entre todos los que quedamos, con el fin de formar siempre una voluntad de oposición a todo lo que pueda representar un retorno a ese pasado." He also expresses that the ex-deportees should not "verse enbultos [sic] en ninguna trama política sea esta del color que sea." Olivares's last statement speaks to the belief that solidarity and fraternity are greater than political labels. Amat's friend signs, "un abrazo fraternal de tu amigo Olivares" (Torner 1.104). Clearly the spirit guiding these ex-deportee associations is innocuous, yet was not

interpreted in such a manner by Damián Cáceres, Spain's Section Chief of the Ministry of Internal Politics.³

When Amat took legal steps and sought permission to form the Amical Association, Section Chief Cáceres denied the petition in a letter dated August 24, 1964. In said letter, Cáceres also recapitulates the purposes, as stipulated by Amat, for the Association:

la protección y ayuda mutua entre sus asociados; estrechar entre sí y con todos los ex deportados de cualquier nacionalidad, las bases de amistad fraternal que los unió en los campos de concentración alemanes; la defensa de los intereses morales, económicos y colectivos por razón de los sufrimientos padecidos en los campos de concentración alemanes; la defensa de los intereses resultantes de la deportación de los familiares de los fallecidos en ella o posteriormente; recordar y enaltecer la memoria de los difuntos y testimoniar los horrores sufridos. (Torner 1.81)

The Section Chief rejected the petition, based on two laws: that of December 6, 1941 and of March 14, 1908. The promoters of the proposed association argue that according to

el artículo 16 del Fuero de los Españoles se dispone que los españoles podrán reunirse y asociarse libremente para fines lícitos y de acuerdo con lo establecido por las leyes, y que el derecho de asociación únicamente está limitado por el artículo 33 del mismo Fuero, no pudiendo atentar a la unidad espiritual, nacional y social de España; que el decreto de 25 de Enero [sic] de 1941 [que] no concede ningún margen discrecional... [y] regula el ejercicio del derecho de asociación, se publicó ... para aclarar dudas suscitadas por textos legales cuya vigencia emanaba de preceptos constitucionales *hoy abolidos*. (Torner 1.81, my emphasis)

He adds that Amat's legal arguments will only be taken into account "en cuanto no se oponga[n] a las normas legales del nuevo Estado dictadas con posterioridad al 18 de julio de 1936" (Torner 1.81). Following the flat denial of the petition, Cáceres indicates in Orwellian double-speak that Amat and his peers do not have any legal recourse:

que la resolución de este Departamento de 24 de Marzo [sic] de 1964 que denegó la autorización para constituir la asociación Amical de Mauthausen, no puede suponer perjuicio alguno para que los interesados puedan ejercitar individualmente sus pretendidos derechos de indemnización, si es que les corresponden, utilizando la vía diplomática, formulando a este efecto las peticiones pertinentes, y más teniendo en cuenta que en la Ley de 22 de diciembre de 1960 se regula el derecho de petición de los españoles. (Torner 1.81)

³ Jefe de Sección del Ministerio de la Gobernación Dirección General de la Política Interior.

This letter is the equivalent of the voice of the Francoist government's official stance on the Spanish survivors of Mauthausen. In effect, their solidarity and the acknowledgement of the concentrationary past would constitute an attack against the current administration.

POETRY

LES LLUNYANIES: PEOMES DE L'EXILI (1941-1946)

All of Amat's efforts—both activist and literary—point to the fight against dis-memory. According to Michael Ugarte, "Exile...is a catalyst for writing. Banished from familiar environments and haphazardly thrown into new and usually more difficult situations, the victims share an uncontrollable need to write, to recall, to testify" (4). For Amat, writing was his catharsis.

Before delving into Amat's memorialistic novel *K.L. Reich*, I would first like to look at his collection of poetry *Les llunyanies: Poemes de l'exili* (1941-1946). In the prologue to *Les llunyanies*, Jordi Castellanos stresses the relevance of concentration camp studies, for concentration camps, he believes, are not the denial of our civilization, but rather the essence of it for reducing human beings to something quantifiable, something bereft of intrinsic value (Castellanos in Amat, *Llunyanies* 12).⁴ The word recovered from silence and oblivion combats mechanization. As Castellanos asserts, "La paraula que es dreça viva de vida propia, portadora de sensibilitat i pensament, perquè és el residu irreductible de tot allò que els homes no han estat capaços de quantificar" (Castellanos 13). Upon combating homogenization, individualism is celebrated.

Through the poetry Amat composed during his nearly five years of captivity, he was able to find his voice, a voice that was not heard until 1999 when critic David Serrano i Blanquer compiled and published the collection under the title of *Les llunyanies: Poemes de l'exili* (1940-1946). The first poem I will discuss, titled "Parlo..." (with ellipsis) adheres to a singular principle: the *communication* with an interlocutor, reader or listener regarding the poetic voice's message. "Parlo..." was written in February of 1945 when the end of the war and, of course, possible liberation were in sight.

⁴ "La incapacitat dels homes per conviure en harmonia amb els altres homes i amb l'univers ha desembocat en els camps de concentració, una mena de metàfora (tan real com inhumana) d'aquesta civilització que ens hem creat. Els camps de concentració, d'extermini, són ... no pas la negació sinó l'essència de la nostra civilització que converteix els homes en números, els amputa la llibertat, els utilitza" (Castellanos in Amat, *Llunyanies* 12).

Ara que el cel s'ha obert amb una pluja generosa
i l'horitzó acull l'ambiciós esguard del captiu,
ara que arriba la remor del combat decisiu
i la deslliurança s'apropa a un pas segur,
és amb el balbuceig del nounat que començo a parlar...

Parlo perquè m'he salvat en el naufragi del món
—mar blava sense el cristall de les transparències—
i els homes han descobert la vilesa de llur ferotgia.

Parlo perquè he seguit la dansa del meu temps
—ritme curt i sincopat de follies color de sang—
i n'he estat juguina a l'apoteosi tràgic.

Parlo perquè l'enemic m'ha pres i vexat
—crueltat de baixos fons cobert d'un teló de progrés—
i els seus cops han solcat la meua carn.

Parlo perquè hi ha qui m'espera allà
—lluna blava entre les resplendores d'un foc absorbent—
i és l'amor sagrat el contrafort del meu odi.

Parlo perquè he volgut plorar i m'he trobat eixut
—fallida del cor davant d'una mort miserable—
i els sanglots han estat sordines per al meu pit.

Parlo perquè m'han esclafat la fatiga i la fam
—ràims de llums sota les parpelles closes—
i el meu puny ha servat força per a cloure's.

Parlo perquè han caigut milers al meu entorn
—frenesi dels instints sobre el llit de la sofrença—
i cap múscul del meu cos no s'ha estremit.

Parlo perquè l'enemic ja està vençut
—epopeia ingent dels creuats de la revenja—
i l'hora ha sonat de pregonar els seus crims. (*Llunyanies* 131-32)

It is clear that with the previous poem, eight stanzas of three verses are unified by the anaphora "Parlo perquè" ("I speak because"). Through the poetic word, Amat breaks the silence imposed on the inmates of Mauthausen—the Republicans in general—and he, thus, gives voice to the trajectory of his emotions during his fifty-two months of concentration camp existence. With this poem, Amat reappropriates his right to speak; in other words he recovers the silenced voice.

In the fifth stanza, the third line reads "and sacred love is the buttress of my hate." Joaquim Amat mentions love and hatred jointly

repeatedly throughout his collection of exilic verse. These two emotions not only constitute affective poles, but also for Amat came to signify the only two options. This poet and survivor of Mauthausen, in his literary production as well as in his life, opted for love, as was made manifest in the solidarity he pursued and reaffirmed with his peers.

The poem "El cel" presents the various routes that became evident to Amat during his captivity. When he wrote this poem on Easter of 1945, friendly aviation forces were visible and audible. The poem begins with the lyric voice's query "Qui haurà fet aquest cel tan ample per on la vista es perd i es cansa?" "Com ho han sabut els avions que visc en la sofrença?" The following three stanzas prove revealing.

Motiu cardinal del meu deler de tothora
 És aquest cel tan ample i tan blau,
 Per qual tants camins són possibles:
 Camins ideals de creació,
 Camins divins de revenja,
 Camins íntims d'amor...

Penultimate stanza:

Jo visc aureolat per la pols suspesa en l'aire
 En aquest clos de frisances i esperes,
 On la suor mulla la manta del pres,
 On la fe neix dels afanyes de viure.

Final stanza:

Per la finestra closa, entre els sentinelles vetllant,
 contemplo el cel ratllat pels avions amics,
 per on la vista es perd i es cansa..." (149-150)

Note must be made of the ellipsis. Although in the spring of '45, the prisoners could foresee the end of the war and hope for their liberation, only the unknown awaited them. They dared not count on anything. Although the poem is based on the hope of liberation, no one could know for certain what awaited the camp inmate, even during the final months of the war when the end was immanent. The heavens, subject of the poem, are both literal and metaphorical (or should I say metaphysical). They allude to the heavenly bodies and also the gamut of possibilities. This concept becomes explicit in the three lines, linked by the anaphora "camins": "Camins ideals de creació", "Camins divins de revenja", "Camins íntims d'amor."

What we see both in Amat's poetry and his novel is the gamut of views/options when facing the Holocaust and the concentrationary experience. Instead of opting for vengeance and hatred, this Catalan poet and novelist chose the bond with his fellow human beings. For

Amat (as stated in the final chapter of the novel), the victors are those who managed to withstand the suffering, those who adhered to their humanity without falling into the pit of political or nationalistic blindness.

The final line of the penultimate stanza states that faith is born of the wish to live. Now, I am not fully certain to what faith Amat is referring, if faith in the divine or in the human or a combination of the two. Nonetheless, what becomes evident in his poetry, his novel and his personal correspondence, housed in the Historical and Regional Archive of Manresa, is Amat's unwavering confidence/faith in his fellow human beings, his peers, that stems from idealism rooted in the belief in the goodness of man and the ties of solidarity.

In his poem "The White Hour" whose title alludes to an epiphany, the line of note, for our purposes "i l'amor, difuminant les ratlles de l'odi," fuses the antipodes of love and hate. I will include only two stanzas of "L'hora blanca" that was composed in May of 1945, the month that Mauthausen was liberated.

A l'hora blanca del meu renéixer,
Vora el llac d'aigües somnolents,
Sota el cel d'un blau tebi i segur,
La llibertat precisa la teva imatge.

...

La fe ha triomfat sobre la pols de la mort,
i l'amor, difuminant les ratlles de l'odi,
es fa lloc en la cleda vella de cada cor.
No em calen ja les armes que m'han ajudat,
Inútils les precaucions de l'instint vital!
Avui puc somniar sense angoixes ni perills
Desprendre la closca que protegia el meu jo. (155-156).

By expressing the white hour of his rebirth, the poetic voice poeticizes an epiphany, an awakening, a decision to love and not to avenge just as we had seen in the previous poem. It is precisely love, the connection to life and solidarity that permits Amat to overcome the desperation and the desire to avenge that rears its head in certain poems from *Les llunyanies*.

NOVEL: K.L. REICH

Amat's novel *K.L. Reich* also concludes with the concept of the "white hour." David Serrano y Blanquer affirms that Amat aspired to have the words he gathered throughout his captivity "contribute to the

awakening of consciences" (7). Curiously, in spite of his arduous efforts, the novel came to light after *seventeen years* of the author's unwavering obstinacy.

The version that was published for the first time in Spanish translation (from the Catalan original) in 1963 (after having gone through censors) differs from the 2002 edition. Serrano i Blanquer returned to the original manuscript that conserves the political criticism and the references to Amat's political engagement with the Spanish Republic and the French Resistance; the attacks against Pétain, Franco, and Hitler regarding his compatriots captured on French soil during the Second World War; and two reflections on the immediate post-civil war situation in Spain and on the ignorance regarding the that fact many of his compatriots were perishing in Nazi camps (12).

Amat wrote his novel in Andorra between 1945 and 1946. In his prologue he declares that among the millions of victims in the German camps, Spaniards occupied a place of honor. Their presence in the camps cannot be justified, rather their captivity can only be explained because they were considered "apátridas indeseables" (Amat, *K.L. Reich* 19). The thousands of Spaniards who died in Mauthausen, Amat affirms, "constituyen un sangriento balance de la contribución peninsular a la causa de la liberación de Europa" (Amat, *K.L. Reich* 20).

In his prologue the Catalan writer from Manresa states "Historia esta de sufrimiento y terror, de muerte, y también de esperanza. ... entre las fuerzas destructoras del *Campo* y el *Hombre*, el ser humano empieza por resistirse a ellas, consigue neutralizarlas y por fin termina vencéndolas" (Amat, *K.L. Reich* 20, my emphasis). The camp that becomes an abstraction, a great force, an entity, is the true antagonist of the novel; it is not Hitler, nor the *Obersturmführer* of the camp Hans Gupper, but rather it is the essence of the Camp, an ideology, a symbolic order based on power against which humanity struggles. Man, then, constitutes the human essence, his humanity, the grouping of traits such as affect, passion, reason, but above all, the representation of the individual for the collective. Each character's micro-history communicates the macro-history of all those affected by the spirit of the Camp.

The novel is narrated in third person omniscient, but the narrative voice is masculine and Spanish, referring to an "us" regarding other Spanish prisoners. The novel begins in the winter of '40/41 with the arrival of friends and compatriots Emili y Francesc; and concludes in the camp a few days after liberation by American troops in May 1945. In *K.L. Reich*, the unity of place stands out. That is to say that although the plot takes place in various *blocs* and *appellplatz* of Mauthausen and its branches, the entirety of the storyline develops within the barbed wire fences of this Danubian camp.

The very first image constitutes a leitmotif and a metaphor that prevail throughout the work: the cold. Because of which, one had to make the effort to "evitar el progreso de la insensibilidad" (Amat, *K.L. Reich* 23). Of course, the narrator literally refers to frost bite; but the climatic cold metaphorizes the cold, the insensitivity of dehumanization. In the first paragraphs, the narrative voice warns that one should not allow himself to fall into the pit of moral and emotional numbing.

Amat presents the paradoxical blending of the poetic and the pathetic. The narrator describes the arriving wagons: "pesados y cansados en su abandono bajo el manto blanco" (*K.L. Reich* 23). He adds, "los recién llegados se alineaban penosamente," and continues "La nieve posada sobre las piedras salientes y los arbustos raquíticos contrastaban con las manchas oscuras de los rincones a los que no habían llegado. Con todo, la niebla era tan espesa que otorgaba al conjunto una tonalidad marcada por los distintos matices de gris" (23). The fog's relevance is undeniable. This natural element is polyvalent, alluding to darkness, ignorance, perhaps evil. But also, let us recall the hope inherent in "post tenebras lucem": after darkness there is light. Furthermore, the fog implicitly alludes to the Nazi euphemism "Nacht und Nebel" (night and fog),⁵ that is the poetic mitigation that cloaked the foul reality of genocide, of institutionalized massive extermination. As the narrator reveals, "El humo de crematorio se cernía sobre el campo y se mezcla con la niebla" (30). The protagonist Emili had already intuited upon arrival that "la niebla piadosa escondía un secreto terrible" (25). The new arrivals view for the first time their peers and blocmates, "aquellas desventuradas carcasas humanas," "aquellos esqueletos vivientes" (33). Emili comments to Francesc, "Pintan bastos, socio... Esto huele a matadero" (42).

Francesc, who is idealistic and spends all the time he can contemplating the sky, escaping from his earthly reality, dies of pneumonia. This pulmonary ailment was the by-product of a punishment. When Francesc had refused to comply with a guard's order to deposit a dying but still living fellow campmate in the pit, the guard, then, imposed a not uncommon punishment: a frigid shower exposed to the winter elements. Francesc's refusal to be complicit in the rampant daily violence within the camp must be viewed as act of idealism and rebellion, a choice that sealed his fate and guaranteed his own death. His pneumonia speaks to his vulnerability to the cold, with all that it entails. That is to say that his inability to acclimate—both literally and metaphorically—hindered his own survival of the dehumanization he witnessed in the camp.

⁵ Also the title of Mercè Rodoreda's five-page short story "Nit i boira" contained within the collection *Semblava de seda i altres contes*.

On the other hand, Emili has a survivor's personality. The narrator delineates the temperament and conduct necessary to cope with concentration camp life. The key to survival was to *acclimate* to the environment, but once acclimated and severed from the past, family, and life outside the barbed wire, the prisoner then lost part of his humanness. If the prisoner preserved his humanness/humanity, he became vulnerable and would probably not survive the experience. The narrator affirms, "La reclusión en el campo equivalía a una noche polar de duración desconocida: para adaptarse a ella era necesario ignorar la misma existencia de la luz" (76-77). Let us not lose sight of the fact that light is a leitmotif that prevails in Amat's narrative as well as in his poetry. Emili felt repugnance for the acclimatization that demanded "la pérdida de la propia condición humana. Mejor era labrarse un mundo propio, ... un universo íntimo ... de la imaginación, de las extensas llanuras verdiazules y de las niveas cumbres alpinas" (78). In his study *Spaniards in the Holocaust: Horror on the Danube*, David Wingate Pike deduces the key to survival in the camp: "Perhaps the secret of survival in this implacable world was this: to concentrate upon one tiny act of resistance, or if that were impossible, to construct some little corner of the mind — where nothing could intrude upon human dignity" (27). Nature is a literary archetype that denotes a world outside of society. By escaping to nature—within his imagination—, Emili preserves an element of beauty and vitality within his existence. In so doing, he does not become irreparably jaded and insensitive to life as well as to the ubiquitous death.

The insensitivity to life and death, as previously indicated by the narrator, is necessary for acclimatization and survival. It is this apathy, this nullification of pathos, which is the true antagonist of Amat's novel. Thus, the conflict is to not succumb to base instincts that contribute to barbarism. Often times, in literature, a character is marginalized and becomes "the other"; it is onto him that the totality of evils is displaced. This monster or scapegoat incarnates the most undesirable values given the social context. Curiously, in Amat's work, the antagonist is not a concrete character that emblemizes the abominable; rather the antagonist is an abstraction: the spirit of the camp. All the characters, be they Spaniards, Germans, Russians, Checs or French, have weaknesses and flaws as well as strengths and attributes. Even the camp's *Obersturmführer* Hans Gupper the Black is portrayed in a human fashion in certain instances and undeniably cruel in others. Several characters stand out: Rubio, the communist leader who organizes the network of resistance, Ernest, the homosexual who rises in the hierarchy by exchanging sexual favors and thus protecting his "friends," August, the interpreter who boasts the highest position a Spaniard could hold in the camp, and who becomes a despot, not

unlike Franco, and of course Emili and Francesc who, as a dyad, embody two poles of humanity: pragmatism and idealism. In spite of the ample gallery of characters in *K.L. Reich*, there are no caricatures. All the characters, as secondary as they may be, are round characters. The reader, precisely because of the spirit of the camp, comes to understand exactly how the characters could succumb to their most base instincts. Cruelty is certainly portrayed, but particular individuals are not demonized, rather the villain is the *spirit* that guided them.

Emili's salvation lies in his pragmatism. He manages to balance the sublime, the delight in beauty, the human bond, with his overriding survival instinct. His proclivity for beauty precludes him from falling into the trap of his most primitive instincts. To wit, when he observes the natural beauty of the Danube and its inhabitants, "Era natural que, envuelto en aquel silencio afectuoso, Emili fuera incapaz de sentir ningún imperativo justiciero. ¿Cómo pensar en venganzas, en nuevos derramamientos de sangre, en levantamientos revolucionarios cuando el sol de aquella tarde era tan dulce?" (276). In *K.L. Reich*, the observation of nature tends to represent an escape from the sordid concentracionary world: "Con frecuencia los copos eran más esponjosos y cubrían el espacio con su vuelo tranquilo y majestuoso. ... y una profunda sensación de paz se desprendía de aquellas formas espumosas" (211).

Nearing the conclusion of the novel, a conversation between Emili and another campmate Manuel also proves Emili's burning interest in life — be it nature or human beings. As Manuel and Emili contemplate fellow inmates, bordering on death whose spirit seems to have abandoned them, Emili queries of his friend, "Pero ¿alguna vez has pensado ... en los que acabarán por sobrevivir, salvados ... por la inesperada campanada de la paz? ¿Qué harán estos en el momento de la, digamos, resurrección?" (312). This is precisely the question Joaquim Amat and other survivors had to face. What would Amat plan to do at the time of his resurrection? How was he to re-humanize himself, to reintegrate to the world of the living? How was he to recover his humanity? The answer, I dare say, lies in his efforts to raise consciousness regarding the Spanish concentracionary experience, to create a network of solidarity with the Amical Association of Mauthausen and to pursue the reparation to the former inmates, so that his experience might not have been in vain, so that his four and one half years in Mauthausen and formerly in the forced labor company as a refugee in France and of course as a combatant on Iberian soil, could denote his individual contribution to the collective fight against fascism, against the antagonist of *K.L. Reich*, the ineffable Panatgrulean villain, the Spirit of the Camp.

Then, how can we define the Spirit of the Camp? It is an entity, an

ideology, an essence—both individual and collective—that is founded on the principle of necrophile power. It is precisely the potential to cause death, in other words to snatch away life, for the purpose of fostering and upholding hierarchical power the leads to total domination. The Spirit of the Camp is the brute force that insures the triumph over and annihilation of one's fellow human beings.

But Emili conquers the Spirit of the Camp upon the novel's conclusion. Following liberation, while a fire rages in the camp and Emili works as a volunteer firefighter in the warehouse, his gaze falls upon something he had seen everyday, but that on this specific day, he could see with new eyes. He notices the stamp inscribed with ink or branded onto every object contained within a Nazi concentration camp: "K.L. REICH." These seven letters constitute the "estigma infamante con que han pretendido marcarle, el único epitafio que han merecido sus compañeros muertos" (343). Emili had forgotten the meaning of the term *Konzentrations Lager Reich*, but soon he wonders if he has truly been stigmatized. His body and mind rebel against the label and he thinks "¡Qué el campo arda de una vez y que se consuman todos los barracones, muebles y ropas marcadas con ese sello!" (345). Fire, as a literary archetype, connotes death, but also rebirth. Flames purify. Like the Phoenix that is reborn from its own ashes, Emili, as he had commented with Manuel, faces the moment of his resurrection. Undoubtedly, the protagonist of *K.L. Reich* wishes to not only be liberated from (liberarse) but also be free of, be rid of (librarse) the stigma of the Nazi camp with all that it entails.

The destigmatization is made possible precisely through one element in its various permutations: light, sun, beauty that which Amat poetically termed the "white hour." As chapter thirteen opens, in only one paragraph, one sentence, the narrative voice changes. Following the description in third person of the glacial surroundings, the tenacity of winter, the variations of snow and snowfalls, the Sun articulates in first person that in the battle between frigid winter and warm sunshine, winter appears victorious. This particular emotional displacement to nature is a most uncommon pathetic fallacy. The Sun communicates his inner monologue: "Ahora no me queda otro remedio que fingirme derrotado... pero ya llegará la hora de tomarme cumplida revancha." The Sun's revenge or reprisal is to conquer the cold — which as stated earlier denotes the insensitivity that makes dehumanization possible. Thus, we see the promise of the future, of a luminous force that will triumph over the cold and death of the winter archetype.

With Amat's liberation arrived the "white hour of his rebirth" ("l'hora blanca de seu reneixer") in that he chose to work toward the common good. He was bent on reaffirming solidarity and combating

Francoist repression. Through his perseverance, he managed to give voice to thousands of Spaniards whose past had been silenced.

CONCLUSION

The powers that be wanted to silence Joaquim Amat-Piniella, but they could not. Montserrat Roig was inspired by him, interviewed him and dedicated to him her ground-breaking *Els catalans als camps nazis*. Recent efforts applaud his role in the recovery of collective memory. Today there is a literary prize in his name. En 2003, the journal *Quadern* dedicated an issue honoring him. Joaquim Amat-Piniella was truly an activist who fought for the vindication of and reparation to the ex-deportees without a glimmer of rancor. What stands out in his correspondence, his poetry and novel is his goal of reconciliation: to set right and put an end to the suffering of so many of his compatriots.

As Amat writes in the final lines of *K.L. Reich*, "Es preciso que no ha sido un sueño, sino una victoria absoluta y definitiva, la del Hombre sobre el espíritu de los campos nacionalsocialistas" (347). Amat's success is not limited to his victory over cruel oppression, but also over a most powerful instrument of Francoist repression: silence. The expression that perfectly captures this triumph is repeated eight times in the poem Joaquim Amat-Piniella composed in Mauthausen in February of 1945: "Parlo..."

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