THE ANNUAL JOAN GILI MEMORIAL LECTURE

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The Poetry of Joan Maragall

THE ANGLO-CATALAN SOCIETY
2001

Produced and typeset by The Hallamshire Press Limited, Sheffield

This text is Arthur Terry's own translation of the third Annual Joan Gili Memorial Lecture, *La poesia de Joan Maragall*, delivered at the Palau de la Generalitat during the Anglo-Catalan Society's XLVI Annual Conference, Barcelona, 14-17 December, 2000.

Grateful acknowledgement is made of regular sponsorship of The Annual Joan Gili Memorial Lectures provided by the Institució de Les Lletres Catalanes, and of the grant towards publication costs received from the Fundació Congrés de Cultura Catalana.

The author

Arthur Terry was born in York on February 17th, 1927. After studying French and Spanish at Cambridge, he spent a year in Barcelona and then took up an Assistant Lectureship in Spanish at the Queen's University of Belfast in 1950. He remained there until 1972, ascending by slow degrees to the Chair of Spanish, which he held from 1963. In his last ten years there, he was a member of a writing group which included Philip Hobsbaum, Seamus Heaney and Michael Longley, for which he produced his first serious translations of Spanish and Catalan poetry. In 1973, he went to the University of Essex as Professor of Literature, a post he held until his retirement in 1993. Since then, he has been Visiting Professor at the Universities of Nottingham and London (Queen Mary and Westfield College), and is now an Emeritus Professor. In his time, he has been President of the Anglo-Catalan Society (1963-68), of the British Comparative Literature Association (1986-92) and of the Associació Internacional de Llengua i Literatura Catalanes (1982-88). He was awarded the Creu de Sant Jordi in 1982 and the Premi Internacional Ramon Llull in 1995 for his work as a critic and historian of Catalan literature.

His many books include *La poesia de Joan Maragall* (1963, reprinted 2000), a bilingual selection of Ausiàs March (1976), two volumes of essays on modern Catalan poets (1985 and 1991) and *Three Fifteenth-Century Valencian Poets* (2000). He has also written widely on Spanish and Latin-American literature and has published translations of Ferrater, Espriu, Valente, Crespo, Sanchez Robayna and other Catalan and Spanish poets. He is at present writing a *Companion to Catalan Literature* for Tàmesis, and will shortly be publishing his versions of Ferrater and Crespo in book form. He is also devoted to classical music and is a keen amateur pianist.

THE POETRY OF JOAN MARAGALL

It is a great honour for me to be here today, about to deliver this year's Joan Gili Memorial Lecture, in memory of a great friend and an exemplary human being. Over the years Joan and I had many conversations, and no matter what the subject—art, literature, more everyday things—I always came away with the feeling that this was a man who had come to terms with everything that matters in a balanced and well-informed way, and that here was an example I must try to follow to the best of my ability. In case this sounds too serious, I must stress his essential light-heartedness, his unfailing optimism which clearly owed much to the companionship of his wife, Elizabeth, and to the constant support of his splendid children. If I look back to the origins of our friendship, and to our early discussions, these seem to centre around the publication of my book on Maragall in 1963, a book which he had read with interest and which led us to talk about Maragall and other Catalan poets. His knowledge of modern Catalan poetry, needless to say, was profound, and his reactions to what I wrote about it encouraged me to continue with what eventually became a large part of my activity. Today, however, I want to go back to those beginnings and talk about Maragall, a poet who was always close to his heart, and about whom he had interesting things to say. And always I am aware of Joan's presence: in fact, whenever I write anything these days, I usually ask myself what he would have thought of it—a sure sign of his continuing influence and his consistently high standards. Here, then, is my lecture, which I can only hope will be worthy of him.

Joan Maragall lived from 1860 to 1911—a relatively short life and, on the surface at least, a fairly undramatic one. He was not exactly a prolific poet: his poems fill only two volumes of the twenty-five volume *Edició dels fills*—the rest consisting of correspondence, translations and a vast quantity of essays in both Catalan and Spanish.

In retrospect, his early life reads like a series of false starts: his father was a cloth manufacturer who wanted his son to follow him in the trade; Maragall refused and, with his father's permission, began to study law. However, his career as a lawyer was short lived: in 1891 he married—a fact which was to bring a great deal more stability to his life—and three years later he became secretary to Mané y Flaquer, the director of the *Diario de Barcelona,* one of the leading newspapers of the time. The next ten years see Maragall at the height of his powers as a journalist, commenting on social, political and literary issues, and following step by step the Spanish colonial disaster of 1898. By the time he left the paper in 1903, he had become something

like the mentor of a whole sector of Catalan society, and so he continued to be, with certain variations, until his death in 1911.

On the face of it, this seems like a steady progression, yet, if we go back to the beginnings of his career, this seems full of uncertainties. One of his reasons for breaking with his father's intentions was his desire to write poetry; yet his first published poems are far from impressive: technically insecure and full of ambitious statements which are not as yet backed by experience. Maragall's most convincing writing of this period, in fact, is not his poetry but the prose *Notes autobiogràfiques* (Autobiographical Notes) which he wrote at the age of twenty-five. These are a very deliberate piece of stocktaking, and are remarkable for the candour with which Maragall assesses his position at what he felt to be a crossroads in his life. At one point, for instance, he writes:

> My character is lazy; it despises practical matters; it is made up of an exaggerated sensibility, at times extravagantly so, and a self-love which goes much further than those who have dealings with me might think.

Though in the context Maragall seems to regard this self-love as a defect, with hindsight one might think of it more as the voice of conscience insisting that he remain faithful to his literary vocation. And at another point he suggests what will amount to a programme for his future work: 'Nature, Art, Love, reduced to a superior unity: that is to say Beauty. This is my ideal.' These, of course, are still abstractions which only later experience will fill out. Nevertheless, running through the Notes there are signs of something more concrete: his admiration for Goethe—'Goethe is my poet', he writes in a letter of 1881—and especially for the novel *Werther,* which to a great extent reflects Maragall's own indecisions. (These, incidentally, are the first signs of something which is to characterize a good deal of modern Catalan literature: an attraction to the Nordic, which in Maragall's case is later to be reinforced by his translations of Nietzsche and Novalis.) And three years after the *Notes,* in 1888, Maragall translates Goethe's *Roman Elegies*—something which has a direct effect on his own poetry. These poems are much more expansive than anything Maragall himself had tried to write up to now: they extend the intimate lyric, making it more discursive and at times sententious. Here, for example, is Maragall's version of the opening of the Second Elegy:

> Parleu, pedres: conteu, palaus altívols;
> digau, vies, un mot, geni, desvetlla't.
> Tot dintre els teus sants murs, eterna Roma,
> és animat, pro a mi tot calla encara.
> ^Qui en dirà a cau d'orella la finestra
> on jo vegi a la dolça criatura
> que, abrusant-me amb son foc, me reviscoli?

(Speak, stones: o you lofty palaces, tell me; streets, utter a word, genius, awaken. Within your sacred walls, eternal Rome, all is alive, but for me all is still silent. Who will secretly tell me the window where I may see the gentle creature who, burning me with her fire, will bring me back to life?)

Now compare this with some lines from 'Nuvial', Maragall's poem on his marriage, written in 1892:

No sols d'amor han bategat mos polsos:
altres afanys han governat ma vida,
i em seran tos esguards als ulls més dolços,
si els tinc oberts a una claror sens mida...

(Not only with love have my pulses beaten: other concerns have governed my life, and your looks will be sweeter to my eyes if I hold them open to a clarity without measure.)

This, to be sure, has nothing of Goethe's sensuality; it is more that his combination of lyricism and discursiveness seem both to extend Maragall's vision and to give him more confidence in his own poetic powers.

In the course of the 1890s, these powers came to be tested against the example of other writers, both foreign and Catalan. This, after all, is the period of Catalan Modernism—*Modernisme*. Maragall's relations with *Modernisme* are quite complex. There is no doubt that he shared many of the aims of the *modernistes*—the belief in intuition, the intention of making Catalan culture genuinely European while remaining unmistakably Catalan—and, as his early essay on Nietzsche shows, there is an anti-establishment strain in his work which coincides with other, more openly *modernista* writers. At the same time, he gradually becomes more critical of the central *modernista* productions. From his original enthusiasm, he comes to see certain defects in the plays of Ibsen and Maeterlinck, just as he identifies the limitations of a writer like SantiagoRusinol:

Sadness seems to be aesthetic mainspring of our poet-painter; humour, *blague,* so typical of his personality in many of his works, strike us as no more than the stretching of nerves which have vibrated to excess at the beauty of sad things.

As against this, Maragall constantly stresses the need for sanity in art: the kind of sadness which Rusinol represents is anti-vital—at one point he says that the artist who feels unhappy should remain silent; sanity, on the other hand, is a sign of health, and the healthy artist is the one who remains responsive to the world without imposing his own personality on it. Nevertheless, I think it is true to say that Maragall never completely left *Modernisme* behind. The first part of *El Comte Arnau,* published in 1900, shows Arnau as a rebel against society—in fact, as a kind *of modernista* hero,

and towards the end of his life, as we shall see, Maragall comes round once again to the idea of the individual as a critic of society.

Coming back to the 1890s, there is no doubt that the best of Maragall's early poems tend to centre on the themes of courtship and marriage. As Carles Riba says, these poems are perhaps *too* happy; certainly they contain no signs of conflict, and one wonders how they could possibly have been extended. There is a considerable discrepancy, in fact, between the serenity of these poems and the much more radical ideas expressed in the essay on Nietzsche he wrote in 1893. There, for example, he writes:

> What is more, after so much democracy and so many democratic institutions which temperamentally repel and weary us, the aristocratic radicalism of Nietzsche, with all its genial brutality, refreshes us and gives us consolation and strength.

This is all fairly abstract, and later Maragall was to go back on his early enthusiasm for Nietzsche. However, in 1893 something which happened which put his feelings for Nietzsche to a practical test. Maragall was present when an anarchist bomb exploded in the Liceu—the Barcelona opera house—killing a number of people. Shortly afterwards he wrote the following poem:

PATERNAL

Tornant del Liceu en la nit del 7 de novembre de 1893

Furient va esclatant l'odi per la terra,
regalen sang les colltorçades testes,
i cal anà a les festes
amb pit ben esforçat, com a la guerra.

A cada esclat mortal—la gent trèmula es gira:
la crudeltat que avança,—la por que s'enretira,
se van partint el món...
Mirant el fill que mama—la mare que sospira,
el pare arruga el front.

Pro l'infant innocent,
que deixa, satisfet, la buidada mamella,
se mira an ell,—se mira an ella,
i riu bàrbarament.

(Hate goes bursting in fury over the earth, heads with twisted necks stream blood, and one must go to feast-days with a stout breast, as if to war. At each deadly outburst the people, trembling, turn: cruelty which advances, fear which draws back, divide the world between them...Watching the child which sucks, the mother who sighs, the father frowns. But the innocent child who, satisfied, leaves the empty breast, looks at him, looks at her, and laughs barbarously.)

This is the first poem in which Maragall attempts to deal with social problems, and he does it in such a way as to incorporate the personal theme of the earlier poems. At the end of the poem, as you see, the child resolves the collective tragedy by asserting—'barbarously'—its right to life and laughter. The force of this final image, in fact, may distract us from the excellence of the poem as a whole. Metrically, I think, it is superb: in the first stanza, the short line emphasizes the word 'festes' (feast-days), intensifying the contrast with 'guerra' (war) in the next line. In the second stanza, the regular metre, with its neatly balanced hemistichs, produces an almost sinister tone; and in the final stanza, the pair of short hemistichs in the last line but one creates a moment of hesitation before the final image.

This final image—more strictly, the word 'bàrbarament' (barbarously)—refers us directly to Nietzsche. The obvious question is whether the anarchist outrage was not a reflection of the 'refreshing return to the great sincerities of barbarism' (the phrase is Maragall's) which he praises in his essay. The strength of the poem, in fact, consists, not in the simple contrast between public and private life, but in the association between two kinds of barbarism: that of civil violence and that of the innocent child. There is no doubt that Maragall was shocked by the public event, and elsewhere he denounces any kind of negative action which is not ultimately constructive. However, the image of the child is quite different, and here the crucial reference is again to Nietzsche himself. In a section of *Thus Spake Zarathustra* which Maragall himself had translated, Nietzsche refers to the 'laughing lions' which, according to him, are the creators of liberty. But these are inferior to the child, who is the creator of new values. He goes on:

> But tell me, brothers, what can the child do more than the lion?
> Why must the devouring lion become a child? The child is
> innocence and oblivion, a new beginning, a game, a wheel
> which moves of itself, a first movement, a sacred affirmation.

And so Maragall, while registering his condemnation of useless violence, has recourse to a symbol which continues to vibrate, as in Nietzsche himself, with a sense of moral renewal.

This is the first of a whole series of poems on civic themes which culminates in the magnificent 'Oda nova a Barcelona' (New Ode to Barcelona) of 1909. At the same time, Maragall was writing a series of what, for want of a better word, one can call 'landscape poems', poems which, more often than not, contain a powerful human element. Sometimes, as in 'Vistes al mar' (Views of the Sea), these are no more than notebook jottings, though the best of them are perfectly self-contained, like the four-line epigraph to this sequence:

> Tot ho torno a trobar: una per una
> les barques en son lloc, i els pescadors;
> la platja, al vespre, igual, plena d'olors,
> i la mar rebolcant-se al clar de lluna.

(I find everything again: one by one the boats in their place, and the fishermen; the beach, in the evening, the same, full of scents, and the sea turning over in the moonlight.)

Such poems are like little capsules of energy: here, Maragall is celebrating his return to a known source of imaginative power; nothing has changed, everything is in its place—in other words, he restricts himself to recognizing the basic elements of a landscape which, on previous occasions, has provided him with poetic experiences.

But what happens if the landscape is centred on a living creature, human or non-human? This is the case of 'La vaca cega' (The Blind Cow), one of Maragall's best-known poems, but one whose effect is quite hard to describe. Here, first, is the poem:

Topant de cap en una i altra soca,
avançant d'esma pel camí de l'aigua,
se'n ve la vaca sola. Es cega.
D'un cop de roc llançat amb massa traça,
el vailet va buidar-li un ull, i en l'altre
se li ha posat un tel: la vaca és cega.
Ve a abeurar-se a la font com ans solia,
mes no amb el ferm posat d'altres vegades
ni amb ses companyes, no, ve tota sola.
Ses companyes, pels cingles, per les comes,
pel silenci dels prats i en la ribera,
fan dringar l'esquellot, mentres pasturen
l'herba fresca a l'atzar...Ella cauria.
Topa de morro en l'esmolada pica
i recula afrontada...Però torna
i baixa el cap a l'aigua, i beu calmosa.
Beu poc, sens gaire set. Després aixeca
al cel, enorme, l'embanyada testa
amb un gran gesto tràgic; parpelleja
damunt les mortes nines i se'n torna
orfe de llum sota del sol que crema,
vacil·lant pels camins inoblidables,
brandant llànguidament la llarga cua.

(Bumping her head against one tree stump and another, groping along the path to the water, the cow comes this way alone. She is blind. With a stone thrown too skillfully, the farmer's boy put out one eye, and the other has grown a web: the cow is blind. She comes to drink at the spring as she used to do, but not with the firm tread of earlier times, nor with her companions, no, she comes alone. Her companions, on the high slopes, along the valleys, in the silence of the meadows and on the riverbank, ring their bells while they graze casually on the fresh grass.. .She would fall. She butts her muzzle against the worn basin and draws back in fear...But she comes back, lowers her head to the water and calmly drinks. She drinks little, with scarcely any thirst. Afterwards, she raises her enormous horned head to the sky with a great tragic gesture; she blinks her dead eyelids and turns away, an orphan of light beneath the burning sun, hesitating along the unforgettable paths, slowly brandishing her long tail.)

Once again, Maragall shows himself to be a master of syntax. It is obvious how, in the first half of the poem, the movement of the meditation is broken several times by an isolated phrase: 'És cega', 'la vaca és cega', 'ella cauria'. In the second half, on the other hand, this pattern is much more irregular. At one point, there is another short phrase: 'i beu calmosa.' but instead of interrupting the movement, this acts as a springboard to the next phrase: 'Beu poc, sens gaire set.' And this is because it is no longer a question of marking the pause between one stage and another, but of pushing the meditation in a new direction.

In his review of the volume which contains this poem, MaragalFs friend Soler i Miquel remarked on the 'sentimientos *tàcitos'* which are a fundamental feature of its technique. This comes out above all in the sequence of adjectives: 'sola' (twice); 'cega' (twice); 'no amb *elferm* posat d'altres vegades'; Therba/rei*ca'* (this belongs to the world of which the cow is deprived); l'*esmolada* pica' (the course of time); 'afrontada'; 'calmosa'; *'enorme,* l'embanyada testa'; 'un *gran* gesto *tràgic';* 'les *mortes* nines'; *'orfe* de llum'; 'camins *inoblidables';* 'la *llarga* cua'. Most of these adjectives do not convey any visual sensation; on the other hand, even those which seem merely descriptive, like *'t\ferm* posat', can have a moral implication. Such implications, for the most part, are merely suggested; to use Soler i Miquel's phrase, they are tacit, rather than explicit. However, there is one exception to this: the phrase 'amb un gran gesto tràgic'. And here one has to recognize that it is the poet, not the animal, who is conscious of the tragic element. In other words, it is the poet who, in the course of interpreting his vision, creates the 'tragedy' (and incidentally the animal's 'resignation'), just as in other poems he comes to personify the inorganic elements of nature. At the same time, one has to admire the tact with which Maragall carries out his interpretation, the way in which what in other poets could lead to all kinds of false pathos is treated with an absolute lack of exaggeration. There is no suggestion that the animal's blindness is anything out of the ordinary, just as there is no attempt to blame the person responsible. In a letter to Soler i Miquel enclosing the poem, Maragall describes it as 'una flor de salut ociosa'—a 'flower of idle health'. What he means, I think, is that the absence of any desire for exaggeration is only possible if one has achieved a position of physical and mental equilibrium. It is this state of health, in the widest possible sense of the word, which ensures the sincerity of his compassion: a restrained compassion which corresponds in a way to the resignation of the animal itself. When he comes to the final vision of the cow as it goes off—'vacil·lant pels camins inoblidables, / brandant llànguidament la llarga cua'—Maragall foregoes any attempt to theorize: the only part of the experience which remains to him is his renewed awareness of the mystery of life. In other words, by ordering his reaction to the spectacle of the animal, he has managed to transmit something of the life-giving force of the sadness which comes from compassion.

In 1900, Maragall published his second book of poems, *Visions i cants* (Visions and Songs). This contains some of his most remarkable poems: 'El mal caçador' (The Wicked Huntsman), 'Joan Gan", 'La fi d'En Serrallonga', as well as the first

part of 'El Comte Arnau', which I shall leave for the moment. In a letter to the composer Felip Pedrell, he explains the general sense of the *Visions:*

> That is to say, figures of legendary Catalan people as they might appear to a poet of today.
>
> I had the illusion that, within these visions seen as a whole, one might find something of the *madres* (the mothers or matrices) of the Catalan soul and its evolution.

And in a letter of 1902, written while he was working on the second part of 'El Comte Arnau', he puts a certain distance between himself and the themes of the poems:

> Conflict is repellent to my nature which seeks in everything a centre of harmony and serenity, but those who struggle interest me enormously because they enjoy an aspect of life which is unknown to me.

Nevertheless, he is aware that most of the themes he deals with in these poems are already embedded in folklore and in some cases in the work of earlier nineteenth-century poets. This is certainly the case of 'El mal caçador', though his treatment of the theme is very different from that of the earlier ballads. The poem is too long to quote in its entirety, but here is the opening:

La missa matinal
la diuen allà dalt
aixís que es fa de dia.

La missa de l'estiu
el capellà la diu
amb les portes obertes.

S'oeix de tots costats
quan enflaira els serrats
el ginestar de Corpus.

El caçadò es deleix
De fora estant l'oeix
amb un genoll a terra.

Al bell punt d'alçar Déu,
li bota allà al bell peu
la llebre endiastrada.

S'esventa el gos lladrant,
la llebre fuig botant,
i el caçadò al darrera

'Corres i correràs,
Mai més t'aturaràs.'
Aquesta és la sentència.

'Doncs, corro i correré
Mai més m'aturaré.
Alegre és la sentència.'

S'allunyen amb el vent,
perdent-se en un moment
els crits, la fressa, el rastre...

(They are saying morning mass up there as soon as day breaks. The priest is saying the summer mass with the doors open. You can hear it on all sides when the broom of Corpus perfumes the hills. The huntsman is delighted. He hears it from outside with one knee on the ground. Just as the Host is about to be raised, the devilish hare springs up at his feet. The dog barks in pursuit, the hare leaps away, with the huntsman behind. 'You will run and run. You will never stop.' This is the sentence. 'Then I shall run and run. I shall never stop. The sentence is a happy one.' They go off with the wind; in a moment the cries, the noise, the trail are lost...)

Notice again the metre: Maragall has distanced himself from the traditional ballad by using three-line stanzas, the first two lines of which rhyme, whereas the third is left free. Thus the typical lilt of the ballad is avoided, and the deliberately monotonous movement creates an almost hypnotic effect. And this is underlined by the obvious avoidance of any dramatic effect, as at the moment when the huntsman is condemned: ' "Corres i correràs. / Mai més t'aturaràs." / Aquesta és la sentència.'

In what follows, several movements are set in counterpoint: the seasons rotate almost with a sense of vertigo, as the huntsman endlessly pursues his prey; but against this, there is what is happening in the church. And here there is a kind of double movement: the church itself gradually falls into ruin, but the Host is lifted higher and higher until—supernaturally—it rises of its own accord. Thus the spiritual symbol takes on an independent force, while the essence of the huntsman's situation is that it cannot change. And in the final stanza, his separation from divine grace is confirmed by the two parallel situations:

L'Hòstia per 'na al zenit,
té l'espai infinit,
i ell, per caçà, encisat,
té el temps, l'eternitat.

(To rise to the zenith the Host has infinite space, and he, bewitched, has time and eternity for hunting.)

So the poem ends, without comment and without any possibility of redemption. At the same time, it is worth noticing that both actions—that of the huntsman and that of the Host—though they never actually coincide, take place in eternity; the earth is simply left behind. In other words, it is as if Maragall had had the first glimmerings of an idea which will finally come out into the open some years later, as he finishes 'El Comte Arnau'. As he wrote in 1911, a few months before his death:

> To make human life, both earthly and beyond the earth, into a single thing, that is my most personal sense of the poem, which is nothing less than the fundamental preoccupation of my life.

I shall have to pass fairly quickly over 'El Comte Arnau' itself: though it is Maragall's longest poem, except for the verse drama *Nausica*, and one which preoccupied him over a period of something like twelve years, it does not really lend itself to extracts. On the other hand, I think it shows very clearly how Maragall's poetic ideas were evolving over this period, and how these ideas fit in with his attitudes to life itself. The poem itself consists of three parts, each of which was published separately. In the first, Maragall takes off from the nineteenth-century Romantic view of Arnau: he is a rebel against society who has deserted his wife, Elvira, and their daughters, and has seduced the nun Adalaisa. And here one sees a link with *Modernisme.* Arnau, as I have already suggested, is a kind *of modernista* hero who triumphs over the sterile mysticism of Adalaisa. In the second part, however, all this changes: Arnau's triumph has now ended; he now speaks from beyond the tomb, and Maragall quotes the original ballad in which he returns to his wife after death and confesses his sins. It is as if Maragall had now repudiated the Arnau of the first part of the poem, with its *modernista* overtones, and had settled for a more balanced, more moral kind of life. And this second part concludes with a section called *Escòlium* (Scholium), a kind of residue from the main part of the poem, in which the poet himself enters into dialogue with Adalaisa. It is also a residue in another sense, since Adalaisa herself, who does not come into the original ballad, remains residual to the poem; the poet admits that he cannot reconcile Adalaisa's desire for an earthly love with the rest of the poem, and so she is made to disappear, still unsatisfied.

The third part is different again: though in some ways it reads like a continuation of the second part, Arnau gradually emerges as a kind of redeemer. At one point he is described as 'un despert entre adormits': the one person who is awake in a sleeping society. There is not much doubt that Maragall, at this stage, is identifying himself with Arnau; as we shall see, towards the end of his life, just when he is writing the final part of the poem, he is coming to seem more and more like a prophet crying in the wilderness, someone who is becoming increasingly isolated in his view of society. And it is not too much, I think, to see Maragall now reverting to one of the chief strains *of Modernisme,* to the stress on individualism, not in the radical Nietzschean sense, but in an equally radical Christian context which at times verges on anarchism. And when Arnau is finally redeemed, it is again through the action of an individual, the 'noia amb la veu viva'—the 'girl with the living voice'—who sings the ballad without any knowledge of its original meaning.

The reference to the 'noia amb la veu viva' should remind us of a similar anecdote in one of his two major statements on poetry, the *Elogi de la paraula* (In Praise of the Word), which dates from 1903. (The other is the *Elogi de la poesia* [In Praise of Poetry], completed in 1907.) It would be wrong to think of these two essays as

comprising a poetic theory: Maragall's method does not depend on logical argument, but in defining as carefully as he can certain key terms like 'sincerity' and 'people'. (In this he resembles certain nineteenth-century poet-thinkers like Emerson and Carlyle, both of whom he had read.) Though the *Elogi de la poesia*, unlike the earlier essay, is framed in openly Christian terms,—he claims, for instance, that the struggle for perfection in poetry reflects the struggle of divine creation itself—the manner of exposition is essentially the same. Almost everything in these essays, in fact, depends on *tone*, which makes them difficult to summarize. On a logical level, they are easy to fault. Maragall's belief in the value of intuition perhaps goes too far in neglecting the technical side of poetry; his faith in the 'people' as the receptacles of true poetry merely extends a longstanding Romantic illusion; his belief that genuine poetry can only exist in fragments goes against the idea of a long poem and incidentally produces a quite wrongheaded view of a poem like the *Divine Comedy*. However, to insist on such defects is somehow to miss the point: the whole force of the essays is to direct one's attention to the dignity and importance of poetry as an instrument of ethical regeneration. Or as he puts it in the *Elogi de la poesia:* 'Now you see what we can do, for good or ill, in this matter of verse, which seems a frivolous game, and is a matter of life or death for the spirit.'

Two years after the *Elogi de la poesia*, between November 1909 and February 1910, Maragall wrote what was to become his best-known poem, the 'Cant espiritual' (Spiritual Song). Many critics have taken this to be his swansong, his last important statement of his beliefs before his death. However, the evidence suggests otherwise: the play *Nausica*, his last major work in verse, was not completed until August 1910, and several of the essays he wrote in the last months of his life contain statements which are directly related to the poetry. There are two main reasons for taking this wider picture into account in discussing the poem. One is that all Maragall's later works, as he himself recognized, tend to deal with a single theme, roughly the belief that there is no fundamental contrast between the spiritual and natural worlds, that in some way this life and the next contain one another. The other, which I shall come to in a moment, is that there are certain things in the poem itself which are not clearly defined. First, though, the poem:

Si el monja és tan formós, Senyor, si es mira
amb la pau vostra a dintre de l'ull nostre,
què més ens podeu dà en una altra vida?

Per'xò estic tan gelós dels ulls, i el rostre,
que s'hi mou sempre...i temo tan la mort!

Amb quins altres sentits me'l fareu veure
aquest cel blau damunt de les muntanyes,
i el mar immens, i el sol que pertot brilla?
Deu-me en aquests sentits l'eterna pau
i no voldré més cel que aquest cel blau.

Aquell que a cap moment li digué: '—Atura't'
sinó al mateix que li dugué la mort
jo no l'entenc, Senyor, jo que voldria
aturar tants moments de cada dia
per fe'ls eterns a dintre del meu cor...
0 és que aquest 'fe etern' és ja la mort?
Mes llavores, la vida, què seria?
Fóra l'ombra només del temps que passa,
la il·lusió del lluny i de l'a prop,
1 el compte de lo molt, i el poc i el massa,
enganyador, perquè ja tot ho és tot?

Tant se val. Aquest món, sia com sia,
tan divers, tan extens, tan temporal,
aquesta terra, amb tot lo que s'hi cria,
és ma pàtria, Senyor, i no podria
ésser també una pàtria celestial?
Home só i és humana ma mesura
per tot quant puga creure i esperar:
si ma fe i ma esperança aquí s'atura
me'n fareu una culpa més enllà?

Més enllà veig el cel i les estrelles,
i encara allí voldria ésser-hi hom.
Si heu fet les coses a mos ulls tan belles,
si heu fet mos ulls i mos sentits per elles,
perquè aclucà'ls cercant un altre com?
Si per mi com aquest no n'hi haurà cap!
Ja ho sé que sou, Senyor, pro on sou, qui ho sap?
Tot lo que veig se vos assembla en mi...
Deixeu-me creure, doncs, que sou aquí.
I quan vinga aquella hora de temença
en què s'acluquin aquests ulls humans,
obriu-me'n, Senyor, uns altres de més grans
per contemplar la vostra faç immensa.
Sia'm la mort una major naixença!

(If the world is already so beautiful, Lord, if one looks at it with your peace within our eyes, what more can you give us in another life? That is why I am so jealous of my eyes and my face, which is continually in motion...and I am so afraid of death! With what other senses will you make me see this blue sky above the mountains, and the huge sea, and the sun which shines everywhere? Give me eternal peace in *these* senses and I shall wish for no other than this blue sky. He who at no moment said 'Halt' save to that which brought him death, I do not understand him, Lord, I who would like to halt so many moments of each day to make them eternal within my heart.. .Or is this 'making eternal' already death? But then, what would life be? Would it be only the shadow of passing time, the illusion of the far and the near, would the reckoning of the much and the little and the too much be deceptive, since already all is all? It does not matter. This world, be it as it may, so varied, so vast, so much of

time, this earth, with all that grows in it, is my homeland, Lord , and could it not also be a heavenly home? I am a man and my measure is human for all I can believe and hope: if my faith and hope remain here, will you blame me for it in the afterlife? Beyond me I see the sky and the stars, and there I should still want to be a man. If you have made things so beautiful to my eyes, if you have made my eyes and senses for them, why close them seeking another *howl* if for me there will be no other like this! I know you *are,* Lord, but where you are, who can tell? All that I see resembles you in me... Let me believe, then, that you are here. And when that fearful hour arrives when these human eyes will be closed, open, o Lord, greater ones to contemplate your huge face. May death be to me a greater birth!)

Taken as a whole, the 'Cant espiritual' is a poem about personal immortality, more specifically, about the terms in which it is possible to imagine survival after death. Perhaps the first question we should ask is why Maragall wrote it at all; surely his doubts are answered by the doctrine of the Resurrection of the Body, in which he constantly affirmed his belief? One possible answer is that he needed to make true to his imagination something he already accepted as an article of faith. Whatever the truth of this, the poem does not finally affirm any religious or philosophical position, though critics sometimes speak as if it did. What Maragall *does* affirm is his delight in the beauty of nature as perceived by the senses, and his feeling of being rooted in human experience. There is nothing hedonistic about the first part of this: he is not saying 'earth flatters my senses', but 'earth is beautiful to the eyes of the Christian who has already experienced something of the divine peace': '...si es / mira, amb la pau vostra a dintre de l'ull nostre' (if one looks at it with your peace within our eyes). He is also aware that his senses themselves—which of course he wants to perpetuate—are divine gifts: 'el cos que m'heu donat' (the body you have given me).

What troubles him, on the other hand, is the thought that earthly life, even when its pleasures seem sanctioned by God, is apparently invalidated by death and by the need to believe in a supernatural existence which is totally different from this one.

Later in the poem, Maragall imagines a way of resolving his mental conflict:

aquesta terra, amb tot lo que s'hi cria
és ma pàtria, Senyor, i no podria
ésser també una pàtria celestial?

(this earth, with all that grows in it, is my homeland, Lord, and could it not also be a heavenly home?)

The justification for this appears in the line: 'Ja ho sé que sou, Senyor, pro on sou, qui ho sap?' (I know you *are*, Lord, but where you are, who can tell?) Since created things remind him of God, might it not be that God is in some way present on earth? And in the last part of the poem, Maragall prays that this might be so. If it were, the life of the senses need not be broken by death; death would not be an end, but 'una major naixença' (a greater birth).

This summary, however, leaves out a number of important points. If there were time, I could show how certain details of the poem are a reworking of previous attitudes expressed in the essays and correspondence, especially the idea that there is a constant transaction—a sense of interacting lives—between earth and the afterlife. At the same time, there are important differences of tone, as if the optimism and self-assurance of the earlier writings were now being more severely tested—perhaps, as some critics have suggested, under a growing premonition of death. There is certainly evidence in the poem of a desire to push the philosophical consequences of such ideas to the extreme. In practice, this means that Maragall is concerned with the weighing of alternatives, and it is this which lies behind the one really obscure passage of the poem.

No one seems to have examined the philosophical implications of the third stanza, perhaps because of a certain vagueness of expression which makes it difficult to follow Maragall's thought with any precision. There are, in fact, two associated lines of thought here. The first is contained in the allusion to Goethe's *Faust:* 'Aquell que a cap moment li digué 'Atura't' / sinó al mateix que li dugué la mort, /jo no l'entenc, Senyor...' (He who at no moment said 'Halt' save to that which brought him death, I do not understand him, Lord). (In the play, it is Faust himself who says this.) Here, he seems to be saying that the experiences which give value to life are those which remain in the memory. At the same time, there is a certain ambiguity in Maragall's treatment of memory which is part of his own dilemma at this stage. This is elaborated in the rest of the stanza, which introduces the idea of a universe in which everything is predetermined:

> 0 és que aquest 'fe etern' és ja la mort?
> Mes llavores, la vida, què seria?
> Fóra l'ombra només del temps que passa,
> la il·lusió del lluny i de l'a prop,
> i el compte de lo molt, i el poc i el massa,
> enganyador, perquè ja tot és tot?

(Or is this 'making eternal' already death? But then, what would life be? Would it be only the shadow of passing time, the illusion of the far and the near, would the reckoning of the much and the little and the too much be deceptive, since already all is all?)

Maragall presents this alternative view of the universe only to reject it in what follows. It might seem at first sight that he was only continuing to play with the symbol of Faust, though there may well be an influence of Spinoza, whom he had been reading in 1908. Unfortunately, there is no detailed evidence of Maragall's reaction to Spinoza. But he cannot have read far in Spinoza without coming across his famous phrase *Deus sive natura* (literally, 'God or nature'), by which he claims that God and Nature are one and the same, and that the universe is composed of a single substance. At one point we read that 'it is not of the nature of reason to consider things as contingent but as necessary', and from this Spinoza deduces that 'it is

through the imagination alone that we look upon things as contingent both with reference to the past and the future'. This is surprisingly close to Maragall: to the reason, 'tot ho és tot' (all is all), because for the reason there are no contingencies. Distinctions and differences are only apparent, though to the imagination they may seem real. This, again, is close to the sense of the poem:

> [Fóra la vida] la il·lusió del lluny i de l'a prop,
> i el compte de lo molt, i el poc i el massa,
> enganyadoir, perquè ja tot ho és tot?

([Would life be] the illusion of the far and near, would the reckoning of the much and the little and the too much be deceptive, since already all is all?)

As often with Maragall, it is difficult to be certain whether there is a genuine influence or not. If what I have suggested is true, it strengthens the impression that he is defending the imagination against the intellect. What is more, it would be interesting to find him *rejecting* Spinoza, since readers who have found the poem pantheistic—a description which Maragall refused to accept—have often assumed that this was *because* of Spinoza.

The more one studies the 'Cant espiritual', the more one realizes that it is only one of several attempts to deal with a common theme. Carles Riba, for example, makes a comparison with 'El Comte Arnau', the last part of which was completed in 1909, arguing that the 'Cant espiritual' is partly an attempt to embody the conflict of the earlier poem in a directly Christian form. And I myself would argue that it bears an interesting, though perhaps less obvious, relation to the other major work of this period, the verse drama *Nausica.*

Riba himself has shown clearly how Maragall made use of Goethe's discarded project of a tragedy on the Homeric theme, at the same time modifying a number of important elements in order to bring the subject closer to his own interests. The play itself is based on the episode from the *Odyssey* when Ulysses is washed up on the shore of the island of Phaeacia and discovered by the princess Nausicaa, who takes him to her father's court. Though he remains incognito for most of the time, Nausicaa falls in love with him, but in the end he leaves her and departs for Ithaca.

The result, in Maragall's version, is a rich and complex play, but there is one point in particular at which it seems to connect with the 'Cant espiritual'. This occurs in the last act, when Ulysses is about to leave the island and return home. Once again, the tragic element in the play depends on the contrast between the temporal and the eternal, revealed in the contrast between Nausicaa's world of visions and her awareness of her mortal nature. Ulysses, who appears as the embodiment of her visions, cannot be united with her in human terms, and the climax is one of renunciation, though Maragall suggests that their real union has already taken place in the world of poetry. The crucial point comes when Nausicaa reveals her true feelings to Daimó, the blind poet, as they wait at the harbour for Ulysses to take ship.

DAIMÓ: ^Voldríeu, tal vegada,
anar-vos-en amb ell?

NAUSICA *(A part):* Daimó! ventura
en 'quest instant, que no em pots veure el rostre!

DAIMÓ: Princesa! què dieu?

NAUSICA *(Alt):* No, no ho voldria...
No ho sé, lo que voldria...Estic molt lassa.

DAIMÓ: Resteu, resteu en vostra llar, donzella,
enc que ara us sembli trista i desolada.
Serveu la visió gran del pas de l'hèroe
davant dels vostres ulls: tota la vostra
vida en serà il·luminada; i, sia
vostra sort quina sia, sempre, sempre,
en pau reclosa, o bé pel món enduta,
en calma, en tempestat, en la vellesa,
en dolors, en salut, en malaltia,
sempre tindreu a dintre el cor la dolça
memòria gran d'aquest moment i hora
en què heu amat a un hèroe en puresa,
i la seva presència fugitiva
haurà signat per sempre més, des d'ara,
vostre cor juvenil, bla com la cera,
amb segell immortal.

(DAIMÓ: Would you perhaps like to go away with him? NAUSICAA *(Aside):* Daimó! Lucky, just at this moment, you cannot see my face! DIAMÓ: Princess! What are you saying? NAUSICAA *(Aloud):* No. I would not like to...I do not know what I should like...I am very tired. DAIMÓ: Stay, stay by your hearth, lady, though now it seems to you sad and desolate. Keep the great vision of the hero's passing before your eyes: your whole life will be illuminated by it; and, whatever your fate, always, always, surrounded by peace, carried through the world, in calm, in storm, in old age, in grief, in health, in sickness, you will always have in your heart the sweet, great memory of this moment and hour in which you have loved a hero in purity, and his fleeting presence will have signed for ever, from now on, your youthful heart, soft as wax, with an immortal seal.)

In this passage, the significance of memory is quite unambiguous, and the solution richer, it seems to me, than in the 'Cant espiritual'. Here, as you see, Maragall distinguishes between two uses of memory: for a moment, Nausicaa is tempted to link her whole life to her experience with Ulysses. In terms of the allusion to *Faust*, she wants to stop her life at this point—'donar la vida per resolta' (consider her life resolved)—and this would be a living death. But Daimó turns her away from this: she must allow her experience to become a memory, which, through its poetry and nobility, will enrich her life. Memory, in other words, no longer conflicts with further

action, and the dilemma which troubles Maragall in the third stanza of the 'Cant espiritual' is resolved.

Nausica was completed several months after the 'Cant espiritual', and after it Maragall wrote no more major poetry. The theme of renunciation continued to haunt him, however, in the closing poems of the *Haidé* sequence, written a few months before his death, and in his last essays, *Los vivos y los muertos* (The Living and the Dead) and *La panacea*, he is still turning over the relationship between the temporal and the eternal. And at the end of his life, Maragall seems to write with a new certainty, as if the problems of the 'Cant espiritual' no longer existed. 'Try to use the body as a soul and the soul as a body' he says in *La panacea*—the last mutation of what he had once described as his central theme.

How, finally is one to judge Maragall? He is clearly much more than a poet, though, as I have tried to show, the poems themselves are in many ways a distillation of his most profound beliefs. Placing him in a literary context, one has to admit that his vocabulary, for instance, is much more limited than that of Verdaguer, his one great nineteenth-century predecessor. At the same time, he strikes one as a much more 'modern' poet—'modern' in the sense that he is reacting most of the time, often very directly, to his actual circumstances in an idiom which reflects the speech characteristics of his time. It is true that the language of his poems is often impure by modern standards: there are frequent Castilianisms—remember 'un gran *gesto* tràgic' (a great tragic gesture)—and quite a number of archaisms and odd spellings. This is partly, of course, a sign of the times: the standardization of the Catalan language was still largely in the future, and in the meantime Maragall was mainly concerned to communicate with his readers in an intelligible form. It is doubtful, in fact, whether a greater degree of formal correctness would have improved his best poems; as Pere Gimferrer has said, Maragall's Catalan is 'poor and approximative, but honest and full of conviction', and, more often than not, it has a resonance and an air of authenticity which raise it above any imperfections.

Maragall died in 1911 at the age of fifty-one. Reading his last poems and essays, one feels increasingly that they contain the seeds of other, unwritten work. Shortly before his death, he confessed that perhaps he would not write much more poetry. He went on:

> What obsesses me now is of a metaphysical, or rather mystical, order. I am very much concerned with the inner man. If I go on writing poems, they will be very different from any I have written so far. But that hardly connects with my way of seeing poetry. I think that, above all, I shall write prose essays in the manner of the Castilian mystics.

Whether this might have worked out, we shall never know, but a statement like this does suggest that he had by no means come to end of his career as a writer. At

the same time, it acknowledges a need for change, something which probably owes a good deal to the circumstances of the time. The watershed comes a little earlier, I think, in 1909, in the aftermath of the *Setmana tràgica* (Tragic Week), the anarchist rising of July of that year. In a couple of famous essays written shortly after the event, Maragall showed his willingness to go against public opinion more openly than ever before. In *La església cremada* (The Burnt-out Church), he praises the celebration of a mass in the ruins of a burnt-out church as a welcome return to primitive Christianity. And in *La ciutat del perdó* (The City of Forgiveness), which Prat de la Riba refused to publish, he pleaded for mercy for the anarchist leader Ferrer i Guàrdia, who was subsequently executed. From this point on, Maragall seems to have felt totally alienated from politics. And it is now, as I hinted earlier, that he comes to regard individual action as the only solution to ethical mediocrity.

And this applies also at a cultural level: his most impressive civic poem, the 'Oda nova a Barcelona' (New Ode to Barcelona), completed not long after the *Setmana tràgica*, conveys a vision of the city, with all its defects, which contrasts strongly with the 'ideal city' of the *noucentista* movement which was just beginning, a movement whose collective nature stood for everything Maragall now detested.

I could go on...But what I have said will, I hope, be enough to suggest Maragall's real importance in the history of Catalan literature: as someone who, despite his complexities and hesitations—and sometimes because of them—never failed to stress the importance of poetry and its power to influence human behaviour at its deepest level, and who produced a body of poetry which, at its best, succeeded in matching this vision.