

Julià Guillamon

On the trail of exile

I had been at my brother's place for two years when we received a phone call from Mestres, the owner of the workshop a floor beneath the apartment rented by our mother. Some immigrants had broken into the apartment and made themselves at home. Mestres had called the police. For months my brother had been emptying out our mother's apartment. However, I had been unable to go to gather my things from there. In the final years of her life, our mother had put time and money into maintaining an apartment that did not warrant its upkeep. Now the doors were broken in and the walls were covered in mould. There was no electricity. The immigrants had installed a stove in the middle of the dining room. In the middle bedroom, where my things had been pushed, I found a wooden chest with toys in it from when I was kid, a bag of books, and some folders. In one of these folders was a series of interviews I had done with various Catalan writers, which I had published in the daily newspaper *Avui* between December 1984 and April 1986, just after I had completed university. Four of these writers were exiles: Pere Calders, Avel·lí Artís, Xavier Benguerel and Josep Ferrater Mora.

The oldest of these interviews is with Avel·lí Artís-Gener, or Tísner, who appears on the cover of *Avui* at home in a housecoat, smoking a pipe. In this interview, Tísner says things I had forgotten he had said at the time. He explains that in 1961, when he had started writing the novel *Les dues funcions del circ* (The Two Functions of the Circus), he had returned to Martinique, where he had been brought after the Spanish Civil War when the ship bringing him to Mexico and to exile had broken down in the middle of the Atlantic. The novel recreates the sojourn of two brothers at Fort-de-France while they await repairs on their boat, just as Avel·lí Artís had awaited repairs on his boat in the summer of 1939. Tísner and I spoke about the trips he had made to Martinique in search of locations for his novel, about the hours he had spent observing the islanders, listening to their manner of speaking, copying advertisements he found on the streets. Descriptions of the beach and the airport in the novel come from precise observations. We also spoke about Mexico, about the writer Roure-Torrent and the mother-in-law of Tísner's brother Arcadi, the mother of painter Francesc Espriu, whose voices Tísner had used for the narrator of *Paraules d'Opòton el Vell* (Words of the Elder Opoton). Opoton, the narrator, is a Mexican warrior who links ideas from a common point of reference. Opoton's narration traces his mental flights, reconstructing a literary pre-Columbian chronicle of events, until Opoton loses his train of thinking and the novel ends. I interviewed Xavier Benguerel at his home on Francesc Carbonell Street in Pedralbes. In the interview's published photos of him, Benguerel appears in a dark dress shirt, on the terrace of his apartment in front of antique bas-reliefs of figures with patterns around them. We speak about *Icària*, *Icària* and his translations of *La Fontaine*. Towards the end of our time, I ask Benguerel about Chile and he talks about the moment he returned from exile and about the adventures of the Club dels Novel·listes, but not Chile. In neither of these interviews with Tísner and Benguerel do we speak about exile.

My interviews with Tísner and Benguerel were in-depth interviews, with background and history, with connections to books and experiences, but exile was always left out of the discussion. I published articles and I contributed prefaces to books. Tísner and Maria Lluïsa Mercadet welcomed me often to their home. I returned many times to the apartment on Francesc Carbonell Street, alone, or with my friend Joan Tarrida. Benguerel used to invite us for lunch at a small restaurant frequented exclusively by neighbours. At this time, I had just discovered the novels of Francesc Trabal and I spoke to Benguerel about them with great enthusiasm. But he was surprised by my interest and I did not understand why. I learned why later. Benguerel's reluctance to reciprocate my enthusiasm was connected to Trabal's generosity, the profound disagreements the Catalan exiles in Chile had had, the tough decisions they had faced at the hour of their return, and then the final drama of the life of Trabal, dead at 58 years of age after great disillusionment with the world—which had all been epitomized by the continuation of Franco at the end of the Second World War.

Avel·lí Artís-Gener and Xavier Benguerel did not talk about exile because exile was not a positive experience for them. For these writers, exile meant stigmatisation and it was a source of shame. This can be seen clearly in their memoirs. Benguerel's erratic *Memòria d'un exili. Xile 1940-1952* (Memoirs of an Exile: Chile 1940-1952) side-steps the fundamental aspects of his life in Santiago. Instead, the memoir reproduces sections of articles from the journal *Germanor*, in which Benguerel discusses a rather inconsequential trip with his family to Corcovado, Puerto Aysén, and the San Rafael Lagoon in the south of Chile. A large part of the memoir is dedicated to showing the craftiness he employed

to make it possible to open and run a pharmaceutical laboratory in Chile. Tísner's *Viure i veure* (To Live and See) also has a bit of the picaresque about it, with its descriptions of Tísner's adventures in cinema and television. Tísner's cars are like the dogs and cats of Benguerel: they are objects of emotional transfer, which speak of a familiar world, placidly accommodated and stable, a place that perhaps never existed. When Tísner reconstructs his return to Catalonia, there is neither pain nor conflict.

Talking to the writer Quim Monzó, the journalist Ramon Barnils describes the sadness he felt at seeing Tísner, a pillar of the magazines *La Rambla*, *L'Esquella de la Torratxa* (The Torratxa Cowbell) and *El Be Negre* (The Black Lamb), reduced to working in the editorial offices of *teleXpress*, in an obscure and a subordinate role. In Chile, Benguerel had made money, but he was like one of the characters of his own short stories —rootless, erased, divided between two irreconcilable realities, like his erudite erotomaniac who keeps his passions a secret and does not understand his son. Tísner returned to Catalonia without a penny. He lived poorly in a boarding house in Barcelona and wound up accepting work at the newspaper of old friends, who had complied with Franco. Benguerel kept a low profile, maintaining personal commitments to only Rafael Borràs and the Lara family. I do not know if he had any friends. Tísner eventually prevailed over his demeaning circumstances and became a public figure, a candidate for elections to the Nacionalistes d'Esquerra, who appeared on TV3 in his final years of life. Tísner and Benguerel were very different, but in my memories of them, both figures are blurred into one.

What should I have asked Tísner and Benguerel about exile? What did I know, really? What should I have said to make them open up and remember, without reservations or embellishments, an intimate part of their lives in Toulouse and Roissy, in Mexico and in Chile? In my time as a student at the University of Barcelona, students of Catalan literature took courses in the history of the Catalan language, its phonetics, morphology, syntax and dialectology, because Catalan had to be the foundation of Catalonia's renewal. We studied very little about literature itself, and hardly anyone spoke about the literature of the 1930s. The books that should have helped us discover the intellectual climate of the 1930s did not exist. We got used to seeing the Spanish Civil War through the deformed mirror of anti-Francoism. I had some copies of *Visions de la guerra i la rereguarda* (Visions of the War and the Rearguard), with its design by Salvador Saura and Ramon Torrente, who played with the colours of the republican flag. The only pre-war newspapers I ever saw were those reproduced in that anthology. The post-Franco transition discredited politics so that a profound silence hung over anyone and anything associated with the Barcelona of the Republic. It was not until much later that I began making important connections about things. Joan M. Minguet i Batllori salvaged the books and articles of Sebastià Gasch, while Valentí Soler published Just Cabot's *Indagacions i proposicions* (Enquiries and proposals). From reading the articles of these writers and through their exchange of opinions, for example, on Dalí, "a world that was true" began to emerge for me. I remember a detail that impressed me. To speak about some brown shoes, Gasch said "some spectator shoes". These "spectator shoes" symbolized the dream world that Gasch carried with him.

I spoke about my feelings to Josep Palau i Fabre. In 1946, Palau i Fabre had voluntarily exiled himself in Paris. He was tired of the atmosphere in Barcelona and of his relationship with his parents, who had become supporters of Franco. I met him shortly after he had returned to Bruc Street in Barcelona. In cabinets and drawers of his home

on Bruc Street, Palau i Fabre found autographs, books with dedications and magazines on modern design that his father had owned. In the foyer of his home, among paintings by Gausachs and Bosch-Roger, there was a cabinet with trinkets and objects of art like those that were advertised in *D'Ací i d'Allà* (From Here and There). Bit by bit, Palau i Fabre sold everything he found to pay for the Ektachrome transparencies of the books he wrote about Picasso. In a drawer of the childhood bedroom of his upper-class family, Palau i Fabre had saved dozens of clippings from the magazine *Mirador*. Every Thursday, a day-boarder classmate of his would bring the magazine to the school's boarding house, where Palau i Fabre stayed. Homesick in the first years of the post-war, Palau i Fabre cut out and arranged clippings of the magazine and

In exile the Catalan novel became an instrument for rethinking the position of men in the contemporary world

assembled them into a kind of encyclopaedia, which he read over and over again. In my interviews with him, he could confirm that he still knew many of these clippings by heart. Palau i Fabre preserved a clear image of the world before the Spanish Civil War, a worldview 16 or 17 years old, which he kept deep inside of him. Palau i Fabre could speak as easily about the first talking picture, *The Love Parade*, as the jokes of Otto and Fritz, which had been in fashion 60 years before. Despite his iconoclastic stature, Palau i Fabre was witness to the civilized customs of an illustrious bourgeoisie who went to the Teatre Grec to see Margarida Xirgu's *Medea* or to the Liceu to see the Russian Ballets, in top hats or trilbys and black-and-white spectator shoes. To understand the world of Palau i Fabre better, I set up at the Library of Catalonia to read old copies of *Mirador*, and I wound up spending more than a year there.

It was at the Library of Catalonia that, in a great torrent, all the questions I was not able to ask Tísner and Benguerel when they were alive and were my friends began to emerge. When I was at *Avui*, I used to come across the journalist Josep Maria Lladó, with a big cigar in his mouth, completing the writing of articles at the bar La Llave, as if La Llave were the bar of the Ateneu. In those days I thought of Lladó as a solitary and anachronistic old man. But now I think of him at the editor's desk of *Última Hora*, and in Nice in 1945, publishing *Per Catalunya* (For Catalonia) with its covers by Fontseré, Clavé and Martí Bas. It was while at the Library of Catalonia reading *Mirador* —and *La Publicitat*, *La Rambla*, *L'Instant* and *Última Hora* as well— that I began to understand the sheer scale of the defeat in 1939 and the consequences this had on my life directly.

The generation of Joan Oliver, Francesc Trabal, Vicenç Riera Llorca, Armand Obiols, Anna Murià, Xavier Benguerel, Mercè Rodoreda, Agustí Bartra, Lluís Ferran de Pol, Avel·lí Artís-Gener, and Pere Calders was the first to access a modern culture which crowned a continuous line reaching back to the Catalan Renaissance, a culture with a normalised Catalan language that made it possible to write in any genre, with a first-order journalism, with columnists who were open to all manner and hue of irony, with stories that offered readers of Catalan a Catalan vision of the world. The writers of this generation published popular collections, they translated the classics, they commented on the latest news in the

European and North American novel. Poetry experienced a golden period, with a return to the 1800s and an adherence to the weighty demands of symbolist and pure poetry. The old masters, Joaquim Ruyra and Josep Carner, were still active and a new generation of Catalan writers in their twenties who spoke about the troubles of youth had sprung up. And then suddenly, this world disappeared.

First, the Civil War forced this generation of writers to channel their energies into the service of politics. Then, after defeat to Franco, the generation's best were pushed across the border into poorhouses and shelters, where they were locked out of Catalonia and kept at bay in faraway countries, living in precarious circumstances, with painful memories and a poor digestion of their injuries. Some of these writers stayed in these faraway countries forever. Others, like Tísner, were away for 25 years. When they returned to Catalonia, they found a place that was nothing like what they had imagined in Chile or Mexico. In *El Poble Català* (The Catalan People), Tísner imagined dozens of Catalan exiles in sombreros and tourist boats returning to Barcelona, while in an apocryphal edition of *La Rambla* published in May 1945 when Tísner was only at the start of his exile, he published norms for applying for subsidies from the Spanish Refugee Evacuation Service (SERE) and the Spanish Republican Assistance Council (JARE), two organisations that helped to repatriate exiles, in the expectation of being back home soon. Nobody ended up in prison in Spain after returning from exile, but each exile lived a climate of constant intimidation and threat. When Catalonia began to revive and when all of the returned exiles should have been dedicating themselves full tilt to the reconstruction effort, they were not always well received. Their ideas, it turned out, did not always correspond to reality.

In 1966, Amadeu Cuito tried to revive his grandfather's magazine. This is how the Perpignan edition of *Mirador*, "the magazine that will be read in Catalonia", was born, which Eugeni Xammar dreamed of as the alternative to Carles Sentís and Ignasi Agustí's *Tele-estel*. In 1966, it was important to look forward, without thinking back to what had been lost. Nevertheless, like the return of what had been repressed, this sense of loss trickled down and made its way into the titles of the exiles' books: *Abans de l'alba* (Before the Dawn), *Homes i coses de la Barcelona d'abans* (Men and Things of Old Barcelona), *Abans d'ara* (Before Now). Before.

Avui was first published in 1976. I was a loyal reader of the newspaper. In those days, I spent the summers at my mother's boarding house, and I was bored. In the afternoons, I would lock myself in a bedroom of the boarding house's first floor and cut out articles about the Freedom March, which had just passed through the town of Arbúcies. *Avui* often published information on the exile experience. The newspaper wanted to transmit a vision of continuity through news of returned exiles as well as deaths of exiles abroad, deaths which occurred in steady drips, from the remotest days magazines on exile were first distributed in Havana and Santiago, in Mexico and Paris. There was news of the death of Alexandre Plana, of Pere Corominas, of Alfons Maseras, of Joaquim Xirau. Those deaths stand out against a glorious image of Pere Quart, at the Price Festival of Poets in 1970, reciting verses of *Corrandes de l'exili* (Folksongs of Exile), which in 1940 had caused Mercè Rodoreda to explode into laughter and nearly burst at the seams. Those deaths stand out against the image of Oliver, joining in with the people, challenging them in crying: "Liberty! Liberty!" As a journalist, I attended Oliver's extremely sad burial. Even before dying, in 1986, Oliver was a star whose light had dimmed. He was a forgotten and cranky writer who published acidic, disillusioned articles in a marginal magazine called

El Llamp (The Lightning). Since those days, Oliver's light has not stopped dimming until almost total darkness. Images of the glorious return of Agustí Bartra to El Prat Airport have disappeared while a much bleaker image of customs and the police in leather three-cornered hats has remained.

After Jaume Subirana's book on Josep Carner in Belgium, Carner's return in 1970 and Carner's uninspiring day-to-day life in Barcelona, Carner's return takes on an even more opaque and contorted significance. Carner's return is situated against a backdrop of rehabilitated and triumphal poets and intellectuals, of a happy reparation of exile's legendary brain drain and of the lost men whose lives were torn asunder. There is Armand Obiols, disillusioned by politics, distanced from his exiled compatriots, writing to his friend Rafael Tasis from Bordeaux, or accompanied by unknown women in Vienna and Geneva, with sadness clinging to his face like a mask. There is Francesc Trabal, busy working on a utopian project to build schools in the Americas so as not to lose the Catalans there, the same Francesc Trabal who, though anxious to return in January 1945, was the first to be lost. Trabal's articles in *Germanor* (Brotherhood) give goose bumps: the writer had lost his way and had resigned himself to a life of silent mourning and shrivelling away. We are far from the days of expecting the honour and compensation that some thought exiles deserved in the mid-1970s, when on the eve of the first elections, politicians aimed to profit from the fidelity and prestige of the exiles. We were not always told by the exiles the encouraging and flattering words we wanted to hear regarding the reality of the exile, a reality which is difficult to nail down. Were it possible to get together again with my old friends, the meeting would be marked by a sense of loss and an experience of grief.

At the same time, such a meeting would also be marked by a joy at seeing my friends again and discovering that their books were still alive







and could serve as examples and stimuli for many readers. Catalan literature matured in exile. Catalan poets sought out possibilities for redemption in the midst of adversity.

They declared the birth of a new man. In exile, the Catalan novel eventually overcame the interwar crisis and became an instrument for rethinking the position of men in the contemporary world. The letters, diaries, and memoirs of the exiles are an extraordinary testimony to humanity, full of heart-rending experiences but also the antics of everyday life. Although this material is mainly a record of personal visions, it can be read as a grand saga with collective meaning, beginning with the flight from Barcelona, continuing with the building of temporary settlements in France and the experience of concentration camps in France and Germany, and ending with the creation of intellectual refuges and safe havens. In this grand saga, the nightmares of Toulouse are included, in their rarefied climate of frictions and discrepancies. So too is the life of the student at Montpellier, youth, and the discovery of love. There are the opportunities for symbolic rebirth in the forests of Bierville and Roissy-en-Brie. And starting in 1940, there is the great adventure in the Americas, which left in parenthesis the ideals of reconstruction of more than a century. The exiles could not publish, had lost their audience and had witnessed the abolition of their language.

A line connects Antoni Rovira i Virgili's *Els darrers dies de la Catalunya republicana* (The Last Years of Republican Catalonia) to Xavier Benguerel's *Els Vençuts* (The Defeated), to Mercè Rodoreda's short stories "Cop de lluna" (Moon Shadow), "Orleans, 3 quilòmetres" (Orleans, 3 Kilometres), and "Paràlisi" (Paralysis), to Vicenç Riera Llorca's *Tots tres surten per l'Ozama* (All Three Come from Ozama), to Pere Calders's *L'ombra de l'atzavara* (The Shadow of the Agave).

Rife are the sense of loss and the promise of another world to come, a world that will be swindled tragically. There is the constant question of survival in clandestine conditions, conflict with an incomprehensible reality, which forced the exiles to reconsider their identities, and fear of being abducted by the Other. More concretely, there is the loss of the things the exiles believed to be certain before the war, replaced in turn by uncertainty and pain. There is anxiety, and the experience of being uprooted. Mercè Rodoreda forges the path of these Catalan writings in exile when, in March 1940, she writes to Carles Pi i Sunyer from Roissy explaining that the world will never be fixed, that the homeland will never be saved, but that if from her store of human knowledge, if from bitterness and cruelty, the work she desired to write ever arose, she would have nothing more to demand of life.

One of the more extraordinary of the exiled Catalan writers, and at the same time one of the more paradigmatic, is Joaquim Amat-Piniella. In 1933, when he was still young, he had published a book of hyperrealist portraits of friends from the city of Manresa called *Ombres al calidoscopi* (Shadows in the Kaleidoscope). At the Library of Catalonia, one copy of this book, with a dedication to J.V. Foix, is preserved. The unravelling of the war brought Amat-Piniella to the Saint-Cyprien concentration camp, and later, when the 109 Compagnie de Travailleurs Espagnols was intercepted by the Germans at Delle, he was taken to Mauthausen, from which he was released at the end of the war and, like some sort of chrysalis, transformed into the great novelist of *K.L. Reich*.

Images of exile have been conveyed to us through photographs which, thanks to repetition, have become common visual places: the lines of people marching to the French border, images of concentration camps, the beach, lorries loaded with bread, spahis. We should start at another end of this historical recreation. We should read the texts of the exiles, paying special attention to details. We need to seek out the revelatory details and the contrasting points that illuminate them, in order to access a space that has been protected. We need to understand the connections between what is present and what is absent, between history and fiction, always looking for keys that will open the captive world of exile imagery. Travel has permitted an alternative reading of exile literature, a reading from a new and fresh perspective. In ways similar to the way Avel·lí Artís went to Martinique to reconstruct the memory of his texts, I have gone to Prats de Molló, Argeles-sur-Mer, Roissy-en-Brie, Mexico and Santiago, Chile, accompanying the film director Joaquim Jordà and his film crew. As a starting point for this historical reconstruction, I brought along the memoirs, short stories and novels of the exiles, with the goal of finding that world that had been locked up in its own memory, a world that has disappeared but that through research has come together again and solidified in marvellous ways.

One of the most impressive articles Trabal published in *Germanor* was “Les Claus, variacions sobre un tema inútil” (Keys: Variations on a Useless Theme). The article describes an afternoon at the Plaza Brasil in Santiago, Chile. Alone in the late afternoon, Trabal dreams of being in Barcelona again and hearing the streetcar push uphill towards the Gràcia neighbourhood, he dreams about the Southern Cross constellation no longer being the Southern Cross, until his wife’s voice interrupts him, caressingly: “Listen... these keys?” In Santiago, Trabal’s niece, Anna Maria Prat, had kept a clipping of an article her uncle had written for *Germanor*, in which he talks about useless objects and false memories: a box of cigars, a dented trophy. He also talks about a bunch of keys: the family’s Barcelona keys, the keys to their cottage at Castelldefels, the keys to the Institution of Catalan Letters.

Those same keys Francesc Trabal still carried with him, in his pocket, in April 1941. A similar story would reoccur in Cèsar-August Jordana's *El món de Joan Ferrer* (The World of Joan Ferrer). In one of this book's first chapters, Jordana speaks about an alarm clock that he carried with him when he was a student, doing his military service, and when he was an exile, which now had a loose hand. How could he throw it away? This alarm clock had been with him on Vecinal Street, in the Las Condes neighbourhood, in the house of his son Joan. In a recent article, Mònica

Zgustova evokes a poignant image of the Croatian writer Dubravka Ugrešić in the novel *The Museum of Unconditional Surrender*.

At the Berlin zoo, close to a refugee shelter, Ugrešić describes a mysterious collage of items: a child's shoe, a pipe, a car key, four other random keys —unconnected objects discovered in the stomach of a dead walrus. For Ugrešić, these objects symbolized the experience of exile.

In Chile, Joaquim Jordà, his film crew, and I travelled as far as the village of Los Andes. We visited Mapocho train station in Santiago, on the tracks of the old route of the Catalan Andean group of exiles. It had been a long time since villages in this part of Chile had a rail line connecting them. In Mexico, we went to the Buenavista Station, where the train from Veracruz once arrived. Now that station is a giant empty space on the point of demolition. We visited the Casa del Agrarista, which welcomed hundreds of Spanish refugees. We walked through the Hipódromo neighbourhood, where apartments and servant quarters are still visible as they appeared in Vicenç Riera Llorca's novels *Amb permís de l'enterraments* (With the Gravedigger's Permission) and *Joc de xocs* (Game of Conflict). We went to the French Cemetery to find the tomb of dramatist and publisher Avellí Artís i Balaguer, the father of Tísner. In the cemetery's great avenue, many of the mausoleums, with their doors half-open, are like apartments, and it is not hard to picture the writer Pere Calders imagining with a laugh the inhabitants of shanty towns making homes for themselves there. In the course that brought us to the French Cemetery, we unravelled the piece of world that Calders had portrayed in "La Verge de les vies" (The Virgin of the Railway): the disused rail crossing of the railway leading to Cuernavaca, the switchman's attendant booth and, on the other side of the road, the chapel and a McDonald's advertisement. We travelled to Chalma Sanctuary, retracing the pilgrimage of Professor Enguiano and his pupils in Lluís Ferran de Pol's *Érem quatre* (We Were Four): the arrival in the sanctuary surrounded by rock-strewn mountains, the descent through alleyways full of street stalls where the multitudes had gathered, the wreaths of flowers that had symbolized sacrifice, the ritual bath, the sudden sickness in the car on the return trip, and the period of recovery amidst visions and deliriums.

It is not a question of revealing spaces that have been preserved but of showing the intangible, for instance, looking again at Domènec Guansé's distorted image in *Laberint* (Labyrinth) of Barcelona, city of the bourgeois novel, of white telephones, a city distorted by insuperable distance. It is a question of looking again at Xavier Benguerel's phantasmagorical Poblenuou in the short story "The Disappeared," with the man who leaves in search of his runaway brother. It is about the vicissitudes of the protagonist of

**It is still necessary to
bring the exile experience
closer to a sensibility
of our times**

Benguere's "The Binocular Man," who in the standing room of the theatre invents a life for a woman he sees in the orchestra seating. The Municipal Theatre of Santiago, Chile in many ways resembles the Liceu of Barcelona. Through this very deliberate ambiguity, Benguerel transforms himself into the character of the onlooker, who contemplates living a reality he can not live from afar.

The opposite of these desolate fantasies is the idealised Catalonia of Josep Carner in "Return a Catalunya" (Return to Catalonia): the fiery sierra, the golden fields, the world ordered harmoniously in the environs of the farmhouse. This world is the beaches of the Cap de Creus, which in the poetry of Ramon Xirau becomes a place of rediscovery and memory thanks to a language Xirau recuperated from childhood. This idealised world is the dream story of *El món de Joan Ferrer* (The World of Joan Ferrer) by C. A. Jordana, a counterbalance to the disenchantment, solitude, and sickness of the other exiles (an appropriate metaphor for this writing would be the draining of bile). This world is the passage of characters in Francesc Trubal's *Temperatura* (Temperature) towards a fabulous world, through lakes and volcanoes placed scenographically to reflect an impossible rebirth. Disturbingly alien is Mercè Rodoreda's story *La plaça del Diamant* (The Time of the Doves), which situates itself in a city disfigured by the blue light of anti-aircraft, or Rodoreda's *Incerta glòria* (Uncertain Glory), in which the author revisits 14th April when Trini Milmany and Soleràs climb the roof of the University of Barcelona with a Republican flag made of remnants and handmade paper stars, in a naïve dream that was to be destroyed on the Aragon front. This phantasmagorical world, this lost world, is one of the most powerful creations of Catalan literature in the twentieth century.

The exile trail has nearly disappeared, but the exile experience is still, in many ways, a world in need of exploration. Lately, oral histories have been collected and published, studies and monographs on important exiled authors have been offered up for study, and synthesising works that situate the Catalan literary exile in the societies and cultures of their countries of exile have begun to appear. Each year there appear wonderful writings, collections of letters, memoirs, diaries written at the moment of Barcelona's fall to Franco's troops, stories of crossing the French border, descriptions of the sojourn in the Americas. This writing generates an alluring counterbalance to the novels and biographies that describe those same events, but from many years' distance. The writing makes possible multiple readings of the same historical events, it complements and enriches second-person accounts, and it opens new perspectives to interpretation from a human, cultural, political and historical point of view. But it is still necessary to tackle and consider the exile experience as a collective Catalan experience, through a discourse that situates and brings the experience closer to a sensibility of our times, far from the stereotypes of anti-Francoist resistance and the political transition, as has occurred in other countries with other historical pasts and other exiles. It is still necessary, that is, to come to terms with what exile has represented for us Catalan speakers because, although we believe we have healed, we have never known much about the exile experience ||