

The poetry of troubles: Maragall's *Els tres cants de la guerra* (*Three songs of war*) and their translation¹

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Joan Maragall (1860-1911) committed to poetry, and ultimately to collective poetic memory, some of the most troubling and controversial events and issues of his day: from the bomb attack in Barcelona's Liceu Opera House (*Paternal*, 1893) and the collapse of Spanish colonialism overseas (*Els tres cants de la guerra*, 1896, 1898, 1899) to the fatal social upheaval that struck Barcelona during what would come to be known as the Setmana Tràgica and the sweeping repression that followed in its wake (*Oda nova a Barcelona*, 1909) and, shortly before his death, Maragall's spiritual struggle to reconcile worldly experience with the Christian dogma of everlasting life (*Cant espiritual*, 1909-1910).

In his close examination of Maragall's poetry, D. Sam Abrams remarks on Maragall's decision to poeticize disturbing and controversial matters. The purpose of modern literature, writes Abrams quoting W. H. Auden, is to "show the truth" to detoxify people from the notion that literature is like an alternative world to take refuge in' (Abrams 2010, 75; this and all subsequent translations from the Catalan are mine). Maragall's earnestness in widening the parameters of poetic discourse can be understood, moreover, as a practical application of his theoretical notion of the 'living word' (Maragall [1903] 1960, 663-668): all experiences and sensations, including those which may be unsettling or disturbing, are the proper matter of poetry.

The troubling events that unfolded with the collapse of Spanish colonialism in Cuba, Puerto Rico and the Philippines sparked concern and reflection that Maragall articulated both in numerous

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articles published in the Barcelona press and in the trilogy of three short poems topping off his second book of poetry, *Visions & Cants* (1900): *Els adéus* (1896), *Oda a Espanya* (1898) and *Cant del retorn* (1899), collectively titled *Els tres cants de la guerra*. The extent of the folly and cost in human lives to the colonial cause of Spanish political and military involvement has been noted by Glòria Casals.² Beyond the particular historical circumstance that gave rise to the poems, however, there lives on in Maragall's art a universal value as well, that is, a core on which shared human experience is imprinted and which is transferable to other peoples and times. As Abrams (2010, 209) has put it, the poems can be read on two levels: the concrete historical and particular, and the wider universal level. Analogously, Maragall remarks on how he discovered, while reading *The Persians* by Aeschylus, striking parallels between the denouement of the Greco-Persian Wars and the fall of Spanish colonialism in Cuba and the Philippines (Maragall [1904] 1960, 275; Casals 1998, 367-368; Abrams 2010, 210).

Delving still deeper into the complexity of the historical and social context in which the poems sprung to life, we find the tensions between the overlapping 'larger' and 'smaller' identities sewn into Spain's variegated national, linguistic, and cultural fabric. Writing poetry in his own peripheral linguistic community's language – Catalan – and penning his soul-searching analyses of the troubles of his day in both Catalan and Spanish (varying with publishing outlet or readership), Maragall emerged as a powerful voice, reacting always with a clear and strong commitment to conviviality and civic purpose. On Maragall's standing within the broader Spanish borders, the late Arthur Terry has written:

² [...] la participació catalana en les successives guerres de Cuba havia començat el 1868, quan la Diputació de Barcelona organitzà i equipà un batalló de voluntaris que va desembarcar a l'Havana el 1869. El resultat funest d'aquesta primera expedició (dels 3.600 soldats embarcats, el 1877 només en quedaven 369) fou premonitori dels resultats posteriors: el novembre de 1897 només sobrevivien 53.300 homes dels 200.000 enviats pel govern espanyol en els dos últims anys. (Casals 1998, 377 n. 7)

[Maragall] achieved a quite remarkable authority, both through his unremitting honesty as a journalist and a public figure, and through his correspondence and friendships with Castilian writers like Giner de los Ríos, Unamuno and Azorín. (Terry 2003, 81)

Hailed by Aragonese writer and former president of the Real Academia Española, Pedro Laín Entralgo, as the ‘primogenitor of the *Generación del 98*’ (Laín 1960, 26), Maragall is nevertheless aware that in choosing his native Catalan as vehicle for poetic expression, he may be perceived in some quarters as a divisive element. In a hegemonic mindset where European nation-states have gravitated toward monolingual institutions, the taking of second-tier or unofficial languages too seriously may be seen as an affront, or even a threat, to the official language of a sovereign state and its preferential linguistic community. Maragall makes it clear that his defense of linguistic pluralism goes hand-in-hand with intercultural conviviality:

Let us keep in mind that we are not rebels waving one flag against another flag [...] Our cause is not only that of our own nation, nor is it a stately dispute or family feud. It is a matter of a human ideal rooted in the divine love that so beautifully vitalizes the world. (Maragall [1903] 1960, 666-667)

It is Christian ethics –the notion of universal love– that comes into play here with the acceptance of linguistic and cultural plurality. Further, as a reflection of the diversity in nature itself, linguistic diversity gains legitimacy in the context of a Christian cosmology where the natural world is the product of Creation. To embrace diversity is to embrace the divine plan.

Els adéus (The Good-byes)

The juxtaposition of the wartime good-byes at the docks and that ‘first good-bye’ of Cain’s raises the ethical stakes of the poem through Christian allegory, ratcheting up the tension between martial duty and moral reflection. As Abrams points out in his keen analysis of the

poem, Maragall underscores the absurdity of sending innocent young men ‘to kill and be killed in order to fulfill the will of the real Cain of the poem’ – humanity’s tendency toward violence; and the fact that ‘ships full of Abels [who] are sent off to act as Cains’ will make their eventual return as Cains (recounted in the third poem, *Song of return*) all the more senseless and distressing (Abrams 2010, 213).

The verbal and visual signs of separation –the good-byes– occur several times in the poem, including the title; prefiguring, as Abrams notes (211), the forceful ending of the second poem, *Ode to Spain*. In the poem’s final image, however, with ‘the hands that moved in the air / to no avail, and that got no answer’, the sign is now separated from its meaning, reduced to a mere motion of the hands, unacknowledged, resulting in a dramatic climax that heightens the pathos of separation bereft of any emotional or spiritual solace –a separation, in effect, without good-byes.

Realizing the importance of this climactic gap at the end of the poem between the visual sign for good-bye –that is, *waving* or *moving the hands*– and its meaning in context –that is, *saying good-bye* – compelled me to revise an early version of my translation with a view to lexico-semantic precision in context, now revising to ‘hands that *moved*’ (instead of ‘hands that *waved*’) since ‘waved’ collocates too closely with ‘good-bye’, failing to drive the needed wedge here between gesturing and meaning. Here is the poem in the original Catalan followed by my translation:

Els adéus

Que senyals d’adéu han fet
mans esteses cap al mar,
vers els barcos que fugien
amb les cobertes massa carregades,
cap allà on les onades llüen
retorcent-se i bramant assoleiades!

Quants adéus des d’aquell adéu primer,
quan Caí, havent fet la mort,
menjà al vespre un bocí a l’endiablada,

el bastó al puny, cenyida la cintura,
voltat de plors de nins, i la muller,
que li deia amb lament:
«No vagis cap a Ponent!»
Mes ell, la cara adusta i ja fatal
girada envers la posta,
marxà, no fent cabal
de les mans que es movien enlaire
en va, sense resposta.

The Good-byes

Now those were good-byes, waving
hands reaching for the sea,
out to the ships pushing off,
with decks that were overfilled,
bound for glimmering sea-swells
twisting and wailing bright in the sun!

So many good-byes since that first good-bye,
when Cain, having given death,
ate little that evening, devilishly pressed,
gripping his staff and belt drawn tight,
circled by children's cries, and wife,
pleading:
'Don't go the road the sun takes!'
But he, grim-faced and resigned to his fate,
and turning to the sunken sun,
set out, striding past
the hands that moved in the air
to no avail, and that got no answer.

Shedding light on Maragall's lexical choices elsewhere in the poem, Abrams remarks on how the gerunds '*retorcent-se*' and '*bramant*' (line 6), in describing the sea-swells, convert them into an 'objective correlate of the war that awaits' across the seas (212); the

English reads ‘twisting and wailing’, and not, say, ‘churning and roaring’ since the latter, despite collocating well with ‘sea-swells’, would fail to evoke the anticipated correlate: the agony of dying men. Significantly, the verb *bramar* (‘wailing’) occurs once again in the concluding lines of the trilogy’s final poem, *Cant del retorn*: ‘i bramen llurs boscos al vent ponentí’, which, rendered as ‘and their forests wail in the west wind’, establishes an intertextual correspondence with the final lines of Longfellow’s *Evangeline*: ‘While from its rocky caverns the deep-voiced neighbouring ocean / Speaks, and in accents disconsolate answers the wail of the forest’ (Longfellow [1847] 1982, 111). The correspondence here between Maragall’s and Longfellow’s wailing forests reveals, crucially, a thematic common ground – the principle of cultural pluralism coupled with a poetic complicity with nature – which I have discussed elsewhere (Puppo 2010, 276-278). Such ‘translative intertextuality’, as we might call it, is a result of the translator of poetry seeking to re-create the form-content synthesis achieved in the original in a semantic, syntactic, rhetorical and rhythmic reshuffling that gives rise to new intratextual and intertextual meanings and correspondences in the translating literary system (278).

Regarding poetic form, Maragall’s frequent end rhyme has generally not been rendered by corresponding end rhyme in English. I have attempted to compensate for this loss by using some assonant rhyme at line ends (‘death’/‘pressed’ and ‘tight’/‘wife’), but mostly by internal assonant rhyme (‘takes’/‘grim-faced’/‘fate’ and ‘past’/‘hands’), combined with alliteration (as in ‘sunken sun’), and more poignantly, multiple alliteration (‘air’/‘avail’/‘answer’) to signal the poem’s dramatic climax: closing, as Abrams remarks, ‘with a sepulchral silence, a lack of response’ (Abrams 2010, 214).

Oda a Espanya (Ode to Spain)

Ricard Torrents has remarked how, in the climactic final line to the poem *Ode to Spain*, Maragall rejects ‘the fitting together of the Catalan cultural nation with that of Spain’ (Torrents 2011, 315). In this bomb-dropping anti-ode, Maragall ‘finds himself unable to write a

laudatory ode in the classic fashion' and so, faced with the unacceptable alternative of 'moral and public hypocrisy', he is 'obliged to tell the truth' (Abrams 2010, 215). In synthesis, this amounts to writing an apostrophic poem, addressing in 'a language that isn't Spanish' (line 2) a Spain which, paradoxically, is nowhere to be seen –all the while depicting the terrible failure of Spain personified as a mother tragically alienated from her children.

The paradox of Spain's absence, of course, is that the culturally and nationally variegated Spain of Maragall's convivial ideal, that is, the *real* Spain, has been supplanted by an aggressive monoculture afflicted with cultural and linguistic daltonism. Notice, nevertheless, how in the penultimate stanza Maragall urges Mother Spain to 'think of the life that thrives all around you' and 'smile at the sevenfold colors arching the clouds', that is, to embrace her multiple identity; but even as the poet holds out hope for reconciliation, in the final stanza Spain is no longer in sight. It is the Spain of reconciliation that is no longer present –as if the one who has broken the bond and gone away is not Mother Spain's children but Mother Spain herself. The choreography of the final farewell is one in which the poet and the peripheral culture he represents are standing in place– it is Spain that walks away.

Oda a Espanya

Escolta, Espanya, — la veu d'un fill
que et parla en llengua — no castellana:
parlo en la llengua — que m'ha donat
la terra aspra;
en 'questa llengua — pocs t'han parlat;
en l'altra, massa.

T'han parlat massa — dels seguntins
i dels qui per la pàtria moren;
les teves glòries — i els teus records,
records i glòries — només de morts:
has viscut trista.

Jo vull parlar-te — molt altrament.
Per què vessar la sang inútil?
Dins de les venes — vida és la sang,
vida pels d'ara — i pels que vindran;
vessada, és morta.

Massa pensaves — en ton honor
i massa poc en el teu viure:
tràgica duies — a mort els fills,
te satisfeties — d'honres mortals
i eren tes festes — els funerals,
oh trista Espana!

Jo he vist els barcos — marxar replens
dels fills que duies — a que morissin:
somrients marxaven — cap a l'atzar;
i tu cantaves — vora del mar
com una folla.

On són els barcos? — On són els fills?
Pregunta-ho al Ponent i a l'ona brava:
tot ho perderes, — no tens ningú.
Espanya, Espanya, — retorna en tu,
arrenca el plor de mare!

Salva't, oh!, salva't — de tant de mal;
que el plor et torni fecunda, alegre i viva;
pensa en la vida que tens entorn:
aixeca el front,
somriu als set colors que hi ha en els núvols.

On ets, Espanya? — No et veig enlloc.
No sents la meua veu atronadora?
No entens aquesta llengua — que et parla entre perills?
Has desaprès d'entendre an els teus fills?
Adéu, Espanya!

Ode to Spain

Hear me out, Spain, a son's voice
speaking a language that isn't Spanish:
I speak the language given me
by the rugged land;
few in such words have addressed you—
too many in others.

On and on they've gone about Saguntians
and those that died for *La Patria*,
and your glories and your memories,
memories and glories: only of death—
you live in sadness.

I want to talk to you differently.
Why shed blood so needlessly?
In the veins blood is life,
life for those now, and those to come;
spilled, it dies.

So much thought about your honor,
so little about your living:
tragic, you shipped your sons away to die,
you fed yourself on honors post-mortem,
and funerals were your festivals,
sad Spain.

I've seen your ships shoving off, filled
with sons you ferried to their deaths:
off they went, smiling, come what might,
while there along the shore you sang
like a madwoman.

Where are those ships? those sons?

Go ask the dropping sun and rolling waves—
you lost everything, have no one.
Pull yourself together, Spain:
let out the mother's cry!

Get out from under all this pain.
Your tears will turn you fertile, happy, alive;
think of the life that thrives all around you:
lift up your face,
and smile at the sevenfold colors arching the clouds.

Where are you, Spain? I can't see you anywhere.
Don't you hear my voice resounding?
Don't you grasp the speech I use at risk?
Have you unlearned your children's words?
Adéu, Espanya!

As Abrams notes, Spain 'has detached herself from the great cycle of life' and 'must recover her vitality' in order to 'save herself and save her children, her future' (Abrams 2010, 217). Years later, in his 1908 article *Visca Espanya!* Maragall would argue forcefully from a similar vitalistic framework for linguistic and cultural pluralism throughout Spain:

[Spain] must live in the liberty of its peoples; each free in itself, drawing, from its own soil, its own soul; and from its own soul its own government, so that together they may remake a living Spain, governing itself freely and of itself. This is how Spain must live. Long live Spain!
(Maragall [1908] 1960, 767)

Again, such intercultural reconciliation would mean Spain's coming to terms with and embracing her own 'nature', as Maragall would put it in an article sent, the year before his death, to José Ortega y Gasset (Maragall [1910] 1960, 770).

Regarding my English translation, the final line—in which the poet affirms the failure of reconciliation—proved to be the most provocative. The problem of making visible to non-Iberian readers the

barrier between preferential and peripheral linguistic communities within Spain is compounded by what Lawrence Venuti has described as ‘the violence of translating: the sheer loss of the multiple contexts in which the foreign work originated and which always inform the foreign reader’s experience of it’ (Venuti 2009, xvii-xviii). To even begin to render an appreciation of the intercultural subtext that informs the Catalan reader’s experience of the poem, linguistic transference in terms of lexico-semantic equivalence will not be enough. As Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak reminds us: ‘it is not bodies of meaning that are transferred in translation,’ but rather it is an *other* that is transferred (Spivak 1993, 179). Translation is more than simple communication (perhaps a rather devitalized notion) – it is encounter.

To encounter a cultural other –and more especially, as in this case, a cultural other struggling for intercultural recognition– we must attempt to step outside our own cultural safety zone. One way of doing this is to avail ourselves of what has been called a textual *exoticism* (Hervey, Higgins and Haywood 1995, 20-23), that is, the verbatim transfer of foreign words into the translated text. It should be noted here that this is a well-known feature of countless literary texts even in their original, untranslated forms: from Geoffrey Chaucer and William Shakespeare to Rudyard Kipling, Kate Chopin, T. S. Eliot, Alan Paton and Toni Morrison, writers have used Latinisms, Gallicisms, Italianisms, Indianisms, Afrikaanerisms, Bantuisms and many more to transport readers to new spheres of cultural encounter. Why should translation preclude the use of such an effective writing technique? In an earlier rendering of Maragall’s *Oda a Espanya*, translator Mary Ann Newman takes an important step in this direction, translating the final line: *Farewell, Espanya!*, which confronts English readers with the Catalan toponym, making for an unfamiliar rhetoricity that nudges them closer to encountering the other. I have simply taken this strategy a step further, serving up verbatim the other half of the hard-hitting final line as well: *Adéu, Espanya!* Where associative connotation with cultural identity is closely linked to denotative meanings, exoticisms abound in English-language circulation: titles of works (Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart’s *Così fan tutte*, Françoise Sagan’s *Bonjour Tristesse*), culture-specific notions (*glasnost* and *perestroika*) and expressions (*dulce farniente*, *c’est la*

vie), to name just a few. That said, ‘the reader of a translation’, as Venuti points out, ‘can never appreciate it with quite the same breadth and depth of reference’ as the foreign reader (Venuti 2009, xviii). Nevertheless, allowing readers verbatim access to foreignness (where this is pertinent and plausible) may help make the *other* a bit more than just a blip on domestic radar.

Cant del retorn (Song of return)

Elias Canetti, in *Crowds and power (Masse und Macht, 1960)*, discusses his notion of ‘national crowd symbols’ and examines the peculiarities of several nations (the English, Dutch, Germans, French, Swiss, Spaniards, Italians, and Jews) in connection with the particular national crowd symbol that he identifies as uniquely significant to each of them (Canetti [1960] 1973, 197-209). This he does in very broad strokes, ‘reducing things to their simplest and most general form and hence [...] saying very little about men as individuals’ (199). Nevertheless, Canetti’s historical and psychological analysis is a fascinating one, and his take on the specific nations he deals with is certainly compelling. Unfortunately, he does not mention the Catalans; but had he done so, there can be little doubt about what Canetti would have identified as the Catalan national crowd symbol: the language.³

The unifying force of the language, the struggle to preserve it, strengthen it, and even to sanctify it – all this comes through in Maragall’s seminal address titled *Elogi de la paraula (In praise of words)*, which he delivered at the Ateneu Barcelonès in 1903, and in which he expounds his theoretical notion of the ‘living word’ (Maragall [1903] 1960, 663-668). I shall attempt to compress the relevant idea here into the proverbial nutshell. In sum, Maragall’s notion of the living word must be understood on two levels. First, as a poet, he invites us to take a fresh look at the unique role of language with a view to revitalizing our receptivity to its empowering potential.

³ I owe this insight to writer and friend Michael Tregobov, who acquainted me with Canetti’s crowd symbols some years ago.

Second, as a poet who writes in Catalan, Maragall contributes to revitalizing the empowering potential of his own particular language in the context of a peripheral community's struggle for recognition.

It comes as no surprise, then, that after four stanzas describing the mournful homecoming from defeat abroad, what turns it all around in the last two stanzas –a shifting from dark to light that is hardwired into the poem– is the glimmer of hope that the language of the land lives on: 'say whether the words we'll use to bring / tears to its eyes are living, or have died.'

Cant del retorn

Tornem de batalles, — venim de la guerra,
i no portem armes, pendons ni clarins;
vençuts en la mar i vençuts en la terra,
som una desferra.
Duem per estela taurons i dofins.
Germans que en la platja plorant espereu,
ploreu, ploure!

Pel mar se us avança — la host malicenta
que branda amb el brand de la nau que la duu.
Adéu, oh tu, Amèrica, terra furienta!
Som dèbils per tu.
Germans que en la platja plorant espereu,
ploreu, ploure!

Venim tots de cara — al vent de la costa,
encara que ens mati per fred i per fort,
encara que restin en sense resposta
més d'un crit de mare quan entrem en port.
Germans que en la platja plorant espereu,
ploreu, ploure!

De tants com ne manquen duem la memòria
de lo que sofriren — de lo que hem sofert,
de la trista lluita sense fe ni glòria

d'un poble que es perd.
Germans que en la platja plorant espereu,
ploreu, ploreu!

Digueu-nos si encara la pàtria és prou forta
per oir les gestes — que li hem de contar;
digueu-nos, digueu-nos si és viva o si és morta
la llengua amb què l'haurem de fer plorar.

Si encara és ben viu el record d'altres gestes,
si encara les serres que ens han d'enfortir
s'aixequen serenes damunt les tempestes
i bramen llurs boscos al vent ponentí,
germans que en la platja plorant espereu,
no ploreu: rieu, canteu!

Song of return

We return from battle, home from war,
we bring no arms, no banners, no bugles;
defeated at sea, defeated on land,
we come back in shambles,
nothing but sharks and dolphins in tow.
Brothers and sisters, waiting and weeping on the shore,
let flow your tears.

Now steaming homeward, we haggard hosts
brandish only the glint of the ship that carries us.
Good-bye, Americas, wrathful lands!
To you we are weak.
Brothers and sisters, waiting and weeping on the shore,
let flow your tears.

We set our faces to the coastal wind,
though it blast and freeze us to death,
and though coming to dock, more than one

mother's call should raise no reply.
Brothers and sisters, waiting and weeping on the shore,
let flow your tears.

Of those now absent we bring the memory
of what they suffered, and what we've suffered,
and the sorry struggle, faithless and inglorious,
of a lost and losing people.
Brothers and sisters, waiting and weeping on the shore,
let flow your tears.

Say whether our country might still have the strength
to hear of the deeds we have to tell;
say whether the words we'll use to bring
tears to its eyes are living, or have died.

And if the memory of other deeds lives on,
if the marching peaks that make us strong
still rise serene above the storm
and their forests wail in the west wind,
then brothers and sisters, waiting and weeping on the shore,
dry your tears: let go a laugh and burst into song!

Again, the dramatic, optimistic upturn at the poem's end underscores the language as the key to sustaining the collective life of the peripheral linguistic community to which, and for which, the poet speaks –living words for a living people. Shoring up that people's collective life, in addition to the language, is the 'memory of other deeds' (final stanza) that, as Abrams points out, stands in stark contrast to 'Spain's memory in *Oda a Espanya*':

By means of its historical memory, Catalonia will reconnect with the great cycle of life, and understand that the lethal crisis of the moment will give way to a period of renaissance and empowerment. (Abrams 2010, 221)

Finally, alongside the unique and particular features of the human geography –a shared language and a shared history– the symbolic force of the natural geography is climactically foregrounded: ‘the marching peaks’ rising ‘serene above the storm’ and their ‘forests [that] wail in the west wind’ represent what Torrents (2003, 245) has pointed out as the ‘telluric’ or geographic element of the Catalan homeland. Among several mountains and mountain ranges that have been strikingly poeticized in Catalan literature for their historical, legendary, and symbolic significance, it is the Pyrenees, and most especially, Mount Canigó, that –thanks to the foundational epic poem *Canigó* (1886) by Maragall’s predecessor Jacint Verdaguer (1845-1902)– looms largest in the Catalan literary system. Inevitably, Maragall’s lines will ring true here for Catalan readers as they apprehend the intertextual correspondence with Verdaguer’s nation-building epic, even as the new poem renews and revitalizes a shared spirit struggling to its feet in the wake of crushing defeat.

Highlighting the concluding upturn is the poem’s very title: *Song of return*. Besides denoting the poem itself –the greater part of which is a song of sorrow– it also signals, more specifically, the poem’s final image –the song of joy to which the song of tears and sorrow has given way. Further, as the final poem not only of the trilogy but also of the entire book *Visions & Cants*, the poem’s concluding imperative ‘let go a laugh and burst into song!’ acquires enhanced discursive force as its context widens beyond the confines of the poem and even beyond the book, calling readers, as Abrams points out, to ‘take up again the great cycle of life’ (Abrams 2010, 223).

Where the importation of this poem into English is concerned, perhaps the most curious feature –as I pointed out earlier– is a thematic intertextual correspondence with Longfellow’s *Evangeline*. In both poems (and also in Verdaguer’s *Canigó*; see Puppo 2010, 276-278) cultures marked by waning recognition and absorption into more widely visible nation-state supra-cultures undergo revitalization and symbolic renewal. This thematic correspondence is heightened by a striking correspondence of imagery in the final lines of both poems – as also indicated earlier– where both Maragall’s and Longfellow’s lexical choices have informed my rendering of the Catalan verb

'bramar' into English as 'wail' in its occurrences in *Els adéus/The Good-byes* (line 6) and *Cant del retorn/Song of return* (line 33).

Conclusion

The question of how preferential and peripheral linguistic communities are to negotiate –or refuse to negotiate– conviviality; divergent views of historical memory competing for discursive and symbolic space; ideological tensions arising from Spain's variegated cultural fabric; all these crucial issues with which Maragall struggled more than a century ago remain, for the most part, unresolved to this day. Then, as now, at the heart of the matter –as Maragall so powerfully poeticized in his verse, and so forcefully articulated in his prose– lies the language. Maragall poignantly reminds Ortega of this:

Catalanism cannot disappear, so don't get your hopes up: it will have its ups and downs as it has in the past (it was held under for centuries and you see how it's sprung back) [...] always, always, always, I swear to you, this impulse will rise up again, this force, this living thing, acute, immortal: call it the Celto-Iberian spirit, the particular nature, the language, the Mediterranean, the Pyrenees, or the trace of the River Ebre –or the trace of God; erase it and it reappears, snuff it out and it sparks back to life, smother it and it will breathe again, change it and it will return to what it was, it will never, never, never die; it is God's trace, the particular nature, the spirit, the language. Do you understand? I tell you this in your language [...] but I think it in my own, and I merely translate. For centuries and centuries I have spoken to you in translation, and yet my language has not died. Here it is. It is as alive and well as Portuguese, just over there; alive and well as Spanish, right there on your lips; not on mine, but only in my pen – for now.

[...] Do you believe you are capable of changing our lips? You would have to tear them from us. Should we want to smother inside them the fundamental word we hold in common? We would end up mute, for no longer would we possess a soul. (Maragall [1910] 1961, 771)

As it turns out, Maragall did not overstate the importance of the language, nor the resilience of a peripheral people, in safeguarding and preserving their living word through nearly half a century of political, cultural and linguistic repression long after these words to Ortega.

More recently, Joan Ramon Resina has remarked how ‘the attacks on democratic restoration of Catalan can be understood only within the logic of domination’ (Resina 2008, 162). To his credit, Maragall, reflecting and reacting in the face of the logic of domination that beset the Barcelona of his day, sought to temper antagonisms by tapping the underlying sense of humanity common to all, reacting always with a strong and clear commitment to conviviality and civic purpose. Conveying this intercultural subtext to English readers, and Maragall’s exemplary role in it, must be part and parcel of importing his work.

‘Translation,’ writes George Steiner, ‘is the donation of being across space and time’ (Steiner [1982] 1996, 202). To carry across (*trans-latus*) what Maragall was, and is, in all his poetic majesty and serenity, might be a task akin to uplifting the mountains that ‘rise serene above the storm,’ and carrying them across to new lands where they might uplift new spirits.

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