



STUDIES IN HISPANIC AND LUSOPHONE CULTURES 16

Catalan Narrative 1875–2015

Edited by
Jordi Larios and Montserrat Lunati



LEGENDA

Modern Humanities Research Association

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CHAPTER 1



Autopsies of Everyday Life: From Josep Carner to Marta Rojals (and Joan Todó)

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For it is paradoxically the act of obliteration, the present absence of the former cafés which brings them so vividly to mind. Demolition and erasure bring with them a sudden appreciation of what is no longer there. (Graeme Gilloch 2004: 300)

In his essay *The Aesthetics of Disappearance*, Paul Virilio introduces the key concept of *picnolepsy*. Inspired by epilepsy — a neurological disorder marked by sudden recurrent episodes of sensory disturbance, loss of consciousness or convulsions — Virilio defines *picnolepsy* as the condition of brief lapses in time, momentary absences of consciousness or, as he puts it, fleeting instances of life escaping. *Picnolepsy* is produced by speed and is a characteristic of the pace at which we live our lives. As Virilio states, if epilepsy is ‘little death’, *picnolepsy* is ‘tiny death’. Our awareness of living encompasses an infinite number of little deaths, little accidents, little breaks, little cuts in our life, made of sounds, visual effects, and that which is remembered. It corresponds to a montage of temporalities, which are closely related to the technologies of organizing time (Virilio 2008: 48).

The picnolept ‘make[s] equivalents out of what [he] has seen and what he has not been able to see’ (Virilio 1991: 10). Virilio presents the example of the awkward child, bothered by the adults who are in a position of authority over him:

People want to persuade him of the existence of events that he has not seen, though they effectively happened in his presence; and as he can't be made to believe in them he's considered a half-wit and convicted of lies and dissimulation. Secretly bewildered and tormented by the demands of those near him, in order to find information he needs constantly to stretch the limits of his memory. When we place a bouquet under the eyes of the young picnoleptic and we ask him to draw it, he draws not only the bouquet but also the person who is supposed to have placed it in the vase, and even the field of flowers where it was possibly gathered. (1991: 10)

Referring to the kind of absence that occurs not only during particular states such as REM sleep but indeed in our general experience of space-time relations as a series of fragmented frames, the idea of *picnolepsy* lies behind Virilio's assertion that 'architecture is just a movie' (1991: 65), and as an experience can be likened to that of oblivion caused by disappearance. Even though he thinks of *picnolepsy* in terms of contemporary society, the concept can also be usefully applied to the problem of space disappearance and transformation. As Walter Benjamin wrote, 'articulating the past historically does not mean recognizing it "the way it really was". It means appropriating a memory as it flashes up at a moment of danger' (2003: 391). The present essay brings the idea of *picnolepsy* to bear on three explorations of the everyday, by Josep Carner, Marta Rojals and Joan Todó, paying special attention to matters of disappearance, and particularly to what we might call the invisible traditions recorded in literary texts of the early twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

* * * * *

The Jaussely Plan (1907) and the Reforma (1908, later the Via Laietana) were two important urban projects that transformed Barcelona in significant ways at the beginning of the twentieth century. Principally intended to create a direct link between the new neighbourhood of Eixample and the city's harbour, they led to the destruction of 2199 homes and many medieval palaces, and affected 10,000 people. Among the buildings demolished, particularly noteworthy were the palaces of the Marquis of Monistrol, the palace of the Marquis of Sentmenat (from which Jeroni Martorell saved a window which he used to restore the Casa dels Canonges), as well as the convents of Sant Sebastià and Sant Joan de Jerusalem, where Pau Claris's grave was located. Some buildings were saved and some were relocated to (or, I should say, reappeared in) the so-called Barri Gòtic [Gothic Quarter].¹ Josep Pijoan recounted the failed effort to build a huge catalogue that would record this important and now-disappeared part of Barcelona's past:

No sé si fins volíem prendre l'índex antropomètric als aborígens barcelonins, ni si volíem conservar llur vocabulari de recargolats renecs, però sí recordo que comptàvem amb En Josep Carner, qui era aleshores *disponible* i ningú millor que ell per immortalitzar el perfum de les alcoves amb calaixeres, escaparates i relíquies i quadros de canemàs dels barcelonins del segle passat, amb llurs costums, mitologia, tradicions, tabús, creències d'ultratomba, fórmules màgiques, confraries, oracions, balls, etcètera.

[I do not know if we even wanted to measure the anthropometric index to Barcelona's aborigines, or if we wanted to keep their expletive vocabulary, but I do remember that we were counting on Josep Carner, who was the best available to immortalize the perfume of the alcoves with drawers, and the display cabinets and relics and the canvas paintings of Barcelona citizens in the last century, with their customs, mythology, traditions, taboos, belief in afterlife, magic formulas, guilds, prayers, dances, etcetera.] (Pijoan 1927: 22)²

But Enric Prat de la Riba, the then-president of the Catalan Mancomunitat, decided to forget about that project, and the 'records etnogràfics de la gran ciutat s'han dispersat als quatre vents, sense possibles recuperacions' [ethnographic

memories of the great city were scattered to the four winds, with no possible recovery] (Pijoan 1927: 23). On the other hand, Pijoan also recorded the reaction to this process of destructive renewal of Joan Maragall, who had no fond memories of the disappeared neighbourhood where he grew up, exasperated as he was by the stench of the sewers.

Clearly, reactions to this disappearance of an entire neighbourhood ranged widely, from the totally elegiac to, in Maragall's case, the plainly indifferent. In contrast to Maragall's cavalier attitude is that of Josep Carner, as portrayed by Pijoan, who undertook the ethnographic task of cataloguing the sensory details of the lost neighbourhood. This was indeed the kind of thing at which Carner excelled in poetry collections such as *Auques i ventalls* [Aucas and Fans] (1914), or in his many contributions to the Barcelona press that were compiled in volumes such as *Les planetes del verdum* [The Predictions of the Bird] (1918) or *Les bonhomies* [Positive Attitudes] (1925). Josep Pla believed that Carner was a 'considerable escriptor en prosa, cosa natural atesa la gran força expressiva de la seva poesia' [an excellent prose writer, understandably, given the great expressive power of his poetry] (Pla 1969: 278). Carles Riba claimed that one cannot read Carner's prose without thinking about his poetry (Riba 1967: 95). Estimates of Carner's achievement vary: Maurici Serrahima held the view that whatever worthwhile comments, jokes and observations might be incorporated in Carner's acute and often funny texts, the author was in the end successful in neither narrative nor essay, and that the topics he dealt with were always topics of general conversation (Serrahima 1968: 818). Alan Yates was unabashedly puzzled when he had to describe Carner's articles: 'La dificultat d'assignar-los una denominació exacta ("narracions curtes", "articles" — per qualificar-los d'alguna manera —) indica un dels trets peculiaríssims de la prosa carneriana' [The difficulty of assigning them an accurate label ('short stories', 'articles', to describe them somehow) indicates the peculiar characteristics of Josep Carner's prose] (Yates 1975: 123–24). Joan Fuster, on the other hand, thought that Carner's articles had considerable literary value: 'Transferits al llibre, ofereixen una unitat i una consistència que semblen premeditades i d'una peça' [Collated in book form, they exhibit a unity and consistency that seem premeditated and well thought-out] (Fuster 1964: 13). In the end, it was Fuster who unlocked the secret of Carner's prose, emphasizing precisely its ability to document a disappeared past. Fuster pointed out that Carner was writing from Italy, remembering a Catalan society of the 1920s that was fast fading away and populated by characters that were anachronisms in the modern world, and concluded:

Avui, que tot això queda a penes diluït en l'enyorança dels ancians supervivents, nosaltres comencem a trobar-hi una nova curiositat, com en un àlbum de família. Ens hi sedueix la imatge d'una societat i d'una topografia que han canviat, o que fins i tot han desaparegut per sempre més, i que tanmateix conserven sobre el paper, embalsamades, una entranyable iridescència sentimental. I d'alguna manera *Les bonhomies* són també un document històric.

[Today, when all this remains barely diluted in the nostalgia of the elderly survivors, we begin to find a new curiosity, as you might in a family album. We are seduced by the image of a society and a topography that have changed or

even disappeared forever more, and yet retain on paper, embalmed, a charming sentimental iridescence. And somehow *Les bonhomies* is also a historical document.] (Fuster 1964: 15)

In one article from *Les bonhomies*, 'Habitants de la nit' [People of the Night], Carner portrays with vivid imagination a series of human beings as they move through an urban landscape at night:

Un celibatari misàntrop, que surt a passejar el seu gos. — Un home estrany, de cara lluent, que us demana caritat en francès (¿qui ha demanat mai, de dia, caritat en francès?), aquell home necessita que sigui de nit i *que hi hagi una certa solitud*. — Un vidu que ha passat la cinquantena i s'arriba fins a Canaletes: havia tingut ideals i emocions, i avui no li resta sinó un culte meticulós de la higiene: és per higiene que dóna un miler de passes abans de ficar-se al llit, però com que l'ambient dels vidus és la paradoxa, surt a dar el seu passeig salutífer a l'hora que les porteres piquen les catifes de les escales. — Dos vellets suaus, marit i muller, que ixen cada nit una mica tard a sentir música: quan fa calor s'asseuen prop d'un teatre de sarsuela o d'opereta i quan fa fred van a un cafè on hi hagi pianista i es permeten el luxe de dues granadines. — El senyor que ha sopat a casa d'uns amics: porta una flor al trauc i fuma un *Caruncho*; se sent encarcerat, entresuat i magnífic. — El marit que s'ha barallat amb la dona: heu-vos-el aquí amb el capell mal recolzat damunt la testa, les mans crispades: hom reconstitueix l'escena de la revolada amb què ha tancat la porta del pis per aquest senzill detall: *s'ha oblidat de posar-se la corbata*. Encara no se sap si va a un music-hall, a tirar-se a mar o a esperar el primer tren per la línia de Vilafranca.

[A celibate misanthrope, who goes out to walk his dog. — A strange man, with a shiny face, who is begging in French (who has ever begged during the day, in French?), it has to be at night and *there needs to be a certain solitude*. An over-the-hill widower walks to Canaletes: in the past he had ideals and emotions, and today he only has a meticulous worship of hygiene: it is because of hygiene that he walks a thousand steps before going to bed, but since widowers live in paradox, he goes out to perform his constitutional when the doorwomen clean the stairs' carpets. — A gentle old couple, husband and wife, who go out a little late every night to listen to music: when it's hot they sit near a zarzuela or operetta theatre and when it's cold they go to a café where there is a pianist and they allow themselves the luxury of drinking two grenadines. — The gentleman who has dined at some friends' house: he carries a flower on his jacket and smokes a *Caruncho*; he feels stiff, sweaty and magnificent. — The husband who has had an argument with his wife: here he is with an ill-fitting hat, his hands twitching: it is possible to reconstruct the scene of the slam with which he closed the door of the apartment because of one simple detail: *he has forgotten to put on his tie*. He still does not know if he is going to a music-hall, to jump into the sea or to wait for the first Vilafranca-line train.] (Carner 1981: 148)

What unites these characters is that all of them are out of place: they belong to a world that is disappearing. They include a misanthropic bachelor; a beggar who speaks in French; a widower obsessed with hygiene; an old couple who, after listening to a concert of popular music, indulge in a soft drink; a man with a flower on his jacket who smokes a cheap cigar; a husband without a tie who has

just quarrelled with his wife and is hesitant in the middle of the street, not knowing what to do or where to go next. Carner portrays a human landscape of vices and attitudes that belong to the *genteta* [the contemptibles]. Gabriel Ferrater defended Carner against those who said that he was an 'estilitzador de manies de genteta' [an analyst of *genteta* idiosyncrasies] (Ferrater 1991: 7). But in *Les bonhomies* we encounter instances of the *genteta* that Carner liked to criticize in many of his poems as well. In yet another example, he puts together a catalogue of bad taste that is also a record of how Barcelona apartments were decorated at the time. In 'Les coses lletges' [Ugly things], he writes:

Un nombre extraordinari de cases de la ciutat seran inundades, un altre cop, de les lletjors industrials: no li ve d'un pam a la dama que no ha conegut mai, en el seu vestit almenys, l'harmonia de la color, ni al seu marit, que, abandonant l'actuació civil a la seva dona, atorgant-li el monopoli, es dedica a la 'torre', que ha poblat de mil detalls 'rústecs'. Però els dolços infants que pugen en els grans caixons apel·lats 'pisos barcelonins', esdevenen una mica més tristos, amb el cor una mica més nuat. Quan s'és infant, i el col·legi, la presumpció naixent i altres malastres no ens han començat de viciar, la lletjor ens causa una tristesa que, naturalment, no podem referir a causes estètiques, però que ens emmetzina les hores. Un pastoret de color de rosa que aguanta una bombeta elèctrica, una tricromia amb una escena andalusa qualsevol, un gosset de guix per a clavar-hi l'escuradents, limiten cada dia, amb llur banalitat, com unes petites ídoles malèfiques, la imaginació, que és el do dels infants i de llurs padrines les fades. Creix llavors, a poc a poc, en els dolços infants, una cosa lletja i irresistible, com els 'desigs' de les dames en certs moments interessants de llur vida: una golafreria de coses que dringuen fals, que lluen fals, que encisen un dia la mirada grollera, i l'endemà degoten fàstic i desesperació. És el Mal Gust, una cosa que esgarrija més que no el grinyol de l'esmolet.

[An extraordinary number of houses in the city will be flooded, once again, by industrial ugliness: it does not matter a jot to the lady who, at least judging by the way she dresses, has never known which colour goes with which, nor to her husband, who, leaving things to his wife, devotes himself to decorating their 'villa' in a completely rustic fashion. But the sweet children that are brought up in those big boxes called 'Barcelona apartments' become somewhat sadder, and their hearts sink. When we are young and still unaffected by school, growing conceit and other disasters, ugliness causes a sadness that, of course, we cannot relate to aesthetic causes, but that poisons our days. A pink little shepherd who holds an electric bulb, a trichrome with an Andalusian scene, a plaster dog where one can leave used toothpicks, set limits every day, with their banality, like little evil idols, on the imagination, which is the gift of children and their fairy godmothers. And so, little by little, in those sweet children, an ugly and irresistible thing grows, like ladies' 'desires' at certain interesting moments in their lives: a gluttony for things that ring untrue and seem fake, that attract rude looks, and the next day drip with revulsion and despair. It's Bad Taste, something that makes your skin crawl more than a knife-grinder's screech.] (1981: 67-68)

Carner here itemizes the most horrifying objects one might find in any Catalan apartment, and abhors their effects during the early stages of life. He also establishes

a catalogue of what Pijoan calls 'ethnographic memories of the big city' before they disappear without anyone having the chance to recuperate them, and the list is his method for doing so. Such a rhetorical device — enumeration — can be understood as an act of looking around to survey and record the wide variety of actions and people that populate the landscape of the everyday. Thinking about a Louvre exhibition, Umberto Eco makes some useful observations in this regard. As he points out, artists have resorted to a range of remarkable solutions in the attempt to represent the list, and he goes on to theorize them. As a good cataloguer, Eco relies on subdivisions. He considers the verbal (from Homer to Thomas Pynchon) and the visual (from a fifth-century Greek shield to Christian Boltanski installations), and concludes that the two major types of list are those that correspond to the 'poetics of everything included' and those expressing the 'poetics of the etcetera' (Eco 2009: 7). The first aims for comprehensiveness and closure, albeit temporary: the old phone book is at once a list of phone numbers and a comprehensive catalogue of the inhabitants of a city. The second exploits the human mind's capacity for association, as is the case in Carner's enumerations. Carner is also playing a well-known children's game: *Un, dos, tres, pica paret* [a variation of hide-and-seek] in which a player/observer facing the wall tries to catch the other players when they move, which corresponds to *picnolepsy* as defined by Virilio.

Sometimes Carner performs an autopsy of lost reality by enumerating what has disappeared. At the beginning of 'Un amic íntim' [A Close Friend], for example, he provides an elaborate theory of disappearances in our everyday landscape:

L'home és fet així: gaudeix sense gratitud, i àdhuc sense parar-hi ment, la quieta carícia immòbil de les coses que el volten, però el canvi, tanmateix, l'adoleix una mica. Cada dia travessem davant d'un arbre sense fer cabal de tota la seva successió de miracles, però el dia que hom l'abat, sentim, per un segon, una mena d'orfenesa. Tenim el costum de passar vora un cafè tot il·luminat, multiplicat pels miralls, atordit de converses; i fins el dia que el substitueix un Banc — paretat, com aquell qui diu, a encesa de llums — no ens adonem que el cafè ens feia un moment de companyia, amb el seu esclat heterogeni i vivent; i sentim, de cop i volta, una mica de solitud. Per a adonar-nos d'una gràcia necessitem en general adoptar un previ determini pedantesc: 'Avui esmerçaré una estona per dar un tomb inútil i sentimental'. Les coses, per a impressionar-nos si us plau per força, no tenen més remei que, amb llur desaparició, emportar-se'n una mica de la nostra vida. Tots nosaltres, amb alguna recança, amoixem reminiscències de coses que no veiérem sinó d'esma i que ja no hi són: conservem, talment, la flor emmusteïda que ens donà una noia de la qual no hem sabut ni sabrem mai la color dels ulls. Així, abans de morir, ja ens anem projectant gradualment en l'ombra.

[People are like this: they enjoy without any gratitude, and even without thinking about it, the imperceptible caress of things around them, and yet any change causes them a little bit of pain. Every day we walk by a tree without realizing its string of miracles, but on the day it is cut, we feel for a second a kind of orphanhood. We are in the habit of walking past a café, with plenty of mirrors, filled with conversations; and until the day a Bank replaces it — fenced, one could say, in full daylight — we do not realize that the café, with

its heterogeneous and living activity, was good company; and we suddenly feel a little loneliness. To realize the elegance of something, we generally need to adopt a pedantic attitude: 'Today I will be doing some useless and sentimental walking'. Things, if they are to impress us, should take away a little of our life as they disappear. All of us, with some remorse, love reminiscences of things that we hardly saw but that are not there anymore: we keep, perhaps, a withered flower given to us by a girl, the colour of whose eyes we do not know and will never know. So, before dying, we are gradually entering the shadow.] (Carner 1981: 165)

Things that surround us cannot but take with them a little bit of our life when they disappear, and these sometimes insignificant, hardly noticed disappearances Carner emphatically links to death. Elsewhere in the text, he exhibits his exceptional ability to perceive and give a sense of invisible changes, for instance ending the article with an elegy for the decidedly quotidian object of the umbrella:

No us convido pas a les reminiscències literàries del paraigua: el paraigua de l'oncle rural de *vaudeville*, el paraigua panxa enlaire de l'estudiant i la modisteta, el paraigua nerviós i prim de la jove dama, el tendal solidíssim del capellà, el paraigua diminut de la *divette* amb el qual hom assenyala un espectador i amaga la fingida escena del bes, el paraigua oficial del senyor de copa alta que va a una cerimònia a l'aire lliure (dos estris a la vegada! — pensa el bon senyor — una desgràcia mai no ve sola!), el paraigua deformat i bruixenc de la castanyera, el paraigua tort del pagès, el paraigua perforat del fumador, el paraigua del poruc que obrint-lo i tancant-lo espanta els gossos, el paraigua del ric celibatari egoista i prudent, arborat per bé que no hi hagi sinó un cap de núvol a l'horitzó, contrapart elegant — seda, malaca i or — del baròmetre que hi ha en una repiseta, ben acuradament embeinat quan el somriure del cel és equívoc, mai no deixat a ningú, i només temerós d'haver de caure, després d'acompanyar cada vegada amb més freqüència el seu encirat senyor als enterraments, a les mans d'algun nebot inexpert.

[I do not invite you to the literary reminiscences about the umbrella: the vaudevillesque umbrella of a rural uncle, the upside-down umbrella of a student walking with a young dressmaker, the skinny and nervous umbrella of a young lady, the solid tent of a priest, the small umbrella of a *divette* with which she points to a spectator and fakes a kiss behind it, the business-like umbrella of a gentleman with his high hat on who attends an open air event (two objects at the same time! — he muses to himself — misery loves company!), the deformed and witchy umbrella of the chestnut-roasting lady, the peasant's twisted umbrella, the smoker's holed umbrella, the coward's umbrella that he opens and closes to scare dogs away, the rich bachelor's umbrella, selfish and pedantic, opened up even when there is no trace of an upcoming storm, stylish counterpoint — silk, Malacca cane and gold — to the barometer that sits at home on a little shelf, always at hand when a threatening sky sticks out, never lent to anybody, and in danger of becoming the property, after accompanying its uptight owner to increasingly frequent funerals, of an amateurish nephew.] (1981: 166)

The passage's keen sense of the relations between umbrellas and the particularities of their owners is remarkable. As Carner concludes, he turns towards the reader:

‘No: us convido a considerar com el paraigua ha estat íntimament unit a l’evolució de la vostra personalitat’ [No: I invite you to consider an umbrella as something closely linked to the development of your own personality] (1981: 166).

All these examples might make us think of the rapidity with which contemporary urban space evolves. Fast changes are characteristic of the urban environment and can instigate the unravelling of memory, affecting everyday life and changing imperceptibly how we relate to our surroundings: as Zoë Thompson puts it, ‘the aesthetics of disappearance is intrinsically linked to the aesthetics of change as urban spaces evolve’ (2015: 162). According to Thompson, Siegfried Kracauer stressed in his essay ‘Street without Memory’ (1932) that ‘one’s memories can be shocked into being, as familiar landmarks disappear, or are erased entirely by the destruction of the space in which they stood. For Kracauer, such erasure was the installation of an eternal now, a constant presentness’ (Thompson 2015: 162). Thompson suggests that this is reminiscent of Baudrillard’s fear that ‘memory itself will be eradicated by the imposition of simulated versions of the past, synthetic histories engendered by a process of “museification” that produces an officially sanctioned form of cultural memory’ (Thompson 2015: 162). As Baudrillard writes in a passage that resonates with Virilio’s idea of *picnolepsy*: ‘It is no longer buildings which burn or cities which are laid waste; it is the radio relays of our memories you can hear crackling’ (cited in Thompson 2015: 162). Carner’s itemizations of unravelling hidden spaces, his records of the physical and emotional network of which they are part, create a map of the city and of its inhabitants in the past, exploring space as a mute witness to changes in everyday life, and my contention is that *picnolepsy* offers an instructive key to this aspect of his work.

Transformation of urban space has long been a preoccupation for writers and artists alike. Christoph Asendorf claims that ‘circulation finds its concrete expression in *démolitions*’ (1993: 69). In Charles Baudelaire’s poem ‘Le Cygne’ [The Swan], the poet witnesses the disappearance of a world, an entire Parisian neighbourhood swallowed up by Haussmann’s reforms:

[...]
 Le vieux Paris n’est plus (la forme d’une ville
 Change plus vite, hélas! que le cœur d’un mortel);
 Je ne vois qu’en esprit tout ce camp de baraques,
 Ces tas de chapiteaux ébauchés et de fûts,
 Les herbes, les gros blocs verdis par l’eau des flaques,
 Et, brillant aux carreaux, le bric-à-brac confus.

[...]
 Paris change! mais rien dans ma mélancolie
 N’a bougé! Palais neufs, échafaudages, blocs,
 Vieux faubourgs, tout pour moi devient allégorie
 Et mes chers souvenirs sont plus lourds que des rocs.

(Baudelaire 2014 : 226)

[[...]
 The old Paris is gone (the form a city takes
 More quickly shifts, alas, than does the mortal heart).

I picture in my head the busy camp of huts,
 And heaps of rough-hewn columns, capitals and shafts,
 The grass, the giant blocks made green by puddle-stain,
 Reflected in the glaze, the jumbled bric-à-brac.

[...]
 Paris may change, but in my melancholy mood
 Nothing has budged! New palaces, blocks, scaffoldings,
 Old neighbourhoods, are allegorical for me,
 And my dear memories are heavier than stone.]

(Baudelaire 1993: 174–75)

The poet voices how the past, the ‘spirit’ of the place, where now he finds new bridges and boulevards, lingers on in his mind.³ The city of Modernity is used as a kind of clock or meter that measures variations accurately. Disappearances and transformations in the cityscape are read as indicators of the transience of life. The simile used to figure his memories of the city — stone — is also noteworthy.

Many of Gaziol’s works elegize past times and missing spaces in a similar way. In his memoir *Tots els camins duen a Roma* [All Roads Lead to Rome] (1958), he provides a rich and eloquent chronicle of Barcelona at the turn of the twentieth century. He remembers that it was a city

molt comprimida, força allunyada encara de Montjuïc i, sobretot, de Collserola; s'alçava enmig de l'ample aiguamoll de la maresma, tota voltada d'un bosc de xemeneies. Aquest bosc fabril — del qual només queden ara restes, que aviat desapareixeran del tot — era llavors un espectacle imponent, la materialització mateixa de l'esperit de la centúria extraordinària que havia creat la màquina de vapor, la indústria moderna, la democràcia, el liberalisme i la grandesa de la capital de Catalunya. Contemplada de lluny estant i des d'una certa alçària, la ciutat, guarnida amb el seu cenyidor de xemeneies que anaven traient glopades de fum — blanques, negres, grises i groguenques —, semblava un pastís d'aniversari, fet de pinyó i ametlla, on havien clavat tantes candeles enceses com dies feiners té l'any.

[compact, still far from Montjuïc and above all from Collserola, it stood in the middle of the wide wetland of the marsh, surrounded by a forest of chimneys. This factory forest, of which nowadays very little remains and what does remain will soon disappear completely, was then an imposing spectacle, the very materialization of the century's extraordinary spirit that had created the steam engine, modern industry, democracy, Liberalism and the greatness of Catalonia's capital city. Looked at from afar and from a certain height, the city, decorated with its belt of chimneys that were belching smoke — whitewashed, black, grey and yellowish — looked like a birthday cake, made of pine nuts and almonds, into which had been stuck as many candles as there are working days in a year.] (1981: 1, 30)

It was a city with no

tramvies elèctrics, automòbils ni tampoc bicicletes, perquè encara no era inventat el pneumàtic. Només circulaven carruatges particulars, generalment luxosos, o cotxes públics, també anomenats 'pesseters', perquè des que arrencava el cavall fins que el passatger arribava a lloc, mentre pel camí no fes parada, el trajecte valia una *pesseta*; tartanes, molts carros, uns tramvies rudimentaris, també de tracció exclusivament animal, i uns ripperts de dues empreses en competència: *La Nueva Condal* i *La Catalana*. Tots els vehicles eren tirats per cavalls, eugues, mules o rucs.

[electric trams, cars nor bicycles, because the tyre was not yet invented. Only private carriages were in circulation, usually luxurious, or public cars, also called *pesseters*, because from the moment the horse started walking to the passenger's arrival at his destination, provided it did not stop anywhere, the journey cost a *pesseta*; traps, many carts, rudimentary trams, also exclusively drawn by animals, and *ripperts* of two rival companies: *La Nueva Condal* and *La Catalana*. All the vehicles were drawn by horses, mares, mules or donkeys.] (1981: 1, 32)

The picture of Barcelona evoked in Gaziél's memoir is very much of a piece with the one that emerges from the newspaper articles he published in *La Vanguardia*. Assiduously avoiding the merely picturesque or superficial detail, there he manages to capture the poetry of living in the city even as he raises the questions and talks about the frustrations of the educated citizen.

In a memorable article entitled 'Pequeña elegía urbana' [Little Urban Elegy], Gaziél evokes the transformation of mechanical life in the city through an account of his forty-year personal relationship with the Sarrià train line. He writes as the tunnel under Balmes Street is to be inaugurated, with the result that the train will move underground and cease to travel along the surface of the city. The article ends thus:

¿Es un sueño? No; es algo parecido: cuarenta años de vida. [...] Al constatar sus extraordinarias mudanzas es forzoso sentir que, en nuestra brevedad, todo lo que fuimos en el seno de esa vida municipal gigantesca, se borra paulatinamente, y nuestra propia vida se va convirtiendo poco a poco en estampas del tiempo pasado.

[Is it a dream? No. It is something similar: forty years of life. [...] When acknowledging its extraordinary changes we must feel that, in our short lives, everything that we witnessed within that giant municipal life is slowly being erased, and our life is gradually becoming a series of engravings from the past.] (1929)

As the subterranean world swallows a former surface train, Gaziél detects an important transformation in city life, and in his account of it there is an overlap between elegy for a time past, anxiety over the speed of change, and an awareness of transience: we are destined to be swallowed up and disappear. One cannot but recall Gilloch's reflection on disappearance: 'For it is paradoxically the act of obliteration, the present absence of the former cafés which brings them so vividly to mind. Demolition and erasure bring with them a sudden appreciation of what is no longer there' (2004: 300).⁴ *Picnolepsy* is a way of labelling this phenomenon of the

sudden and unnoticed disappearance of objects, parts of the city, attitudes and ways of living. Therefore, we could define it as the unremitting alternation between tiny moments of consciousness and diminutive 'deaths' of unconsciousness.

* * * * *

The 2008 financial crisis hit Southern European countries hard, leaving large groups of young graduates with little hope of finding a job. Consequently, a new and exceptional economic, cultural and social paradigm has arisen, which is not only multidimensional but also multidirectional. According to Manuel Castells et al.,

the crisis of global capitalism that has unfolded since 2008 is not merely economic. It is structural and multidimensional. The events that took place in the immediate aftermath [of the financial crisis] show that we are entering a world with very different social and economic conditions from those that characterized the rise of global, informational capitalism in the preceding three decades. (Castells et al. 2012: 2)

Individuals and communities have articulated cultural and intellectual responses to such an unprecedented situation whose far-reaching effects transcend national borders. In Southern European countries including Spain, Portugal, Italy and Greece, the crisis has prompted a complete rethinking of democratic, social and cultural values, changes that literature is only now beginning to register and document.

Like Carner, many contemporary Catalan writers have engaged in chronicling disappearance and transformation in the everyday. However, they do so from a slightly different perspective. Some focus on the modern city. Others, hit hard by the financial crisis, return to the small rural communities where they grew up, viewing their hometowns from new urban perspectives and realizing how much (and how fast) the world around them has changed. I propose to analyse these upheavals and their depiction in two recent (auto)fictional texts. The characters/narrators in these texts, without jobs, and in some instances without a love life, go back to their hometown for sentimental reasons. In *Primavera, estiu, etcètera* [Spring, Summer, Etcetera] (2011), Marta Rojals has her protagonist Èlia return to a small town that resembles Rojals's own hometown, La Palma d'Ebre. In *L'horitzó primer* [First Horizon] (2013), Joan Todó revisits La Cènia.

Rojals's is a generational novel which centres on those in the mid-thirties demographic, paying special attention to their everyday lives in Ribera d'Ebre. One of the main issues is the dichotomy between city and village: the protagonist struggles constantly with the idea of returning to her hometown, and her struggles mingle with episodes and images from her childhood and adolescence (her first love and so on). Attention is also paid to the problems, disappointments and frustrations involved in migrating to Barcelona, where she now lives. Having left her hometown to study and work there, Èlia is puzzled by her new condition as a migrant. A friend tells her:

— Ei, que per ser emigrant no cal anar a viure a l'altra punta del planeta, es pot ser emigrant de moltes coses, de realitats, de sentiments, de la llengua, també. Perquè cadascú té la pàtria que té, i se'n pot sentir allunyat encara que et trobis a deu quilòmetres, i la pots enyorar encara que siguis a tres hores de tren.

[Hey, to become an emigrant it is not necessary to move to the other side of the planet. You can be an emigrant of many things, realities, feelings, language, too. Because everybody has a hometown, and you may feel far from it even though you are only ten kilometres away, and you may long for your hometown even if you can get there in three hours by train.] (Rojals 2011: 112–13)

To this Èlia answers that she has felt very lonely and foreign in Barcelona. She does not know anybody in the apartment building where she has been living for ten years, and finds it concerning that a new neighbour was surprised that she could speak Catalan: 'Va i em diu *Ay*, "hablas catalán?, però ¿tú eres de aquí?" T'ho pots creure, la tia?, d'on vol que sigui, de Singapur?' [And she tells me in Spanish, 'But do you speak Catalan? Are you a local?' Can you believe it? Where does she want me to be from, Singapore!?!] (Rojals 2011: 113). At the end of the novel, Èlia flies to Lisbon to visit her sister, who is expecting a baby. Through the plane's window she observes her hometown from a panoptic perspective that allows her to make unexpected connections:

Recolzo el front a la finestreta de policarbonat i, en el moment precís, el Google Earth ja és un sotabosc de fulles de roure. Entre el trencadiscos de peces verdes i terrosses, localitzo la serp negra de l'Ebre i li segueixo els capricis fins on gairebé es fa un nus: el Meandre. I ara he de mirar més amunt, i una mica cap a la dreta, i ja tinc ubicada la crosta verda del Montsant. [...] Però les coses que no es veuen, pel fet de no veure's, no tenen per què no existir. I *allí*, tot i que ara no ho veig, existeix un *patchwork* de teulades secretes, i sé que n'hi ha una amb una antena que sembla un penja-robes, i que dos pisos més avall hi té un telèfon inalàmbric que ningú no pensarà de carregar; sé que hi ha una altra teulada que, un pis més avall, hi té un sofà reclinable massa modern, i que al vespre hi jaurà un home que encendrà un Winston amb el cendrer al pit.

[I lean my forehead against the polycarbonate window and, at the right time, Google Earth is already a vegetation of oak leaves. Among the earthy green puzzle pieces, I locate the black serpent of the Ebre river and I follow its whims until it almost becomes a knot: the Meander. And now I look a little to the right, and there I have located the green scab of Montsant mountain. [...] But things unseen do not cease to exist simply because they are not seen. And *there*, even though now I cannot see it, there is a patchwork of secret roofs, and I know that there is one with an antenna that looks like a clothes line, and two floors below there is a cordless phone that nobody will remember to charge; I know that there is another roof, a floor below, under which there is a recliner sofa that is too modern and in the evening a man will lie down on the sofa and light up a Winston cigarette with an ashtray on his chest.] (Rojals 2011: 362–63)

This very detailed description of what she sees, and what she does not see, from the plane's window is also a reconstruction of spaces she knows all too well, spaces that are the remnants of a world to which she no longer belongs. At the same time, without naming them, she surveys the novel's main characters and the

repetitive actions they have performed in it, as if this passage were an abstract of the narrative as a whole. This unusual perspective, an intimate world seen from far above, gives the narrator a sense of security, but it also introduces a vanishing point, the point at which something that has been decreasing disappears altogether. She is daydreaming about what she sees, and remembering the details that her new perspective hides, when she is awoken by a stewardess who asks her '— ¿Café, señora?' [Coffee, Madam?]. She reacts forcefully: 'Señora? Señora tu!, no et fot?' [Madam?! Madam yourself, my foot!] (Rojals 2011: 363). The stewardess's use of 'señora' (rather than 'señorita' [Miss]) brings home for Èlia the passage of time, and from a panoptic perspective she now zooms in on a few houses she knows well, a move that encapsulates both the events in the novel and also a human geography only made visible by virtue of a piercing look at reality.

Joan Todó's *L'horitzó primer* likewise deals with the experience of being a foreigner at home. The narrator regards his situation as being of the kind that Victor Turner defined as liminal: a state of being 'neither here nor there; [...] betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremony' (1969: 95). He perceives slight changes in his own behaviour and has many doubts about how to interact with his neighbors: 'Aquesta sensació de foranitat. Fa gairebé tres mesos que ets aquí, i tot ha canviat subtilment. Ja s'han adonat que has tornat per quedar-te. [...] Ja no saps, per exemple, quan saludar' [This feeling of being foreign. It has been almost three months since you arrived here, and everything has changed. They have already noticed that you're back to stay. [...] You do not know, for example, when you should say hello] (Todó 2013: 87). Also: 'No ha sabut endevinar quan és que la gent d'aquí va al bar, quan cal trucar-los, com funcionen les coses' [He has not been able to work out when people here go to the bar, when to call them, how things work] (Todó 2013: 88). He makes a long list of typical activities performed by families during the local festivities (Todó 2013: 57–59), but it does little good, and his isolation also reminds him of the passage of time (he is nearly forty). As a result of all this he comes to a pessimistic conclusion regarding the book he intended to write: 'Seria una novel·la sense protagonista únic, o potser l'únic protagonista seria el temps, o el mateix poble, la comunitat, una espiral de llenguatge, una novel·la sense argument que tu i jo no escriurem. ¿Qui la llegiria?' [It would be a novel without a main character, or perhaps the main character would be the time or the village, the community, a spiral of language, a plotless novel that neither I nor you will write. Who would read it?] (Todó 2013: 59). The quotidian pervades his memory:

T'adones que, idèntics a si mateixos, aquests dies s'han perdut en un sospir. Aixecar-se, esmorzar, comprovar mails, llegir, passejar, comprovar mails, dinar, prendre notes per a una possible versió llarga del pregó de festes, comprovar mails: una rutina només trencada pels dies que has anat a ajudar el teu pare a carregar llenya a la finca, que després guardàveu al garatge, vora la caldera de la calefacció. La resta són hores que pareixen engolides per un forat negre, menys pesants que no marca el calendari, dies que semblen perduts. Ja és, però, el que vas aprendre aquells estius que anaves a treballar a la fàbrica: que les hores s'allarguen com un turment si estàs atent a elles, que es cremen com la

palla si en lloc d'estar comptant quantes peces falten per polir et concentres en la perfecció singular de cadascuna; al cap i a la fi, acabar la pila no volia dir res perquè, igual que la roca de Sísif, quan l'acabaves ja n'esperava una altra. Però després s'encongeixen en el record: en una situació de monotonia semblant Hans Castorp va descobrir que quan un dia és com tots, tots els dies són com un qualsevol, i el temps s'accelera. Les últimes setmanes mateix, les que has passat aquí navegant entre ofertes de feina, llegint, sense fer gaire res, atuit per la manca de sortides, aixecant projectes com estels que l'endemà deixaven d'interessar-te, ara semblen un sol minut angoixós; mentre que les Festes d'agost, quan vas fer el pregó, pareixen un any sencer.

[You realize that, identical to each other, these days have been wasted. Getting up, breakfast, checking mails, reading, walking, checking mails, lunch, taking notes for a possible long version of the speech at the *festes*, checking mails: a routine only interrupted by those days when you helped your father to load firewood at the farm, to store it in the garage, near the heating boiler. The rest are hours that seem swallowed up by a black hole, lighter than the calendar indicates, days that seem lost. It is, however, what you learned during those summers you worked at the factory: hours are excruciatingly long if you are aware of them, they go very quickly if, instead of counting how many parts are left to be cleaned, you concentrate on polishing each of them to perfection; in the end, finishing the stack did not mean anything because, like the rock of Sisyphus, as soon as one was finished another one was there. But afterwards they shrink in your memory: in a similarly monotonous situation, Hans Castorp discovered that when one day is the same as another, every day could be any other day, and time accelerates. Take these last weeks you have spent here considering job offers, reading, doing nothing much, devastated by the lack of opportunities, launching projects as if they were flying kites only to forget about them the next day, these weeks now seem like a single anguished minute; while the August festivities, when you made the speech, feel like a whole year.] (Todó 2013: 154–55)

Todó appears to be gesturing here towards *l'infra-ordinaire* [the infra-ordinary], a term coined by Georges Perec in 1973 to denote those unglamorous elements of reality on which he hoped to zero in: 'What happens everyday, the banal, the quotidian, the evident, the common, the ordinary, the infra-ordinary, the background noise, the habitual' (Perec 1999: 210). Perec reminds us that our eyes are conditioned to scan the horizon of our habitat only for the unusual, therefore we tend to neglect the anonymous *endotic* (another of his coinages, an antonym of *exotic*). And it was Walter Benjamin who described the process by which, without the aid of dreams or hashish, an individual perceives the most ordinary, overlooked objects of everyday reality — from obsolete train stations to out-of-place arcades — as uncanny, supernatural, and irrational, a process he called 'profane illumination' (1999: 209). These concepts, as well as that of *picnolepsy*, are useful to understand the texts examined here — by Carner, Gaziel, Rojals, and Todó — all of which detect major transformations in apparently insignificant changes in the everyday.

Milan Kundera invokes Herman Broch's reflection on the purpose of the novel: to discover what only a novel can discover is the *raison d'être* of the genre (Kundera 1986: 5). The sharpest writers have managed to condense narrative into a few topics. These topics are not mere plots (myth or elegy), but the inner filter that forces the writer to investigate large abstractions and to offer a reactive response, to express their ideas in a personal way that nevertheless reflects and speaks to the time in which they live. The texts examined here include names and places and temporal changes, and react to the absurdity of everyday life in a big impersonal city through elegy or by evoking mythical spaces and ways of life that have disappeared.

In a section of *The Arcades Project* that mocks the claustrophobic and chaotic mess of the bourgeois living room, Benjamin writes:

Living in these plush compartments was nothing more than leaving traces made by habits. Even the rage expressed when the least little thing broke was perhaps merely the reaction of a person who felt that someone had obliterated 'the traces of his days on earth'. The traces that he had left in cushions and armchairs, that his relatives had left in photos, and that his possessions had left in lining and etuis and that sometimes made these rooms look as overcrowded as halls full of funerary urns. This is what has now been achieved by the new architects, with their glass and steel: they have created rooms in which it is hard to leave traces. (1999: 701–02)

Similarly, J. G. Ballard is fascinated by reality as a depository of quotidian objects with magic and poetic effects: 'I'm always struck by the enormous sort of magic and poetry one feels when looking at a junkyard filled with old washing machines, or wrecked cars, or old ships rotting in some disused harbor. An enormous mystery and magic surrounds these objects' (cited in Revell). What is the relevance of this for us as we conclude? Carner was an ethnographer of the near past and Rojals and Todó of the near present, but all three perform what I have called autopsies of the everyday and all three can be better understood by considering them in terms of *picnolepsy*. These writers look at reality from a very different perspective, as a special kind of autopsy. They assemble the materials of their mortuary investigation, treating reality almost as if it were a cadaver, or the contents of a special kind of forensic inquisition.

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Notes to Chapter 1

1. See Navas (1995), Quintana i Trias (2007) and Còcola Grant (2011).
2. Unless otherwise indicated, all translations are mine.
3. See Cavallin: 'En troisième lieu, les strophes du Cygne comme le premier chant des Métamorphoses s'écrivent sur un motif de construction. Tandis que le demiurge ovidien construit le cosmos à partir du vieux chaos de la matière, Napoléon III tire une ville impériale du chaos du vieux

Paris. Dans le *Cygne*, l'apparition de l'Andromaque de Virgile s'inscrit dans cette réflexion sur la construction ou l'architecture. Si Baudelaire pense brusquement à elle alors qu'il traverse "le nouveau Carrousel", c'est que les chantiers du nouveau Paris lui rappellent le chantier de la ville qu'Hélénus, mari de la princesse troyenne, est en train de construire quand Enée la rencontre sur un rivage désert de l'actuelle Albanie. L'allusion au "Simoïs menteur" illustre la méthode d'Hélénus. L'ancien esclave de Pyrrhus crée la ville de Buthrote à l'image de Troie détruite. Il construit "une petite Troie, une copie faite sur le modèle de la grande Pergame", "simulataque magnis | Pergama (1)". Il appelle respectivement les deux fleuves qui longent la ville le Xanthe et le Simoïs, en souvenir des fleuves de la cité phrygienne. Sa translation onomastique imprime sur le support neutre de ce rivage inconnu une ville archétypique. Sous le roitelet bâtisseur, à la fois cadet d'Hector et sa copie en miniature, se profile la silhouette de "Napoléon le petit", singe et médiocre neveu de Napoléon Ier, transformant le vieux Paris en une ville impériale, conçue comme la figure du rétablissement de l'Empire. À l'exemple d'Hélénus produisant ex nihilo un simulacre de Troie, Napoléon III efface le "bric-à-brac" du "vieux Paris" et y substitue une idée de ville. Le demiurge des *Métamorphoses*, l'Hélénus de l'*Enéide* et l'empereur urbaniste, tous trois architectes et bâtisseurs, forment une séquence analogique qui invite à lire le poème comme une méditation sur l'acte créateur et donc sur la poïesis' [Thirdly, the stanzas of *The Swan* as the first song of the *Metamorphoses* are written on a construction motif. While the Ovidian demiurge builds the cosmos out of the old chaos of matter, Napoleon III draws an imperial city out of the chaos of old Paris. In *The Swan*, the appearance of Virgil's Andromache is part of this reflection on construction or architecture. If Baudelaire suddenly thinks of her as he crosses 'le nouveau Carrousel', it is because the building sites of the new Paris remind him of the city that Helenus, husband of the Trojan princess, is building when Aeneas meets him on a desert shore of present-day Albania. The reference to the 'liar Simoy' illustrates Helenus's method. The former slave of Pyrrhus creates the city of Buthrote in the image of destroyed Troy. He builds 'a little Troy, a copy made on the model of the great Pergamos', 'simulataque magnis | Pergama (1)'. He calls respectively the two rivers that border the city Xanthe and Simois, in memory of the rivers of the Phrygian city. Its onomastic translation stamps on the neutral support of this unknown shore an archetypal city. Under the little king, both Hector's younger brother and his miniature copy, stands the figure of 'Napoleon the Little One', mediocre nephew of Napoleon I, transforming old Paris into an imperial city, conceived as a symbol for the restoration of Empire. Following the example of Helenus producing ex nihilo a simulacrum of Troy, Napoleon III erases the 'bric-a-brac' of 'old Paris' and substitutes it for an idea of a city. The demiurge of the *Metamorphoses*, Helenus of the *Aeneid* and the urbanist emperor, all three architects and builders, form an analogical sequence that invites us to read the poem as a meditation on the creative act and therefore on poiesis] (2006: 342-43).

4. As Benjamin said, '[t]he important thing for the remembering author is not what he experienced, but the weaving of his memory, the Penelope work of recollection. Or should one call it, rather, a Penelope work of forgetting? Is not the involuntary recollection, Proust's *mémoire involontaire*, much closer to forgetting than what is usually called memory? And is not this work of spontaneous recollection, in which remembrance is the woof and forgetting is the warp, a counterpart to Penelope's work rather than its likeness? For here the day unravels what the night has woven' (1969: 204).