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Daybook 1918: Early Fragments

By J. V. Foix, edited and translated by Lawrence Venuti. Chicago, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2019. Pp. 171. \$18.95 (paperback). ISBN 9780810140653

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homophone “cale-se” (“shut up”). How this song borrows from a biblical passage and the vivid descriptions of the violence of the authoritarian regime are well explored, along with symbolic events metaphorically rendered in the song. “Apesar de você,” a song first released in 1970, is left to the end, for this song is regarded as an anthem of resistance, Chico famously uses the pronoun “you” as a substitute for “the regime.” It was a big hit then, but soon after its release, censors banned it. Perrone notes that its repercussion broke national boundaries, and to this day it is used in protests in Brazil as well as outside.

The last chapter evaluates Chico’s international recognition and raises the issue of his less significant profile in the US market. Perrone’s book offers a good insight into the first *Chico Buarque* album. It draws mostly on secondary sources and provides a well-rounded picture of Chico’s musical and political contributions. Perhaps its scope is not one that seeks originality, but it works well as a quick resource about the significance of this major icon of Brazilian protest songs. It can perhaps be appealing and instrumental to the general readership or to those outside Brazil who have no prior knowledge of MPB and its historical and socio-political context; but equally, it could be appreciated by those wanting to know more about the technical production of each song in the album.

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Giuseppe Sansone defined the uniqueness of J.V. Foix as a poet by describing him as a troubadour and a Surrealist. Foix’s dual nature, always situated between tradition and the avant-garde, is evident from the beginning of his literary career. We are faced with a case of dual personality, a schizophrenia of literary nature that has enjoyed remarkable success in Catalan literature. Foix, in fact, was a notable avant-garde writer, although unfortunately he has never been widely known outside the strict sphere of Catalan culture. He self-published his first books and they had very limited distribution. He was very well connected with the French avant-garde; for example, he prepared with Paul Éluard an anthology of Surrealist poetry that unfortunately was never published. J.V. Foix is the least known author of Surrealist prose poems, but he may be the best. Partially inspired by Apollinaire and Breton, he took Surrealist imagination places to which only his friend Salvador Dalí dared go.

Lawrence Venuti’s edition has two very positive results. First, Venuti is not shy in affirming that we are in front of Surrealist prose poems, especially those Foix wrote before 1936, when, according to the usual chronologies, he became interested in the practice of the sonnet and put into practice his famous verse (or motto) “M’exalta el nou i m’enamora el vell” (“Exalted by the new, in love with the old”). Venuti also makes another important decision: he translates in a not exactly contemporary English (unlike what his predecessor David Rosenthal did), achieving a language that may challenge the English-speaking reader. He chooses “to maintain a semantic correspondence that approximates the stylistic features

of his writing, its periodic structures and rhythms” (xxx). Not an easy task, but he succeeds at doing it.

The negative aspect, in the eyes of this reviewer, is Venuti’s adherence to the organization of the texts according to the 1981 edition, an edition that manipulates or truncates the first two books, *Gertrudis* (1927) and *KRTU* (1932). Thankfully Venuti includes in appendix, even if only in the English version, the texts that were not included by Foix himself—under the guidance of Joaquim Molas—in the 1981 edition. Thus at least he offers the reader the instruments to reconstruct the puzzle. It is not surprising that in the 2000 edition of Foix’s *Obres completes*, prepared by Jordi Cornudella, the books are published as they were by the author himself. It has never been clear how the selection process worked, deciding which texts were part of the *Diari 1918* and which were not. It is surprising that some key texts such as “Getrudis” and “KRTU” were not rescued for the 1981 edition. The Joan-Ramon Veny critical edition of *Diari 1918* (2004) induces some perplexities (or increases them) when it includes some texts that could have been part of *Diari 1918*. This book contains only 203 pieces of prose of the 365 envisioned. I have already proposed that one possible solution is a digital edition such as the various existing editions of Fernando Pessoa’s *Livro do desassossego*, which reflects the richness of the original, never edited by the Portuguese author; but also, recognizes the difficulty of reaching a single textual solution. Another problem may be the choice of the title word. “Diari” becomes “Daybook” a daring choice, but one that does not reflect the adherence by Foix to a Catalan tradition of diary writing. Although I am not a native speaker, it still sounds awkward.

Venuti’s edition—a major event in itself—vindicates Foix’s centrality in the avant-garde literature of the early twentieth century. *Gertrudis* and *KRTU* are books of poetic prose that respond to the challenge resulting from the contact with the French and Italian avant-garde, and that had seduced a group of young Catalans writers such as Joan Salvat Papasseit, Josep Maria Junoy, Joaquim Folguera, and J.V. Foix. The contact with the Italian and French avant-garde explains the characteristic tension present in Foix’s work between the impulse towards the most daring proposals of modernity and the desire to promote his works through the linguistic and cultural normalization of Catalonia. The notes by Venuti are extremely well documented and can be of help not only for the English reader, but also the Catalan public. Most editions pay much attention to textual issues, but very little to hermeneutic ones.

Venuti also does a very good job summarizing Foix’s situation in the Catalan literary landscape and discussing painstakingly some of the most pressing issues regarding his writing, including, among others, the refusal to sign his poetical writings. In a text, “Some reflections on One’s Own Literature,” Foix declared, with an almost Dadaist attitude, that his first books were published against his will, but he admitted that, in spite of this, he is the author of the published books. Foix was a personal friend of Miró and Dalí. He published numerous articles containing remarkable reflections on European avant-garde artistic manifestations. In the Barcelona daily *La Publicitat* he published hundreds of short notes commenting on aesthetic issues of the time. Other articles were published in the main avant-garde magazines, especially in *L’Amic de les Arts*, which in the years 1927–29 became an important point of reference, together with the activities developed in the Dalmau Gallery, where artists such as Joan Miró and Salvador Dalí became known. *Gertrudis* and *KRTU* open with an illustration by Miró. They are books that can be considered the starting point of his work as a poet, which is widely reflected in the works in verse, as illustrated in Pere Gimferrer’s study of Foix’s imaginary.

Venuti's introduction is very well informed and extremely helpful for a non-Catalan readership. It helps the reader understand major aesthetic (and political) trends such as *Noucentisme* and Foix's link to them, and his particular version of *Catalanisme*. Particularly useful is the discussion of hypnagogia, a concept that became very important for Surrealist artists and writers: "Dream and hypnagogia [...] result in the literature characterized by a higher realism that departs from the convention of verisimilitude" (xxi). He also discusses Foix's concept of love and stresses the many contradictions in his presentation of Gertrudis: "she entertains a number of lovers and wears a red dress to taunt him. But she is also a devote churchgoer who takes notes on sermons" (xxiv). Venuti does an excellent job of summarizing Foix's early reception among Catalan critics, who were puzzled by such an original writer and documents his success (*d'estime*) until his last years. Personally, I am not sure that an endorsement by Harold Bloom has much value in itself, or maybe it will become a curse.

Editing and translating Foix's *Diary 1918* into English is a challenging endeavor. Venuti has done both with high marks. Reading this book is an absolute must for anybody interested in European avant-garde literature and aesthetics. Foix's *Diari 1918* is Surrealism's last secret (and one of the best), finally revealed to the English reader with a text much closer to the Catalan original.

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