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THE CONSTRUCTION OF EXILE FROM A FRENCH DEPORTATION CAMP IN THE NARRATIVE OF XAVIER BENGUEREL

CARLES CORTÉS

ABSTRACT

The autobiographical experience of exile becomes the axis around which are structured a variety of fiction and non-fiction texts written by Xavier Benguerel (Barcelona, 1905-1990). Although they are fictional recreations, the works discussed here represent an important inflexion within the corpora of testimonial texts as they become highly relevant to the study of the representation of the experiences of the Catalans in French camps, as well as the literary construction of a desired return to a country under the regime of Franco's dictatorship.

The autobiographical experience of exile becomes the basis of a variety of fictional and nonfictional texts written by Xavier Benguerel (Barcelona, 1905-1990). His literary construction reveals the exile's personal feelings both in testimonial works such as *Memòries 1905-1940* (Memories 1905-1940) (1971) and *Memòries de l'exili: Xile 1940-1952* (Memories from Exile: Chile 1940-1952) (1982)¹ and in fiction narrative, in short stories² as well as in fictional works such as *Gorra de plat* (Peaked Cap) (1967), *Llibre del retorn* (Book of Return) (1977), *Els vençuts* (The Defeated) (1969)³ and *1939* (1973). This literary use of these personal perspectives takes place after the writer's return to Catalonia in 1954, a return that was actually not definitive as for some time he maintained a work link with Chile, a country where he had set up a pharmaceutical business.

Xavier Benguerel, who began his career in the 1930s with *Pàgines d'un adolescent* (Pages of a teenager) and *Suburbi* (Suburb) (1936),⁴ resumed his literary activity with some psychological novels. Those that stand out are *El testament* (The Will) (1956) and *Ikària, Ikària* (Ikaria, Ikaria) (1974). In parallel with these, he wrote documentary or testimonial novels such as the aforementioned *Gorra de plat*,⁵ *Els fugitius* (The Fugitives) (1956), *Els vençuts, 1939* or *Llibre del retorn*, where the traces left by his personal experience of exile become much more obvious.⁶ Our analysis will focus exclusively on the last three novels.

The first testimonial novel published by Benguerel after his exile was *Els fugitius*, which served as the literary basis for the final version, entitled *Els vençuts*, as the author himself recognized in the 1969 prologue. He wrote two more books on the same subject: *1939*, which became a sequel of the previous novel, and *Llibre del retorn*. In terms of content, *Els fugitius*—first part of the later version of *Els vençuts*—describes the initial moments of the journey into exile taken by a writer, Joan Pineda, who, after leaving his family behind, walks

across the border in El Portús and finally reaches El Voló, after a brief stay at the Perxés farm, in Agullana, exactly as the author himself did. The help provided by the owner of the *Café des Sports* made it possible for the writer and his companions to travel to Toulouse, where they met up with their respective families. In the second part of *Els vençuts*, “La fam i les fúries” (The Hunger and the Furies), the author’s focus is on the chronicle of exiles imprisoned in French deportation camps under the surveillance of Senegalese and Algerian soldiers. In this case, the main character is not the same as in the first part —*Els fugitius*. The new protagonist is a thirty-year-old young man, Oriol, who has left his parents and his fiancée behind in Barcelona. He and his friends manage to survive the difficult conditions in the camp of Saint Cyprien beach, near Perpignan. Thanks to the help provided by Genís Riera and a friend of his, Monsieur Robert Pons, a few exiles from Oriol’s group can start living everyday life in “their new country”.

In turn, *1939* is structured in four parts, which can be identified with the four seasons of the year and historical events of that same year, which coincided with the end of the Civil War and the beginning of several events that foreshadowed World War II. Based on accounts offered by witnesses about the experience described —cited by the author in the introduction to the book: Núria Juandó, Ramon Calsina, Miquel Ferrer, Josep Soler-Vidal, and Jaume Calmó— Benguerel’s book shows us the three alternatives available to Catalan exiles after crossing the border: returning to their country of origin with the risk of being jailed by Franco’s regime; facing the uncertainty of French deportation camps; or joining the Workers Companies set up by the French government. Some of these companies were sent to build the Maginot Line to defend France against the German invasion. The writer uses other people’s experience but also uses some of his own feelings and reflections, even though he did not live the reality of French camps himself.⁷ The protagonist of *Llibre del retorn* also watches these internment camps from a distance and recalls the following a few years later, “fa de mal arrelar entre dunes i estanys salats: la sorra és un pèssim element” (LR 45).⁸ This is how we can see, amongst other things, that in the first chapter of *Els vençuts* some exiles have doubts about their return; in the second chapter, Daniel Catarineu, chairman of the House of *Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya* (Catalonia’s Republican Left Party), is sent to prison by the police in Barcelona; in the third chapter, we learn that several exiles have returned to Barcelona and we are also told how they were received by the pro-Franco military; ultimately, the author allows us to reflect on the decision made by a deported man to go back into exile in France. Regardless, just as in *Els vençuts*, Benguerel sets most of his stories in French deportation camps.

We must finally mention Benguerel’s *Llibre del retorn*. The author constructs an ending that portrays the exiles’ memory of despair when they saw how Franco’s regime remained in place after the defeat of the Fascist Axis powers: “en lloc de restablir la pau espanyola, després de tot la nostra democràcia, la nostra república, els sinistres polítics que maneguen els interessos universals i engiponen els pactes, les lleis i fins i tot la història al seu gust, van trobar més convenient i

digne prestar suport al règim franquista” (LR 142). In short, *Llibre del retorn* becomes the story of exile evoked from a distance and with nostalgia, with the ultimate wish for the return mixed with the fears about its possible consequences. This is all told through the eyes of a fictional protagonist, Baltasar Olivella, who recounts his past through a number of police interrogations that took place once he had decided to return. Therefore, *Llibre del retorn* conveys stronger emotions than the two previous books, the yearning: “a despit de tants anys, no has demostrat posseir prou categoria de desarrelat: et falta resistència, t’enyoraves; sí, cada dia m’enyorava més i, d’improvís, la primera clariana, terroses estructures d’un paisatge amb arbredes, conreus” (LR 10). Nevertheless, the true main character in this book is the ‘scene’ of the return from exile, defined by the writer as follows: “el conegut reingrés en el silenci i en una compacta buidor rara” (LR 10).

Analyzing the characters’ declarations on the status of exiles can help us understand the mark left by this new reality in Xavier Benguerel’s narrative.⁹ We can thus identify feelings such as disappointment, disillusionment and despair caused by the lack of understanding on behalf of the authorities in France. It is consequently easy to find shared perceptions in the books we are dealing with; for instance, the feeling of resignation about the difficulties faced when crossing the border, as expressed by Joan Pineda “mentre la mort d’un mateix no arribava, un estava obligat a fugir, a vetllar, a acampar allà on fos, a dissimular la seva condició” (EV 41). This feeling, which prevails throughout the novel *Els vençuts*, becomes a sort of premonition in the first image seen by the protagonist when he has just started his journey and notices the presence of a woman carrying a huge bundle:

Em van agafar ganes de córrer a suplicar-li que se’n tornés a casa, de dir-li que el camí era llarg, llarguíssim, de fet, interminable, que s’aniria desprenent de mica en mica de tot allò que duia i que ara li semblava indispensable, que d’aquí a unes hores, poques, s’hauria d’aturar, extenuada, que totes les portes estarien tancades i barrades, que hauria de dormir, per força, al ras, sota el cel o a recer d’un ràfec o d’un arbre... (EV 22-23)

There are numerous references to this feeling throughout *Els Vençuts*, which does not disappear as time goes by in *Llibre del retorn*. Defeat is present in every reflection made by the characters, which is why their attitude towards mankind becomes quite negative, as can be inferred from these two examples:

Deu ser un virus moral, l’home es va resignant sense consciència a la idea que el món s’ha transformat en un camp de concentració, vull dir que es resigna a renunciar a l’ús de la seva llibertat. (MIL 184)

El món pot arribar a exhalar una pudor desesperada, una immensa pudor, una pudor com la d’aquesta plaça. (MIL 55)

Resignation leads exiles to a routine life with a distinct lack of planning: “vaig per uns carrers que no s’han fet per mi, carrers sense ànima vivent, amb fred i nit” (MIL 34). This perception becomes increasingly evident among those imprisoned in deportation camps: “la gent no sap on va, què fer, com esquivar el

pes del temps, la dura, la implacable llum del sol, les interminables nits sense lluna i, quan fa lluna, la freda claror que els cau a sobre igual que una pluja de cendra. Deprimits, farts de veure's, s'han acostumat a mirar-se rarament cara a cara" (MIL 139). However, it will be in *Llibre del retorn* where the creation of a character whose exile has come to an end allows Benguerel to once again strongly rebel against the circumstances that these people have gone through: "afortunadament pensaves que l'home tampoc no es resigna a un destí que pretén marcar-lo amb un ferro roent com a les bèsties. No, tu no et resignaves a un destí que tenia tot l'aire d'arraconar-te indefinidament al fons d'un carreró sense sortida d'una ciutat americana" (LR 157). Drawing a comparison between human existence and the growth of wheat, Benguerel recreates one of the most theatrical metaphorical recurrences in 1939: "has sembrat blat al seu temps i, al seu temps, exigeixes farina; vius per enllaçar passat i futur com en les històries que acaben feliçment. Una generació més, una generació menys, una dècada més, una dècada menys, treure o afegir una anella a la cadena, tant se val" (MIL 276).

Exiles also have to experience a sense of being uprooted, or on the contrary, a lack of understanding on behalf of their comrades and loved ones when they make their decision to return. It is the case of main character in *Llibre del retorn*:¹⁰ "ja ets a casa, però no prou a la d'abans, ni ells no acaben de ser ben bé els teus i, tu, per ells, deus tenir algun aspecte d'intrús, de foraster, ets algú que tan sols coincideix vagament amb la imatge de tu que li ha anat proporcionant la seva personal manera d'enyorar-te" (LR 19). One way to reflect the awareness of the new reality is the treatment of time as something that cannot be stopped along with the assumption that their return is for good.¹¹ Time passes quickly or slowly but it passes; that is the reality (MIL 139).

The feelings of loneliness and isolation in Benguerel's texts are significantly strengthened through nature and the elements. As we can read: "li inspira terror: el vent, la pluja i, tot el dia, tota la nit, en adormir-te, en despertar-te" (MIL 15). This reference can also be found in the memories of the exile already returned: "l'aire pesat, arrapadís, lliga amb el teu estat d'ànim i una rara fatiga que tanmateix no et priva de caminar de pressa" (LR 90). It is an example of how the inclemency of the weather becomes a direct reference to the mood of the exile sent to French deportation camps: the rain, the wind, the cold, an overcast sky; a subjective view that is recognized by one of the main characters: "els perfils de les cases, dels arbres, de les roques, de les barques, de les carenes, tot és tens, amb la duresa dels objectes treballats amb escarpria o per la cega violència del vent: lliga amb el meu estat d'ànim" (MIL 313). In this respect, it is worth mentioning the reference to individuals as *ombres* (shadows), that is to say, as an odd group of tormented souls who live their lives mechanically and senselessly: "tant si plou com no, se sent baixar el silenci, així queia el vent a Argelers. La gent és, amb prou feines, ombra" (MIL 61). This image has an interesting precedent in *Els vençuts*, where the protagonist, Joan Pineda, notices how his shadow "lliscava al llarg d'una paret ennegada per tot de cartells i proclames" (EV 42). Therefore, they have become shadows in the camp of

Saint Cyprien. The negative connotations associated with this symbol have to do with the pain caused by the physical space where they are held prisoners.

Another aspect carrying a negative symbolic connotation is the sea, an element which increases the individuals' feeling of isolation as well as their desperation, since the sea often expels the corpses of other refugees. This becomes evident in the assertion made by Tomàs, one of the prisoners: "a l'aigua li fan nosa els cadàvers, els escup" (MIL 138).

Furthermore, sunrise is not a moment of the day that provides any positive meaning either. It actually produces the opposite effect, the light dazzles the disoriented prisoners who complain because "la sorra crema, l'escalfor entorpeix" (MIL 152).

In the case of *Els vençuts*, the river instead of the sea acts as a reference for the main character's desperation, as its constant flow represents the monotony of time and the lack of hope among these refugees forced to endure permanent immobility. Time is meaningless, one could say.

In addition to the natural elements strictly speaking, the refugees have to suffer another torment —lice—: "ens apliquem a matar-nos els polls com aquell que fa mitja" (MIL 38).¹² The negative connotations associated with these insects allow them to compare them to the jailers of Republicans. The presence of lice is pervasive even when the exiles return to Barcelona, their main purpose within the text is to demonstrate the great burden of exile. The difficulty of physical conditions is often linked to the political conditions under which the French government has set up the camps and criticism abounds in the lack of consideration toward the "fighters for democratic rights", as exiles see themselves. Nevertheless, 1939 contains an attempt to justify lack of consideration from the French by the huge number of Republicans who had crossed the border and the impression that the French saw them as a kind of plague: "els hem caigut a sobre com una plaga, molt bé, però la majoria ens imagina com una plaga de llagosta; plaga, sí, però de vençuts, al capdavall de gent que ha lluitat per defensar el que ells, vulgues no vulgues, s'hauran de posar a defensar d'aquí a quatre dies..." (MIL 305). The use of this biblical reference to the plague of locusts is also present in *Els vençuts* along with the comparison of Catalan exile with the Exodus.

Seeing this construction, it is only logical that Benguerel tried to reproduce the general climate of disillusionment among Catalan exiles following the harsh political reception in France. In other words, the perception of the main characters in 1939 resembles the one of those in *Els vençuts*: "ens havíem convertit no en un poble vençut sinó estafat" (MIL 124), since the feeling that they have been betrayed is similar in both texts. However, this individual feeling ends up becoming a collective cry. Thus, just as the protagonists of *Els Vençuts* feel that they are treated like beasts ("bèsties de bast", EV 21), these feelings increase in 1939 while they are being transported to the camps in wagons (MIL 33). The parallelism established with the herds of animals is recurrent in the two stories written by Benguerel. Whereas in *Els vençuts* "avançaven callada-

ment i com empesos per una maledicció" (EV 21), in 1939 the main characters "es mouen desmanegadament, amb moviments de bèsties engabiades durant llargues hores: bruts, mal afaitats, rapats al zero" (MIL 142).

Faced with the attack from the outside world, exiles reinforce the concept of a collective, cohesive group with the same concerns. It is through the use of this rhetorical device of the joining shadows of characters that Benguerel symbolizes the bond created between them: "a terra les dues ombres s'ajunten, se separen, s'encavallen, al cap de poc s'ajunten en una de sola" (MIL 119).

On the other hand, the memory of the past becomes a source of comfort for Benguerel's characters, who express their wish to remember everything: "convé recordar-ho tot" (MIL 93). In *Memòria d'un exili: Xile 1940-1952*, Benguerel stated the twofold value of remembering as an element that not only helped to overcome the present but also to encourage rebellion:

El record se't presenta sovint amb les dues cares d'una mateixa medalla: per un cantó (l'anvers) acceptes que una afalagadora "inconsciència" t'ajudi a rescabalar-te i oblidar temporalment una vida que et constreny a organitzar-te en l'estretor i la precarietat; per l'altre cantó (al revers), admetes ser la consciència d'un subjecte que planta cara a les adversitats i les penúries conforme a un codi de moral estricta. (221)

Nevertheless, as time goes by, the memory remains unchanged, a fact that distresses Baltasar Olivella in *Llibre del retorn*: "per si fos poc la famosa memòria acumula detritus. L'inevitable corcò de la memòria! I no me'n puc desprendre ni prenent-me a mi mateix per interlocutor i insultant-me davant del mirall... I en canvi, trobes que la capacitat d'oblit de la majoria és enorme" (LR 81). The psychological pressure on exiles might lead them to experience an unknown mental state: "a les primeres paraules m'assaltà una rara sensació de distanciament, no en l'espai, sinó en la meua nova manera de sentir..., com si jo, per compte propi, m'hagués posat a viure qui sap on una vida, més que impossible, absurda" (EV 103). It feels as if they had reached some distance from themselves which eventually generates the impression that they are losing their own identity: "jo mateix ja feia hores que tenia la sensació d'haver perdut en gran part identitat, i que tot allò podia molt ben ser el començament d'una altra existència en la qual fins i tot els nostres noms resultarien superflus" (EV 114).

The recourse to memory also enhances the 1939 characters' own identity: "calia que s'afanyessin a recordar, a mirar, a sentir, a tocar-se el cos que anava a ser-los arrabassat amb violència" (MIL 64). They feel comforted by family memories from the past, as Claudi Arderiu states at the end of the first part (MIL 70). The memory of childhood, with the protection of their parents, is induced in the act of sleeping, which is why the narrator urges one of his interlocutors to sleep: "Arronsa't com un cuc, com un fetus. Esforça't a dormir perquè demà arribi més aviat" (MIL 95).

Sleeping in addition is perceived as a comforting state because it means a pause in the middle where there is little awareness of the harsh reality, as we can read in

the first part: “Dormir ve a ser un acabament, enganyós acabament que entronca al cap de poques hores amb el simulat començament de cada dia” (MIL 14).

Still, due to the uncertainty of the present, the characters choose to destroy these images in order to escape the anguish of recalling the happy moments from the past. This can be inferred from Joan Pineda’s words: “a no recordar, ni tan sols recordar-me dels meus. Però allò que em sobrava, com sempre, eren preguntes i respostes” (EV 63) or “tot em feia mal. I, recordar, també” (EV 97). Perhaps this is why Oriol, the main character in “La fam i les fúries” not only decides to forget his experiences but also that he will not tell them to his family in the future: “no els en parlaria mai, però tot això, dintre meu, n’estava segur, duraria sempre, i alguna cosa molt profunda de mi mateix no es mouria mai més d’aquell camp...” (EV 222). Due to the tragic sense of reality experienced by the characters—visible in statements such as “És inútil, pas vrai?, fugir de la mort” (MIL 106)—their perception of the future is also permanently uncertain, circumstance that make them doubt about the possibility of returning to their own country. The warning given by the narrator to one of these exiles may be highly representative in this respect:

L’espriaran quan baixi, hola, Claudi, com has canviat, és cert tot això que fan córrer dels camps de concentració de França, i tu a què penses dedicar-te, ara, no tens por d’haver tornat, vigila. T’inventaràs una història curta, la repetiràs com una cotorra, i llestos. T’interrogaran amb un deix de compassió, la compassió que es dedica, fins i tot involuntàriament, al vençut... Potser em costarà molt de trobar feina, potser m’he equivocat: si m’hagués quedat a Argelers, però al Camp cada dia en moren una pila. (MIL 98-99)

However, the return does not bring an end to uncertainty, since the protagonists remain skeptical of their fate and keep repeating to themselves “you are in Barcelona, you are in Barcelona” (MIL 100). The same uncertainty assaults the main character in *Llibre del retorn*, who wonders about the reason why nobody is asking him for his identity documents or why the police is not keeping watch on him:

No puc creure que hagi deixat de ser un home suspecte, i que puc seure, tinc dret a seure en qualsevol d’aquests bancs, que ningú no es precipitarà a demanar-me els documents, a preguntar-me si sóc refugiat, que cap policia ja no ens està espiant darrera d’un tronc d’arbre o traient el cap per una cantonada. (LR 54)

A doubt also besieges the protagonists of *Els vençuts* when they ask themselves why they had to run away: “de què fugíem i de què ens amagàvem?” (EV 116).

Nevertheless, this fatalistic tone does not prevent the textual introduction of one of the most innovative elements in 1939 if we compare it to earlier versions such as *Els fugitius* or *Els vençuts*, namely the humorous treatment given to the immediate reality that the characters have to live. Benguerel seems to emphasize the pathos of several scenes through the use of humor and irony. Thus, we can see how Claudi Arderiu, arrested for his Republican sympathies,

is released with the provided guarantees as he ironically welcomes his fate because he will have to work twelve hours a day from now on and will not be allowed to have any contact whatsoever with friends; he will be prevented from reading newspapers and even from listening to the radio: “estic de sort. Treballaré dotze hores cada dia, no aniré enlloc, no tindrè amics, ni llegiré els diaris, ni escoltaré la ràdio” (MIL 69).

Xavier Benguerel made a remarkable effort to recreate the feeling of being uprooted through the testimonies that he collected, especially from those individuals who were sent to French camps.¹³ The quotation which opens *Llibre del retorn*: “pienso que el hombre debe vivir en su patria y creo que el desarraigo de los seres humanos es una frustración que de alguna manera u otra entorpece la claridad del alma” (LR 5) deserves a special comment. These words are drawn from Pablo Neruda’s volume *Confieso que he vivido* (I confess that I have lived). Xavier Benguerel, who was a great admirer of the Chilean writer and had an in-depth knowledge of his work,¹⁴ chose one of Neruda’s sentences which would ultimately become paradigmatic of the ethical position adopted by Benguerel himself after having dissected the reality of Catalan exiles and the difficulties associated with their return home.

In this sense, it is also worth highlighting that some of the information used in the texts I have discussed above comes from personal experiences lived by Benguerel while he was in exile. For instance, the first part of *Els vençuts*, published in 1956 as *Els fugitius*, is one of the fiction works that contains a substantial amount of information about the author. The protagonist, Joan Pineda, is a writer from the Poble Nou neighborhood in Barcelona who, due to his illness, postpones his flight abroad as long as possible. Furthermore, under the pretext of being the youngest one among the writers linked to the Institute of Catalan Letters, he is called the latest to flee toward France.

Llibre del retorn once again offers the reader a recreation of personal experiences through its main character, Baltasar Olivella, who happens to be the same age as the author (LR 26) and has spent his exile in Chile, working in the same laboratory as Benguerel and performing the same tasks as the writer in his return to Barcelona (LR 140), to name only a few of many similar coincidences between fiction and real life.

In spite of all the hardships, Benguerel’s protagonists always hope to overcome death and consequently to have a future: “mai, trec forces de flaqueza” (MIL 282). This is also what the main character says to himself in *Llibre del retorn*: “necessitaves amb urgència viure cada dia més obert ni que fos a la més absurda de les esperances. I, pensant-hi, et satisfieia, en aquell instant, la idea que era cert que el tren avançava amb lentitud enervadora i a contracorrent” (LR 52).

In Benguerel’s case, we can easily understand the wish to transform an intimate experience into literature as a kind of therapeutic effect, to exorcise inner ghosts, expressing at the same time the doubts both of those in exile and of those who have returned. The testimonial texts by Benguerel we have been examining can be described as a prose bordering the limits of the novelistic

genre. The writer's testimonial concern prevails over his literary purpose, which explains why some of the elements that characterize the genre are hardly present. We can see, for instance, that the narration does not have a single plot where the characters participate in a logical continuous form.

In our view, the works discussed so far hold an important place within the writing of testimonial texts which, despite being a recreation, remain highly relevant to study the representation of the experiences lived by exiled Catalans when they were sent to French camps as well as the complexity involved in their return to a country that was still oppressed by Franco's regime.

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NOTES

¹ You can find my analysis of these writings in Cortés “L’ ampliació de la realitat”.

² See Cortés “El tractament de la realitat”. A special mention must be made of the tale compilations *La dama del parc i la meua ombra* (1984) i *L’ absent i altres narracions de la guerra* (1986).

³ See Cortés “L’ experiència de l’ exili”.

⁴ See Cortés “Els orígens literaris de Xavier Benguerel”.

⁵ *Gorra de plat* is set aside in the current study because its plot focuses on the memories of a Barcelona caretaker from 1906 until after the Civil War. Instead, the others have as their starting point the experience of Catalanian exiles from the initial moments of their flight, the beginning of exile.

⁶ In Lluís Busquets’ words, this is the group of works where “the historical chronicle is used as a community frieze which can provide the shock needed to shake (them) out of defeat” (Busquets, *Xavier Benguerel* 113).

⁷ See Busquets *París-Santiago de Xile* 171, and Benguerel, *Memòries* (chapters 39 and 40, 291-311), which refer to the author’s first weeks in exile.

⁸ The following abbreviations will be used from now on to quote from Benguerel’s texts: EV, *Els vençuts*; MIL, 1939; LR, *Llibre del retorn*.

⁹ This connection between the writer’s feelings and those of his characters is actually highlighted by Maurici Serrahima in a letter to the author collected by Lluís Busquets: “els fets a través de les emocions que et produeixen —a tu o als personatges, vull dir— i això et porta a una major adjectivació i a un punt de lirisme” (Busquets, *Xavier Benguerel* 88).

¹⁰ This expression can also be traced in other short stories by this author such as “Sense retorn” or “Xandri, el titellaire”. See Cortés “El tractament de la realitat”.

¹¹ The reiterative sense of time is highlighted once again at the end of the third part of this book: “Com ahir, com abans d’ahir, com fa un mes, tres, quatre, cent mesos, com sempre”. (MIL 278).

¹² We can observe an interesting parallel in chapter IX, “Els polls” of Mercè Rodoreda’s novel *Quanta, quanta guerra...* It is consequently a very characteristic image of war scenes used by Catalan postwar novelists.

¹³ We can see how he transforms this fieldwork into literature in *Llibre del retorn*; Baltasar Olivella, the protagonist, takes down testimonies of acquaintances who had been in French camps (LR 83).

¹⁴ It is interesting to underline how the main character in the novel, like the writer, has contacts with the poet who made Catalan intellectuals’ arrival in Chile possible despite the difficult situation in Pre-World War II Europe. You can find a comment about their relationship in Busquets “Epistolaris de Xavier Benguerel”.