

dialog

JOSEP M. MUÑOZ

Josep Termes, history as nostalgia

Josep Termes i Ardèvol (Barcelona, 1936-2011) came into the world in the same month and year as the Spanish Civil War broke out, in a working-class environment, to whose memory he always wished to remain true. He studied at Barcelona University in the nineteen fifties, reading Pharmacy first, and, after the Students' Movement of 1956, Arts, where he specialised in Contemporary History. It was also then when he joined the PSUC, the party he quit in 1974 due to the disagreements he had within the committee of intellectuals. From then on he was a fierce critic of Marxist dogma. Taking Casimir Martí's book, *Orígenes del anarquismo en Barcelona* (The Origins of Anarchism in Barcelona) as his guide, he began to study the workers' movement, especially the anarchists, in Catalonia and Spain in the 19th and 20th centuries. This dedication, of which his thesis *Anarquismo y sindicalismo en España. La Primera Internacional, 1864-1884* (Anarchism and Syndicalism in Spain. The First International, 1972) is a landmark, culminated shortly before his death with a voluminous work of synthesis: *Història del moviment anarquista a Espanya, 1870-1980* (The History of the Anarchist Movement in Spain), L'Avenc, 2011. Expelled from Barcelona University, in 1958 as a student and in 1966 as a lecturer for his anti-Francoist activity, he returned there after being part of the initial team of the Autonomous University of Barcelona. From 1991 to 2006 he was a member of the Jaume Vicens Vives University Institute at Pompeu Fabra University. His work was characterised by the desire to revise some of the interpretations that have been made of the contemporary history of Catalonia, and in particular of the bourgeois nature of Catalanism, based above all on a paper he presented in 1974 at the Historians' Symposium on *El nacionalisme català. Problemes d'interpretació* (Catalan Nationalism, Problems of Interpretation), the seeds of his studies on popular Catalanism, to which he returned in books like *Les arrels populars del catalanisme* (The Popular Roots of Catalanism, 1999) and others. His private library, with over 20,000 volumes, books and leaflets, and a notable library of press cuttings, has been donated to the Museum of the History of Catalonia. In 2006 he was awarded the Prize of Honour for Catalan Letters.

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>> I think that your family background has a lot to do with what you have been and have done as a historian.

Absolutely; at heart, I have studied history for reasons of environmental nostalgia. Nostalgia for the environment into which I was born: a working-class neighbourhood, July 1936, people extremely politicised. This means that, for me, talking about politics and, therefore, about history was like talking about Barça is nowadays. For years and years that was everyday life for me. The subject of Catalanism, the Republic, Macià, Companys, the CNT, the FAI... And I'll tell you something else: it was also the criticism of all that, because, contrary to what it might seem, in that atmosphere –in which if people weren't in the CNT, they were in the FAI– there were an awful lot of people who were highly critical of the war, starting with my father, who was politicised but not in any party. Everyone was asking: "What did we do? But, what did we do?" and that "what" that we did is violence. Therefore, right from the very start, and here I don't mean to sound pompous, for me history and life have gone hand in hand.

You describe the surroundings into which you were born as very poor. The place where I was born was a wretched, terribly poor bar. Before the war, my father delivered wine and olive oil around the neighbourhoods on a small cart pulled by a mule. After the war he ran a bar, but he was very poor, poorer, to be honest, than the other workers in the neighbourhood. The workers were poor to start with, but my parents were even more so, more worn down and with less money than the local workers.

Poor and politicised, too. My father was highly politicised, but he was because of the brutal poverty that he had experienced. He told me that he had been born into a family of landless farm labourers, and that at the age of 12 or 13 he was already going to reap in the fields as a day labourer in summer. He worked so hard that I, who knew him all his life until he died, only ever saw him working in the bar, 365 days a year. So there were no holidays, no Saturdays or Sundays. He got up at the crack of dawn, at five or half past five in the morning, to serve the drinks to the workers who were on their way to the factory, and he worked until midnight or one o'clock every day, until I was able to help him when I was 18. Only after lunch did he go up onto the roof terrace for a couple of hours, stretch out on a sack, under a small roof, and have a nap. I perhaps only ever saw him go on three or four small outings with people from the bar: they collected money for a few months and, when they had enough, they went in a coach to somewhere near Barcelona and barbecued some meat.

He was so hard-working that he couldn't be a politician; however, he was totally politicised. He was always talking to me about politics. Politicised along what lines? Popular Catalanism, that is, Macià, Companys. A radical Catalanism and, obviously, a working-class sentiment derived from the fact of believing that working people could not live that way, things had to get better. But he had neither the time nor the opportunity to be a politician. I have hardly any photographs of home, because we were so poor that we didn't have a camera until well into the sixties, when I began working at the university; however I do have one in which you can see Father and Mother sitting on a bench, on their honeymoon in Zaragoza: what luxury, they went on their honeymoon to Zaragoza for a couple of days!

And yet you were able to go to school. Yes, because my father was fanatical about working and studying. Moreover, though I say so myself, I was a big reader right from the start; I still have an old book, fourth-hand, one of the ones someone in the neighbourhood used to give me. By the age of six or seven I was already reading a lot. Everybody used to say, "This boy should go to school, he loves reading." As a matter of fact, when I started school, I could already read, write and do sums, because I had had a private teacher for two or three years. Next to the bar there lived a poor spinster, Castilian through and through, who had become a teacher during the Republic and who had lost her job after the war. One day, talking to the people at home, they agreed that she would come and give me classes every day, and in return she could have lunch with the family. Therefore, I can see myself at 5 or 6 in a room

separated from the rest with cava crates, which they made up to isolate me. It might sound vain, but she said a thousand times, “This boy is very strange because he never answers in Castilian.” She gave me the classes in Castilian and, I don’t know why, some crazy kind of traditionalism, fanaticism or self-esteem, but I always replied to her in Catalan. She didn’t say it nastily, but she was very Castilian and proud of it.

What school did you go to? I went to the local Catholic school, the Cor de Maria. My father wanted to pay the monthly fee, when in fact we could have saved it for me and my brother, because on 19th or 20th July 1936 a cousin of my father’s with whom he had very little contact turned up at the bar. He was a Claretian priest and he asked my father if he would hide him. My father hid him for three or four months. He spent all day shut up in a small room inside the bar with a sliding door. At night he came out to walk round the bar, and he carried me when I cried. It’s a story that I have told in the book *Misèria contra pobresa. Els fets de la Fatarella de gener de 1937* (Misery Versus Poverty. The Events at La Fatarella, January 1937) to show how complicated the world is: my father, saving a priest. When the

war was over, he didn’t want it to be considered in any way as meritorious: at the school they told him that as a token of thanks my brother and I could attend for free, but he wanted to pay. Not only that, but he used the fact of having saved the priest to save a brother of his who had been in the Control Patrols. This brother of father’s was a friend of the priest, but when the latter had gone to ask him to hide

him he threw him out, and it was then that the Claretian went in search of the other cousin, with whom he was not as close because of the age difference. My father said he would hide him. After the war, everyone told me as a child, the guy from the Control Patrols would be as good as dead. But he was saved because they said that he had saved this priest.

For a long time I didn’t really think much about this. Many years later I thought that Father Cortadellas was in fact a saint, because he went to one house and they threw him out, and someone else saved him, and after the war, instead of saying “fend for yourself,” he went to the police to say that this guy had saved him. People from the country sometimes do really strange things for the sake of the family!

In your case, the strange thing the family did for you was to let you go to school instead of getting you an apprenticeship, for example. I worked hard at school; I did well at the *batxillerat* (A-levels). My father always had the idea that he had been a poor man who hadn’t been able to go to school. He was from a small village in the country and when he was little, for a while he went to another village four or five kilometres away, where there was a school, and there he learnt to read and write. But he hadn’t been able to go to school after that, or have books; nor did my mother, but whereas she was not so bothered, for my father it was a kind of, perhaps not a trauma, but he did think that his children would go to school. I was born fifty metres from where I live, and in my

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neighbourhood, which is Camp d'en Grassot, a working-class district, no one went to school. Some went for a couple of years to private schools in apartments, and by the age of twelve they were already working. On the other hand, I went to school, and everyone knew that I would become a student.

Despite the poverty that you speak of, and the reasons you have given, your family was able to send you to university, at a time when very few people went to university. And you began studying Pharmacy. At the age of seventeen, when I finished school, in a very poor family in a poor neighbourhood, everyone said, "What, you're going to study History? You won't earn a living with that! You ought to do Pharmacy, you can make a living with a chemist's shop." Up to a fortnight before enrolling, I thought I would do History, but I signed up for Pharmacy. And I did it for four years.

“At the age of seventeen, when I finished school, in a very poor family in a poor neighbourhood, everyone said, ‘What, you’re going to study History?’”

Historical chance has affected me a lot. I did the first three years of Pharmacy, despite coming from a family that had never owned a book, but then the events of 1956 took place: at Madrid University the movement happened of the students and the young intellectuals close to the Minister of Education, Ruiz Jimenez; while not backing it, he let it take place and protests began to occur. Automatically it also happened in Barcelona and I found

myself in loads of meetings and discussions. From that moment on I stopped going to lectures, and for months and months, aged 20, I was a political activist, without knowing how to do it or what it was. We went to trade unions, dissident Falangistas, I don't know where we ended up, and there I met people who were also doing things on that scene; we were a small group of people who got everywhere.

It was then that you gave up Pharmacy and began Arts. I said, "What am I doing in Pharmacy if everyone I know, activists, protesters, who meet every day, are doing Arts?" And as I liked History, I changed to Arts. That was where the first core of the PSUC in the university was. One of them, Marcel Plans, had to go into exile in Romania in 1960, fleeing from the Francoist police. He spent many years there. When he came back after 15 years in exile, after the death of Franco, he said two things to me that I can still remember: when I asked him what things were like in Romania he said, "Well, perhaps the workers will have a revolution one day." And the other: "And what do you do?" "I teach at the university." "Ah, good. There, neither you nor your children would get into university, because they would consider you a dissident." It was really shocking. With this group we prepared the day of National Reconciliation (May 1958) that had been organised by the Spanish Communist Party. I remember five or six of us going to Marcel Plans' house, and with a cyclostyle, after typing the stencils, we ran off, and I'm not exaggerating, thousands of pamphlets; we wrote them, we printed them, we cut them out and we handed them out on the Day of National Reconciliation. Afterwards, we were summoned to a clandestine meeting in a remote house. We arrived there separately, and then the authority, Jordi Solé Tura, arrived –I'm very sorry he's dead, but that's how it is. He spent two hours telling us about the fantastic success that the day had been. To our surprise, he acted like an official, which we, out of boredom, finally accepted, without believing it: "OK, it went well (but it's been a complete disaster)."

Because of your militancy, you were arrested and expelled from university. Yes, one day when I was handing out leaflets, I was arrested. Five or six social police officers came to my house at eleven o'clock at night. But I performed so well that after a night of interrogation and roughing me up they let me go because they hadn't got anything out of me. I had a made-up story ready, memorised: every day, every hour, I knew what I had done, and I didn't make a mistake. Everything I told them was false; depending on how bad the beatings got, I had the order in which I would sing, always talking about non-existent people. When they asked me who had given me the leaflets, I made someone up; as there was no way of linking us, they could be hitting me all day but there would never be any mistakes in the description: he was the neighbourhood carpenter, who, poor guy, knew nothing about it. I was saved.

After National Reconciliation Day, the following year, 1959, we called the Political General Strike. On that occasion, I convinced Anna Sallés to help me with the leaflets. We went to her house –her parents were PSUC– we filled satchels with leaflets and we went to the football ground, the recently opened Camp Nou, and handed them out. The first political leaflets to be handed out at the Camp Nou and it was me with the help of Anna Sallés, who was really frightened as she was only 17. So we did a lot of things, until I was called up to do my military service, in 1962.

The camp saved you, however, from being arrested again. One of the regrets I have from my time there is that I couldn't keep the telegram I received, while at camp, when the arrests were made after the strike in Asturias, in 1962. They arrested a lot of people from here, among them Anna Sallés, Helena Valentí, and so on. The major said to me: "Termes Ardèvol, step forward! We have received a telegram!" Just as well that we were aware of what had happened, those of us who were doing the *mili* at that time spoke every day about what was going on in Barcelona. In fact, I heard really strong stuff from people saying, "If they send us down there, let's grab the guns and shoot the officers." I heard that in the lunch queue. And an Andalusian, saying every day, "I've got it all worked out. We go with the *cetmes* to camp such-and-such and we kill all the officers." At that time this might not have meant much, but quite a few were talking like that.

So the major calls me, opens the telegram and reads: "Anna, Helena, Irene entered the convent. Many others there. Signed, Ramon." Now I was for it! What a telegram! Ramon Garrabou, who was thoughtless, had sent it to me. But the major stayed calm and put the telegram in his pocket. For a split second I hesitated. Should I go and ask for it? But I thought that if I did, he might get suspicious, and it was better for him to forget about it, so I let it drop. Even though I would dearly love to have that telegram!

Let's return to the university, in Arts. From the academic point of view, what was the atmosphere like in the faculty in those years, where there were figures like Vicens Vives?

A very pleasant atmosphere, basically. There weren't many of us, virtually the same number of students as in the thirties. A very relaxed atmosphere, then. Absolutely kind lecturers, who talked to the students in the yard and the bar. I, who was doing History, had lengthy discussions with Antoni Vilanova, Gomà, Martí de Riquer, and others whose names I forget. Martí de Riquer took hold of me and, for half an hour, told me about the latest research into the picaresque novel. A fabulous atmosphere.

By the way, I was known as the "Soviet", because I always wore a proletarian jersey, with a stripe, no tie, but they said it in fun. The teaching we received may not have been very good quality, and there were some very poor lecturers, like Palomeque, who was a joke, but there were others who were good. Vicens did not have much to do with us, because we were too young and he lectured fourth- and fifth-year students, although I went to his seminars in first and second year and spoke to him; he had two young assistants, Giralt and Nadal.

There were only a few of us and you learnt things. It was of course not a very international atmosphere. Whereas now there are loads of foreign scholars, in those days there was no talk of foreign historians, or just the old Hispanic scholars like Marcel Bataillon or Jean Sarrailh. No one was talking about Pierre Vilaryet. Therefore, there were a few Frenchmen, very highly thought of, and the *Annales* and economic history were being introduced. In fact they talked more about economic history than the *Annales*. But this was rather the exception; all the other lecturers had their own manual, and no one talked much about foreign historians. The interest in foreign historians came a lot later.

They are the years when historiographically, but with an evident political intent, the nature, bourgeois or not, of Catalanism began to be discussed.

Pierre Vilar possibly came via the PSUC: when I was doing the *mili*, people told me about a French historian who was working on the Catalan national problem. Among my papers that have ended up in the Museum of the History of Catalonia there is the famous PSUC leaflet *El problema nacional català* (The Catalan National Problem) that was sent to us, typed, so that Fontana and I could discuss it. I can tell and assure you that it was an incredible cock-up. Pere Ardiaca had written it in Paris, with the help of Francesc Vicens and Solé Tura, with a totally weird bibliography: Vicens' *Industrials i Polítics* (Industrialists and Politicians), *Historia del nacionalismo catalán* (The History of Catalan Nationalism), by Maximiano García Venero – a Falangista, who had taken





advantage of his position to publish a series of books in the forties about the history of Catalanism, trade unions and Basque nationalism— and two or three more books like this. It was so naively written that their names kept appearing in the footnotes. The first thing we told them was to get rid of those notes.

When you begin your research, though, you lean towards studying the workers' movement, and in 1965 you publish your dissertation, about the First International in Spain.

It is the first book published during the Francoist dictatorship that speaks about the workers' movement, not as a bunch of murderers but as something positive. After that I worked on it continually, I extended it a lot and the thesis came from it.

What materials did you have available to study that history? There was one very important thing: for those of us who were interested in what, to simplify, you might call social history, Vicens' *Industrials i Polítics* is as important as Casimir Martí's book *Orígenes del anarquismo en Barcelona* (1959). That book... for a dozen or so people, Antoni Jutglar, Miquel Izard, Albert Balcells, myself, it was as if God had appeared before us. And basically what I do is continue it: he talks of the origins and I continue it.

There was nothing else about the workers' movement; in the library you found the odd booklet, like the one by Manuel Reventós, *Assaig sobre alguns episodis històrics dels moviments socials a Barcelona en el segle XIX* (Essay on some of the historical episodes of the social movements in 19th Barcelona, 1925), but there was virtually nothing else. My book was created from scratch, with a very clear idea of history written according to life itself. I was like those aristocrats who write the history of their family, and who have fun collecting papers: I was doing exactly the same thing! I'm not making this up now, I said exactly the same then: I was writing the story of your people, your people who do not exist, you are giving them a voice, you are bringing them here so we can see what they are.

And what were those anarchist workers like that you gave a voice to?

I believe that Marxism has been very doctrinaire and scholastic, but there have been extraordinary activists. The problem with communism is that it was a terrifying system, for me as bad as Nazism, yet on the other hand it had thousands of very honourable, disciplined and selfless activists, but very much part of an interpretative orthodoxy. The anarchists were something else: they were the crazies, the ones who appeared where you least expected them. There would be one who believed in human kindness and in emancipation through culture, and another, on the other hand, who was a crazy terrorist. In the book I have just written, you can see that terrorism is full of layabouts: people who've gone out of their minds. To start with, I tried, in the dissertation, to play down what already smelt like nihilism, violence: it seemed to me that they were

little sparks. But in 1970 I saw that this wasn't the case, that the existence of activists for whom the midwife of the new society was violence was part of the very body of the anarchist system.

You say that you have written this book of the history of the anarchist movement with fondness, but you are not condescending. Not at all! It's like my family, I treat them well, but I don't hide anything: on the contrary, at times I gleefully list in detail the crazy things they do. This book, philosophically or politically, will not be to everyone's liking. But, do you know what? Ever since I was a small child, people have said, "This boy loves arguing!" As a little boy in the neighbourhood, people said I was "contrary". I've been told this many times, and it's quite true. When I find white, I look for black, and when I find black, I try to turn it into blue, and then this contrariness comes out.

Within this contrariness, there is a text that I think is important in your life, which is a paper from 1974 about the problems of interpreting Catalanism. Well, deep down, to be honest, I was a pragmatist, a historian for whom history is written to be read; I've always said things like, you know, someone who has read 800 books on the Republic knows a lot more about it than someone who has only read 20. This is the truth, full stop. Therefore, with this pragmatism and reading a lot, I was encountering Solé Tura's Marxism. And it was the reaction against this reductionism that eventually led me to throw a sort of little bomb. They were, though, things that I had been thinking about since the day I started university and joined the PSUC. In the PSUC, at times there were people who said terrible things to you. There was one who said, "Listen, Pep, if the working class is Spanish-speaking, Catalan culture has to be Spanish-speaking." And I thought, "This guy is annihilating me as a people with a frivolous argument!" According to this, I, my parents, my grandparents and all the people of La Fatarella don't exist! It was then, thinking about it, rather spontaneously, perhaps not well thought out – it's not that Catalanism is proletarian, not exactly, but in everything it's far more proletarian than bourgeois. Catalanism is very varied: in it there is a synthesis of many things, and the lower you go, where there are more people and more things, things that I was seeing in the street continually, every day... and it was a bit like that, you know?

I see that class still plays a major part in your life story. As a boy at Cor de Maria, when we came out of school, we used to go round the streets before going home, and when we heard people speaking *pijo* (affected) Catalan, those who said "my papa", we used to hit them. I swear it, we hit them. We went after them, called them stupid and gave them a bit of a kicking. Quite often. We were the local neighbourhood monomaniacs, and anything that smelt of posh districts was odious and treacherous for us. If I had told my street pals that Catalanism was an upper-class thing, the immigrants' kids would have split their sides laughing! Because that was another thing! I lived among the children of the good immigration of the twenties; they spoke perfect Catalan, without exception! So much so that the last time I heard, in Barcelona, around 1960, the word *xarnego* (Castilian-speaking) as an insult, it turned out to be a *xarnego* saying it! That's the last time I heard it.

This text of yours from 1974 coincides, and perhaps not by chance, with you quitting the PSUC. No, it's pure coincidence. I quit the PSUC, to be honest, in the first place because it was too full of dogmatic people: and secondly, because after May 1968 something happened that I thought was not good, which is that society became more and more left-wing. I was in Paris in May 1968, and I had a great laugh, I was laughing like a madman! But what was this? I saw the students building barricades wearing rubber gloves! I, a kid from a poor district, told them that the day we have to build barricades with rubber gloves on, there'll be no revolution! And when I returned to Barcelona, I quarrelled with all the *progres* who worked with me at Planeta publishing house. The leftism that invaded the university was very strong, and in part it's understandable, because orthodoxy was no longer the thing, but although I wasn't at all orthodox I was really anti-left wing: I think I was one of the most anti-left wing people in Catalonia at the time. Which

also means that I really couldn't stand the *gauche divine*. Some days, when I used to go out in the evenings and get drunk, I would go to Bocaccio to see if I could find one of them and beat them up; I did it quite a few times, I really did, but every time I had the bad luck to get there too early, and I never found any Ricardito Bofills.

But in my leaving the PSUC the determining factor was that it was dominated by Sacristán. Manuel Sacristán, who was a very brilliant figure and probably a very honest and selfless person, was a fanatic. He defended the Catalan line out of obligation, because we convinced him, but all that stuff about Catalanism, Catalan culture, wasn't really what he believed, like the Catholics who sacrifice themselves even though they don't like it. And the first time I saw Sacristán I noticed that, and it really upset

me. The first time, still in the nineteen fifties, that I went with the PSUC group to his house, where they had a meeting every Sunday, I got the impression that they were a sanctimonious bunch.

What made you quit, though? I was going to meeting after meeting, and it was getting worse, and finally it was Andreu Nin that got me expelled. Because in 1974 I was already a revisionist about the Civil War, and I told them that we ought to acknowledge the huge mistake that we had made with the murder of Andreu Nin! I'm very pragmatic, and I told them that if we said it ourselves, it would look really good, because that way the PSUC would be piling the blame onto the Soviet KGB. But they wouldn't hear of it. So I said to Giulia Adinolfi, Sacristán's wife, "Giulia, why not?" She replied, "Because there's no resolution from the Central Committee acknowledging it." I was studying history. To tell the story of the Battle of the Ebro, did I have to wait for a resolution from the Central Committee? "Hey Giulia, I'm sorry but that means I can't study contemporary history then; I'll have to be a pre-historian." And she said, "Yes, you will." So at the next meeting I quit; I left taking Fontana with me, who at the moment of truth got scared and didn't want to follow me. Fontana thought like me, and Sacristán said yes, we ought to quit. But when we were at the door, Fontana spent five minutes talking to Sacristán, thinking it over, to my intense displeasure, as I'm a real fighter, a neighbourhood bruiser. And I said to Sacristán, "Tell Fontana what you think." And he said to him, "OK, Fontana, you can go as well." Just like that. And we left.

It was, of course, the sum of many things, but this was probably the worst of all. I'll say it again: the problem was that Sacristán was a fanatic. He was a martyr. An excellent person, but, of course, as a fanatic he was frightening. And his wife, with that "Yes, you will," she stabbed me in the back.

You've just mentioned that you were a revisionist about the Civil War. There is another speech by you, quite controversial, that took place at a commemoration of the fiftieth anniversary of the outbreak of the Civil War, at Barcelona University in October 1986. You said things like "Blacks, reds, striped or plain, from that defeat we've all got shit on our espadrilles. We've all got something to be ashamed of."

Do you know who that sentence is by? It's not mine, I copied it! When I read it, I loved it and copied it, because I like copying what's good. This sentence is extraordinary. And do you know who it's by? *Mossèn Ballarín*. "We've all got shit on our espadrilles." I found it on a loose sheet of paper, and I said, "It's mine now. You created it but I'm taking it." And I would give anything to have come up with it, but it was him and I can only acknowledge that.

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And you added: “We are all guilty. Only the dead are innocent.” More than anything, I wanted to question the idea of good and bad. But, of course, what did they say when I left? I left accompanied by Jordi Carbonell. He’s a very nice young chap, and he said, “Hey Pep, so who are the good guys and the bad guys?” And I thought, now I have to explain to him that it’s not a case of good guys and bad guys. There are sensible people and stupid people. Therefore, I’m on the side of the reds, but there are all sorts, and some things were done wrongly. The workmen in my neighbourhood used to say so. “It was us who lost the war!” Now, good and bad? You know, they’re so basic that they need to class everything according to the Catechism. The day I write my memoirs, they’ll be entitled *Neighbourhood Kid. Memories of a Free Spirit of History and Politics*, a title I’ve had in my head for forty years. And so, what do you want me to say? That guy in the FAI was a saint, and the other one in Unió Democràtica was a swine, and Franco was a bastard. Christ, that’s why I was against the dictatorship! I’m the only one to have been expelled from university twice. The first as a student and the second as a lecturer, after the *Caputxinada*! Some people were expelled as students, and some as lecturers, but I was thrown out as both. It must be for some reason! Because I know who the good guys and the bad guys are, but not like that.

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memory to act like those old Catholics, in the worst times, who thought that they were in possession of the truth and that their people were the good guys, and that has scared me. In other words, I know that something must be done about the historical memory, about the past and also about the struggle for democracy. But if I could have chosen the people –and I know that’s impossible– I might have done something about it. But if I have to meet the people who said that I ought to be a pre-historian, then I don’t want anything to do with it.

You see, things have been done well and things have been done badly, but you know that it’s all so complicated! If you will the case is anecdotic, but I’m terrified of the name of the murderer of the Badia brothers, Justo Bueno, appearing on a monument commemorating those who “gave their lives for the freedoms of Catalonia”. It’s an accident, I know, but it’s an accident that shows that the way of taking bends is dangerous.

Among your most recent books, there is perhaps one that you feel happiest with, given its family implications. It is the one you wrote about the events in La Fatarella in January 1937, as an example of the failure of agrarian collectivisation. Yes, that’s true, because we are getting back to history and life. This is a story that I have been told since I was a boy. In 1939, my parents, living in a wretchedly poor bar, with their little boy sitting on the floor, dressed in rags and tatters, wanted to send me to my mother’s village in summer. And my godfather, my maternal grandfather, said, “No don’t come, because in La Fatarella there are too many shells from

In recent years we have experienced the boom in what has been called the historical memory, about which you have been quite critical. Yes, out of fear of people. Out of fear that there are too many people who want to be too orthodox with the historical reality. The historical reality is saying that, yes, ERC is a party a thousand times better than the CEDA, but that said, it is true that Companys was wrong, and that that other one was a terrorist. I’m afraid of too many people using the scheme of the historical

the Battle of the Ebro that could explode.” And so I didn’t go to La Fatarella in the summer of 1939, but I did go in the summer of 1940, and from then on I went every year for twenty years. The whole summer, for months. And there I spoke to everyone, about anything, the almond or hazelnut harvest, the summer fête... but from time to time, suddenly, the Battle of the Ebro also popped up in the conversation: Pàndols, Cavalls, and the war. Therefore, I heard the story of the events at La Fatarella quite a few times every summer. What’s more, my uncles were directly mixed up in them, because they had been standing facing the wall, waiting to be shot. They must have been 18 or 19, one of them, and 21 or 22, the other. They were turned to face the wall, and waiting to be shot, and then someone turned up and said, “No, not these two.” And they were led out. They never told me who had saved them, they’re so reserved! But I worked it out: it was a cousin of theirs, a FAI member. Years later, I thought that those people must have come out of that experience crazy, because if they did that to me, after that I would be chasing butterflies. But they told it to you like they would tell you they had gone to Ascó to mill corn... Exactly the same: with indifference, or solidarity!

And the time came when I decided to look into it (I’d been thinking about it for 30 years), collecting oral testimonies and judicial documents, and I was very pleased to find the documents that the Republic itself produced, which is exceptional: the Republic judging events that take place during the war, with the people’s statements, many of them unable to read or write, and they say what things people have stolen from them: “the donkey, two sacks of almonds, a pocket watch that cost me 25 *duros*...” And then, upon seeing that those shot by the FAI, that is, the FAI’s victims, were people who only had a few sacks of almonds, I deduced that this was misery versus poverty. Moreover, in some places I saw that the story was very curious: in La Fatarella they kill 35 in one night, and no one knows about it. In Casas Viejas it was 7 or 8 dead, and it has generated a huge international bibliography. And here they kill 35, and only I know. I got heavily involved in the book, even in the introduction, saying that one of my mother’s cousins is a FAI member, that my mother’s brothers are about to be shot by the FAI, that my father hides a priest, that my father’s cousin is a hidden priest, and that my father’s brother is in the Control Patrols and doesn’t want to hide him. Here, who hasn’t been mixed up in something like this? It’s all very complicated!

And I was very happy to write the book. It’s very personal. They are my childhood summers when I played every day with the helmets and bayonets of different armies, and I played with gunpowder: I would open a bullet, scatter the powder making a pattern on the ground and set light to it...

We don’t have time to speak of a subject that has always concerned you, immigration to Catalonia, and about which you have also written. Well, I mentioned it when we were talking about the PSUC and the *mili*, and I realise that here there are a lot of immigrants who are not like the previous ones, who were assimilated, and therefore we will have a problem of what to do about them. I realised this when I went to the *mili*, and I amused myself counting the soldiers, those who were from one place and those from another, and in 1962 I was already saying that we had a problem here that perhaps we would sort out, for better or worse, but the country would have a serious problem. I knew the people from the previous wave of immigration, in the nineteen twenties, through serving them *carajillos* in the bar! I spoke to them every day, when they were still being called *els castellans*, because *xarnego* was an insult, but we said, “There’s a *castellà* here.” So immigration has always been an issue for me.

And, very briefly, how do you see the present situation in this respect? I see it as very varied. At times, joking, I say that Catalonia will be an original country because we’ll be able to study all the variants of everything, because there will be all sorts: there will be Catalans like the ones in Ciutadans, and next to them there will be an Argentinian who will be more Catalanist than Prat de la Riba... There will be a lot of variety. But I also feel that a moment will come when

immigration will stabilise, at least for a while, and that with this stabilisation there will be far greater integration than now. With all the variables and contrasts you like, which will be very great.

Next July it will be 75 years since the start of the Civil War, and you will also be 75. How do you see life?

Life is very varied: look, in the *mili* I was the only soldier with an education, and so they put me in the archives to sort out papers, in the cooperative to do sums... And there was also a time when they got me to teach, and I taught the son, who was very stupid, of the colonel of La Seu d'Urgell. From time to time the father told me to notify the company and he took me fishing, because I was someone you could talk to. While he fished for trout and barbel in the Segre, I was sitting peacefully on the ground, smoking, totally undisciplined, and we chatted. He spoke to me of the war. He told me two really good stories. The first: "You Catalans are incredible. I never saw one fire a shot. They arrived, and they were put in the kitchen, in telegraphs; they didn't know any languages and after two days they were French translators, but they never fired a shot!" And the other one: He was from Navarre, and as a result of the Azaña Bill, some Navarrese officers resigned, because they didn't want to serve the Republic and they retired. But when the war started they enlisted again in Franco's army. Then, the Navarrese officers got together and decided that, as this was a civil war, they would refuse to be promoted for war merits, because in a civil war there are no war merits. Once the war was over, he found out that everyone had passed over him on the promotion ladder! He was good person, and we spoke quite frankly of the disaster that the war had been for everyone||



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