

TERESA GIMÉNEZ BARBAT
THE DIARY OF A SCEPTIC



ALLIANCE OF LIBERALS AND
DEMOCRATS FOR EUROPE 

The Diary of a Sceptic

Teresa Giménez Barbat

(Introduction by Albert Boadella)

Translated by Sandra Killeen

© Teresa Giménez Barbat, 2018

© Introduction by Albert Boadella, 2018

© Translated by Sandra Killeen, 2018

© Cover illustration by José María Beroy, 2018

Editorial coordination, page layout and front cover:
Editorial Funambulista

INTRODUCTION

I'm going to try and write as comprehensibly and naturally as Teresa does in the pages that follow this prologue. The first thing that springs to mind is that this is a book that takes numerous risks. Its diary format is a risk on the current writing scene. Such a realistic narrative form implies the likelihood of a minority reception right from the outset. The elimination of any fictional perspective is currently a sort of literary suicide. Anyone who writes a book free of fantasies could be said to walk a fine line with their readers. The majority want to read simulations. The book also has a feminist air to it, which together with the ostentation of scepticism may initially cause readers to shy away from these pages. Obviously, I write this hypothesis from a masculine point of view and in it I'm attempting to express my first impression when the book I had in my hands was fresh out of the oven. Nonetheless, as I knew the writer personally I was inclined to take the theoretical risk. I have to admit here, that I opened the pages of this account out of curiosity about my friend, though this didn't prevent a certain degree of scepticism on my part and a slight willingness to be distracted when faced with the first undigested page. I have now read it twice. The first time I was hooked on the spot. A few years later, the goal of my second reading was to refresh my memory with a view to writing a prologue for the Spanish version. My initial intention for this second reading was to skim over the pages to simply trigger a recall. But that didn't happen. Again, I got caught up in the book, page after page, although this time round something surprising occurred. I perceived a different

vision of the account. That seems worrying. Can my criteria have changed so substantially in the space of just a few years? Whatever the cause, ten years after its publication in Catalan, the book takes on a new dimension given the current situation in Spain.

Let's consider it one piece at a time. To highlight that the pages of this diary are written by a woman may seem like an anachronism, at this point. I understand it's a detail of very relative significance to the reader at this moment in time. Or at least it tends to be in the majority of cases. Nonetheless, the female gender is crucial here. In these pages we follow the events described by Teresa from a perspective that only a woman could describe and analyse in this sort of detail. I am one of those people who still believes in the innate differences between men and women in the mental sphere. I admit to being one of *'the last men standing'* in this respect. It's also true that this woman talks about everything. She goes from the most everyday to the most transcendental, attaching equal importance to making pasta with pesto and the thorniest issues of national and international politics. It feels comforting. I'm fascinated by the women who have managed to preserve a certain uniqueness compatible with a broadness in their perspective of the context. I am particularly interested in that minority of women who have held onto their freedom while freeing themselves of the current whirlwind that smooths out the gender differences as if this constituted a huge leap in progress. Of course, Teresa shows an elegant modesty when it comes to certain details of her private life that distinguishes her from many, more cavalier, female writers, who have no qualms about forcing us to take minute interest in the contingencies of their most intimate facets. I understand that these are very personal observations. They belong to a male in whose childhood years it was common to hear a Catalan expression: *¡Cony de dones!* An expression impossible to translate.

Perhaps “Women’s cunt” might come close but only literally. I don’t believe the Catalan expression reflected any machismo, but rather a male perplexity in the face of certain female actions. It was simply the reflex action that some singular twists in women’s behaviour triggered. The topical male expression aimed to reaffirm to others of their same sex the fact that these actions were clearly the product of a different and somewhat mysterious being and that they should not interfere with. I have the same reaction to Teresa. I would have liked to call this prologue “*¡Cony de dona!*” to reflect the curiosity and admiration I feel for the narration of events and reflections in this tale, although I can already picture the consequences of such boldness on my part. I would quickly be shot down by certain gentlewomen ever thirsty for punishments to aim at the theoretically offending primate. Which is why I waive any audacity here. She doesn’t need it. On the contrary, she detests it.

I’ve shadowed Teresa for the second time in her everyday life, her walks, her travels, her political meetings and her astute reflections on certain situations. She applies equal determination to resolving the most ordinary and the most complex. I particularly enjoy her tenacious avoidance of fiction. We see her in her daily quest to get to the truth of things, however everyday they may be, fighting against the pressure of society. She detests fiction. Whether in the occult sciences or everyday relationships. This leads her on an obsessive quest for the reality behind what has been established or hidden in the contrived liberal mythologies. She softens this occasionally intractable stance with irony and sarcasm although there are areas she refuses to budge on. Yet, it is surprising to see how easily she understands the opponent. Even her proverbial patience, or charity (?), with opponents I would have crushed in a second. She puts up with them with exemplary rationality. I would go so far as to say

that occasionally she does so with an almost maternal warmth. She is capable of untangling friendly ties from intellectual meanness and sharing aperitifs and meals, sometimes purely for enjoyment, others in the noble pursuit of cultivating friendship but mostly to feed her insatiable taste for debate. Some of these characteristics might give the misleading impression that this is a book essentially for women. Absolutely not. I consider myself a textbook male and I fully enjoyed the *double entendre*. Perhaps it's precisely because I perceive twists of intelligence that would follow a different pattern in the brotherhoods of my genre dedicated to writing and that difference is reassuring to find here. It invests life with new dimensions. In other words, I perceive heterogeneous viewpoints that satisfy my curiosity to tap into ways of thinking that are out of the ordinary. Particularly those exempt of the intellectual petulance so widespread among male writers. Teresa makes no effort to hide either her weaknesses or her femininity. The latter might well seem impossible. Yet it comes through in an adjective or a simple, everyday gesture. I haven't observed even the slightest interest in establishing competition between the sexes in her writing. This means that it is natural and enjoyable to follow her ordinary comings-and-goings from October 2003 to June 2005. A possibly crucial period in the evolution of her own political thinking. And here I return to the idea I suggested in the beginning. Ten years later, I've discovered in this book a new and interesting dimension.

The period she chose very realistically shows the beginning of the end of Catalonia as a balanced society. It is clear in her relationships and in the attitudes of those around her, but above all, it comes through in the need to move closer to people who have already been fighting like antibodies to the epidemic for a time. An epidemic that just a few years later would devastate the common-sense and

good know-how of a community. Teresa joins in this fight that has offshoots in other Spanish territories. The way the beginning of the disease is revealed, interwoven with everyday situations, reminds me of something I read about the behaviour of the Germans in the thirties. In her diary, the whiff of the virus starts to be perceptible in the subtle details of her relationships. Neither she nor I believe the situations that took place subsequently are comparable in terms of the final consequences of national-socialism but they are similar in the way they alienate a society. The current reality clearly shows the consequences. In addition to all of the above, this diary holds an additional and extremely contemporary incentive, precisely, in the root of this whole epidemic process.

Teresa's personal dimension and her political commitment as a European Member of Parliament today, have their origins in the events recounted over the twenty-one months of this diary. Many serious things have happened in Catalonia since. Her (ever positive) scepticism has not prevented her firm ethical commitment. Hence, we look forward with relish to the next tale that could be described as the diary of a somewhat sceptical lady in the clamour of battle.

Albert Boadella

In this age, the mere example of non-conformity, the mere refusal to bend the knee to custom, is itself a service. Precisely because the tyranny of opinion is such as to make eccentricity a reproach, it is desirable, in order to break through that tyranny, that people should be eccentric. Eccentricity has always abounded when and where strength of character has abounded; and the amount of eccentricity in a society has generally been proportional to the amount of genius, mental vigor, and moral courage which it contained. That so few now dare to be eccentric, marks the chief danger of the time.

On Liberty

John Stuart Mill

THE DIARY OF A SCEPTIC

October 15th

I met Arcadi for lunch. I'm writing a novel and I wanted to talk to him about it. It's a slightly grotesque story of sex and black humour set against the seedy world of psychics and a New Age esoterism in the same vein. It's already on track and I want to know what he thinks.

We meet in some sort of Irish restaurant next to the Pompeu Fabra University, close to the Rambla Santa Mónica, at the Pitarra monument. Arcadi is a veritable gourmet, but I don't need to be one to realise the set menu is inedible.

Towards the desserts, he says:

—What I'd actually like you to write about is how you arrived at this scepticism business.

—Sorry?

—Yes. Something personal: how you discovered it, how it has affected your life...

—Like *My Life as a Sceptic* or something along those lines?

—Well, more or less...

I should have known. He's saying this because I've spent years collaborating with organisations that promote a rationalist and naturalist view of life. The Anglo-Saxons call people like me *sceptics*. This was the very word I used to introduce myself to Arcadi, and he

must think somebody else might find it interesting. What a load of codswallop! Neither my life nor my, let's call it, conversion to scepticism are interesting literary material. I mean, disbelieving all religions and ideologies or thinking that only the instruments of science and reason can take us close to reality is not as dramatic as suddenly converting to Islam. Dramatic in both senses: my experience was far less gory than, say, falling from a horse, and it's not remotely commercial. You don't gain entrance to an exotic world that allows you to exploit your kohl-rimmed eyes, staring out over a veil. It wouldn't make the front cover of the National Geographic or the back page of *La Vanguardia* newspaper.

Even so, the fact that Arcadi believes my «sceptic life» might be worthy of this undertaking makes me think. I'd never have said this man found me «interesting». Maybe he did think so the first time we met in that «bourgeois patisserie, as he described it the day he presented the book to me. I wanted to be convincing, and that meant giving a serious image. Distance and seriousness give power, and plus, I'm not bad to look at. I think I looked the part that first day, the maximum skill attributed to me by my ex-husband, who always did everything possible to ensure I didn't much believe... anything.

This is what Arcadi wrote about me in the «La Crónica» section of the newspaper *El País Catalunya*. And what he understood about the association I had introduced him to:

«After a couple of hours, after polishing off every crumb of a bourgeois breakfast, my conversation with Mrs. Giménez was dwindling when it suddenly took an unexpected twist:

- I wanted to tell you that I consider scepticism a total attitude to life.
- I think I understand.
- And that many of us in the movement feel the same, and we believe

that we must extend our activism against all types of para-sciences and mystifications.

- An honourable endeavour.
- Because there are not only ufologists...
- Of course not, not only ufologists, there are also spiritists and...
- Nor just psychics or quacks.
- Certainly, nor astrologists nor healers...
- Nor just telekinesists, nor chiromantists nor shamans.
- Of course, of course, not only...
- There are also nationalists, for example...»

«For example»... And how!

I'm absorbed by the memory of that first encounter for a few seconds and his Bernard Henry-Levy look. They are both men in black and white. Does Arcadi wear a trench coat when it rains? How must his unruly head of hair look wet?

I tell him I'll think about it and he invites me up to his office to give me the pocket edition of his *Diarios*¹ that he had promised me. The first book in which someone mentions me. Arcadi warned me that he had included something about me and the day I bought it I quickly sat on a bench of Rambla Nova to find myself in it. It reproduced an email I had sent him. A story about «mad cows» with an element of humour (and of sex). I felt absurdly exposed. As if a gust of wind had suddenly blown my skirt up.

And this man wants me to write something about myself?

We're in the office. It's the first time we've been alone in an enclosed space. *Tête à tête* looking at the book. He shows me a stain he got on his shirt over lunch. I stared at it intently. We are a hand-breadth from each other. Maybe less. It's a small stain that's easily

1. TN: Espada, Arcadi, *Diarios*, Espasa-Calpe, 2002.

hidden by moving his tie a bit. Nothing happens. He kindly walks with me to the lift and I leave.

On my way up the Rambla, and this proves that I had already come around to the idea, I'm thinking of possible book titles. For instance, to paraphrase some celebrity: *My Life as a Sceptic* or *My name is María Teresa Giménez Barbat and This is How I Became a Sceptic*. I have fun fantasising for a while.

We'll have to see. The only thing I know for sure is that as he was giving me his book it occurred to me to steal the idea and write the book as a diary. For his *Diarios*. A tribute, we could say.

October 16th

I'm at home, in Tarragona. I moved here one year ago and married Josep, a resident of the city, two years ago. The wedding took place in Renau, a charming village 20 kilometres from Tarragona. But afterwards each of us went back to our own homes. I to Cerdanyola and he to Tarragona. We didn't mind going on like that for as long as necessary, independence suited us both. But then we found this big flat close to his workplace and it cost exactly the amount of money we had. So we decided to buy it.

It's eight. I don't even know what the weather's like, I haven't looked out. I'm still not sure if it's a good idea to explain what it means to be a sceptic. Plus, it might be a term that sounds good to the Anglo-Saxons, but it has somewhat negative connotations here. Although, since it's the name generally used to refer to this area, as the joke goes, «we can now consider ourselves... named». On top of that, Philosophy considers a classic sceptic that person who systematically questions everything and preaches the impossibility of

knowledge. And that's not what this movement does. We consider a sceptic that person who believes there are no absolute truths but rather provisional approximations to truth. Scepticism, like the scientific method it is inspired by, is a means, not an end, and applicable to any knowledge area or any area of public interest. Like, for instance, politics.

So many disappointments before coming to think like this. Because I used to believe in many things. When I was studying anthropology at the University of Barcelona, I even did a study on a case of ghost appearances. The most unreadable study ever. Anything but scientific. Based on the tale of a few facts a woman from my father's village witnessed. According to her, she lived for a long time with the spirits of her parents-in-law. They spoke to her, advised her... All very homely. Familiar. Worthy of Tele5². And I built an exercise around the prejudice and fantasies of a credulous woman (or two of them, to be more precise: her and I).

I get embarrassed when I think back on all that. At the time, I would never have imagined that I too would have to confront a ghost one day! A very real ghost. And in a painful and disturbing way. Fortunately, by the time that happened to me I was a critical and sufficiently educated person. Otherwise, I would have blown my top.

But I'll explain all of that later on.

Let us continue. I didn't become what's known as a member as such, that is form part of an organization, until I met Miguel Ángel. It was in '95. I had been separated from my second husband for a

2. *TN*: Tele5, now known as Telecinco, is a Spanish commercial television channel operated by Mediaset España Comunicación. It is known for its Spanish series, entertainment programs and reality and talent shows. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Telecinco>.

year. I was the ideal sort candidate for a group that was active and a defender of lost causes. Apparently, it's typical of people who are either single or separated. *Spinsters*, as the English call them. My case exactly: alone, longing for change and anxious to invest my energy in something other than the obligation of having a partner.

And there was Miguel Ángel Sabadell, on a TV programme. One of the ones showing psychics and nutters. For the first time, I saw someone defending the rational and scientific perspective with intelligence, humour and critical sense. He elegantly and politely destroyed his opponents' delirious claims. The next day, I sent a letter to the *Letters to the Director* section of *La Vanguardia* newspaper saying that it was about time we saw a person with arguments on a programme like that. And that it was a pity there were no organisations like the American Sceptics, that I was already familiar with, in Spain. And straight after, I went on holidays. Fifteen days in Greece. Two weeks far away from everything that prevented me from reading a diligent reply in the same newspaper. It was by someone informing me of the existence of *Alternativa Racional a la Pseudociencia*³, the aim of which was to show up the lies of psychics, people contacted by UFOs, inventors of water engines and other freakish illusions, and that Miguel Ángel, astrophysicist and promoter of science, was the vice-president.

They would never have found me if it hadn't been for a diligent member of the association who looked up my name on the Sant Cugat area phone book, as that was where I was living at the time. Fortunately, I was separated and living alone. I mean to say that the phone was in my name. And that was when I discovered that I wasn't alone, there was a whole association interested in these matters in Spain.

3. *TN*: Rational Alternative to Pseudoscience organization.

Who would ever have said that two years later I would be one of the managers!

October 17th

The advertising aimed at women by the world of cosmetics couldn't be any more vulgar if it tried (it's not bad when aimed at men either). I still remember that ad for a sunscreen product that contained «marine DNA». You don't have to be sceptical, anyone with an ounce of common sense should feel offended. What is «marine DNA»? The DNA of a mussel? An anchovy? Popeye's semen?

Now I'm watching television and there's an eyeliner ad that claims to «unfurl your eyelashes 360 degrees». Are the people who write these texts ignorant or do they think people really believe that «360 degrees» is an arc and don't want to disillusion them? The part about the «marine DNA» was a fabrication to provide a scientific pretext, but this is quite simply equivalent to having eyelashes that trace a circumference. Who would want eyelashes like that?

There are people who say things in good faith though. This afternoon I went to the hairdresser's. The girls who work there are great, they even bought my book *«Polvo»*. But I don't know what to do when they explain the fantastical effects of their products to me. They just want to make a sake and earn a few pounds and they even completely believe what they're saying. Today they suggested I use a «serum» by I don't-know-what-brand because it «feeds» the ends of the hairs. What do you say to that when you know that these ends are about as likely to absorb nutrients as a «scouring pad»?

October 18th

My Pepe is coming to pick me up at the gym. He's finished the job he was working on. His visual and applied arts centre is gaining more and more students, and he's more and more rushed. But on certain days, he leaves earlier. Like today, for instance.

It's eight-thirty and it's already very dark. We're going to «touch the iron», or in other words, do what the locals of Tarragona do when they stroll along the Rambla: reach the *Balcó* and lean on the iron railing. The Balcón del Mediterráneo is at the end of the Rambla Nova and it's a vantage point over a cliff that looks onto the port and the beaches. Ten minutes before you get there, it also enjoys a majestic monument dedicated to Roger de Llúria. Atop a pedestal a couple of storeys high, a knight wrapped in worthy garments raises a hand holding some sort of scroll. He appears to be telling the locals not to worry that he'll watch out for them. And he's right because the esplanade of the *Balcó* is the most beautiful place in the city. Or at least it was today.

Roser, one of Josep's former students is leaning over the railing. We say hello. Roser believes in a great many esoteric things and knows what my school of thought, so she probably doesn't like me much. I've lost friends because of this. I had a close friend, a sensitive girl who wrote stories and poetry, who was attracted to all things spiritual and mystical. I couldn't repress my tendency to be ironic about it all, but she liked a good debate and we had really lively and stimulating conversations. But even so, the more I insisted on my demystifications, the less she enjoyed our discussions. She even began to look at me differently, to distrust me. Maybe I wasn't the open-minded person she had thought, but someone far more intolerant, reactionary and coarse.

The day I laughed at telepathy and told her it had in no way been demonstrated, that no experiment had ever succeeded in surpassing the mean number of statistically right answers, she couldn't bear it any longer. That was her limit. How absurd. She claimed to have had hundreds of telepathic experiences. That friend you're thinking about who suddenly phones you. The worrying dream that awakens you in the middle of the night and that terrible event the next day (or the next, or the next) which, obviously, couldn't just be chance. Moreover, she avowed that it had been rigorously demonstrated and established. Scientific and everything.

I don't miss her anymore, but I did for a time.

October 19th

I spend half my life in front of a computer. And a large part of that time online. I receive a lot of emails because I take part in three debating lists. Additionally, I also correspond with people I see. It's cheaper than the phone. Now that it's ten in the morning, I get an email from Elisabet. «Let's have a coffee» in the afternoon. Great, I'm looking forward to it. I write to her and we arrange to meet.

Elisabet is one of the few friends I have in Tarragona. I haven't had much time to make friends; I've only been living here for a year. She has one of the best clothes boutiques carrying labels in the city. An acquaintance introduced us and recommended her shop to me. We hit it off straight away. She is also incredulous and sceptical, and three months after meeting me, when my book, "Polvo", came out she really liked it. At least with her I won't need to discuss whether telepathy exists or psychics can see the future. We won't stop being friends over that.

She's divorced, doesn't have a partner and is in her forties, that in-between age. On top of that, she has an eccentric air about her and does her own thing instead of looking after her nieces and nephews. In a macho-dominated society like ours (a «normal» society, let's be honest), she ticks a lot of the boxes to be considered «odd». I imagine that when people find out she's mad about the Internet she probably gains herself even more labels.

Like me.

October 20th

The phone rings just as I'm getting out of bed. A friend, Consuelo, inviting me to her daughter's baptism. I joke: «You do know that we're all atheists in this family, don't you?». She laughs, but in a certain way. She doesn't want to seem old-fashioned. She believes, but fears it's not very fashionable. She says a bit timidly:

—But we all need to have ethics, don't we?

Seriously... religious people think the only ethics possible are confessional. Possibly a biased belief. The truth is that all humans come «fitted» with moral feelings. They evolved with us. Not only do we need to have some ethics, it's impossible to live without any.

Mine have the same root as my scepticism. I consider myself a «secular humanist». As the Humanist Manifesto claims, secular humanism is «a philosophy of life inspired by humanity and guided by reason» and the outcome of a long tradition of free thinking that has enlightened many of the great thinkers and creative artists, and given rise to the very birth of science. We humanists believe that science and reason provide the best foundation for understanding the world that surrounds us and that moral values are grounded on empathy

and scientific knowledge.

We do not see any compelling evidence of any god, the supernatural or life after death. On the contrary, we do not even consider it. Yet ours is a movement with firm ethical principles.

Of course we'll go to the christening.

October 21st

I go out in the morning to run some errands and buy some flowers on the way home. Yellow lilies. I feel good walking along the sunny, autumnal Rambla with my bright flowers. It's a «Parisienne» image. Leslie Caron (if I lose a few years).

I almost always believe I've done the right thing by coming to live in Tarragona. In this precise instant, more so than ever. Like the title of a book I read by Arcadi, this is an «instant of happiness». It's enough for me. I don't need anything more «momentous». My only interpretation of the word «spiritual» is the concept of «cultivating the spirit». That is, sensitivity, delicacy; culture's most sophisticated products. But not through an entity that is independent of my body with an aim for eternity.

The naturalist and materialist perspective of the world is not broadly preached in our society, given that it is the opposite of idealism (in the transcendental sense), of spiritualism understood as «soul», or of some other upper case beliefs that I don't buy into.

No, no it's not fashionable, I think as I examine my bouquet closely. Another friend says that yellow flowers mean hatred. Poor lilies. They are bright and cheerful. Full of laughter. Does she really believe that? Sometimes, women tire me. It's a good thing I do the most basic things with men, otherwise what a calamity... Just joking, but

there are people who associate belief in something with greater sensitivity and feelings of love and compassion. And I would go so far as to say that women do even more so. This friend of mine, Nieves, that I got annoyed with, was very feminist, New Age branch, and didn't understand me. According to her, women are closer to feelings, to emotions, to the subconscious. And she used to tell me that this peculiar intuition means there's a lot of sorcery in all of us...

How I loathe such nonsense! A group of women claiming this type of thinking has been one of the most reactionary ideas of recent years. I have no doubt that men and women have different innate characteristics, but nobody in their right mind can claim the irrational territory belongs to women. As if we were little animals.

Anyway, my desire for objectivity, for the facts, for reason gradually converted me into a sort of traitor to the cause in her eyes. Even suspect of being almost conservative, right-wing! And the truth is that nowadays, going against their own tradition, many left-wing people don't appear to identify much with rationalism and science. With her, I had criticised psychoanalysis, Gender Studies, alternative medicines, the energy channels of acupuncture... She took it all. Until our friendship ended in the most idiotic way.

—The existence of telepathy has never been demonstrated —I said.

—Telepathy either? —she answered, sick to the teeth of me.

That day she'd had enough of a «closed-minded person» like me.

October 22nd

Today I went for a coffee with Elisabet. As we were chatting, I discovered that she's extremely nationalist. But I mean extremely, you

know? And since I'm not even remotely... I see nationalism as a political philosophy that considers the group, the «people» as the object of rights. Whereas I believe it is the person, the individual who is the holder of these rights. I couldn't be nationalist. Catalan or Spanish. And I would almost go so far as to say this new friend of mine is even pro-independence and all.

I'm feeling a bit perplexed. Maybe disappointed. And so is she. She wasn't expecting it. A Catalan like me, interested in culture, who writes... She almost certainly imagined me to be lefty and pro-independence. I've suffered a disappointment. But so has she, the poor thing.

Shoot. Now, I'm going to have to tiptoe around her. Elisabet couldn't give a toss about telepathy and all that rubbish. She is not, in the terms some of us use, a *magufo*. A friend of mine invented the word «magufo», an acronym based on the first letters of MAGician and UFOlogist. It applies to anyone who believes in the occult and superstitions. A play of words that has ended up being quite broadly used.

Elisabet is not a *magufo* in the esoteric sense of the word, but nationalisms are essentialisms so we'll have to wait and see. We will have an element of discord between us. Scepticism is a provisional approach to any statement. Not only in the field of science, but also in the social or political disciplines. For instance, I, as a sceptic, believe that the best political system is the one prevalent in the so-called «Western» countries: parliamentary democracy and free market. And I believe this because all other experiences have proven negative. But, unlike the people who believe in an ideology, my opinion is provisional; therefore, it is not based on dogmas or infallible formulae (which is what characterises an ideology). If one day someone demonstrates that there is a better alternative, I will

gratefully accept it.

The same thing applies to nationalism (not to mention independence) in my opinion. If a politician suggests something to me, I need to know what I want it for, what real, material, measurable advantages it will give me and those close to me. I won't buy into it if I don't know what I want it for. And when it comes to independence, the way I see it, they're trying to sell me a car with no wheels. I've already lost one friendship because of the farce of pseudoscience, will the same happen to me again because I don't believe in independence, or Carod⁴ and his whole gang, either?

October 23rd

Saturday. We spent it doing things around the house. It's been a year and one month since I moved here and we are still halfway through the refurbishments. Everything costs a fortune and we have to do it ourselves. Good thing my Pepe is handy... but he just can't do it all, poor thing.

Around sunset we went down towards the *Balcó*. It's starting to get dark. It's also lovely to look at the sea at this time of the day. There are no clouds in the sky and loads of stars are visible up there. Mars is marvellous. At this time of the year, it's very close to us.

I know some of the constellations, some planets... I could spend my life looking at the sky. When I have time, I must join some astronomy society here. As a teenager I used to spend hours and hours

4. *TN*: Josep-Lluís Carod-Rovira, (born 17 May 1952 in Cambrils, Spain) was the Vice-president of the Catalan Regional Government from 2006 to 2010. From 1996 to 2008 he was the leader of ERC Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya (Republican Left of Catalonia). ERC campaigns for Catalonia's independence from Spain. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Josep-Llu%C3%ADs_Carod-Rovira.

on the roof looking at the sky in case I spotted some suspicious object that could be a UFO. The time I wasted doing that... But the truth is that looking at the sky and looking for them made me ask a lot of questions. I wanted to know more. I started to read books on astronomy. I didn't understand almost anything, but a whole unknown and fascinating world opened up before me. The so-called ETs didn't appear, but it was good to learn what that incredible Milky Way so clearly visible from small towns without much «light pollution» when I was little, really was. Although astrology fascinated me, it raised more doubts than certainties. But I learned to locate the Zodiac constellations, to know that the really bright, really red star was actually Mars, and that light came from a supernova explosion. And that appealed to me far more.

From the novelesque fantasy I moved on to science-fiction, and from science-fiction to a preference for all things that spoke of true science. The ETs started to seem insignificant to me compared to the contretemps of the pioneers that Arthur C. Clarke positioned on the Moon, who had to boil water for coffee at a different temperature than on Earth, or who had sailboat races driven by the force of solar wind.

Now, leaning over the Balcó railing, with this cool air whispering of winter, I can't understand how the people around me don't tell their children: «See that really big, red star up there? That's Planet Mars where those rovers that send us photos every day have got as far as. And, you know what?, maybe in the future man will set foot there».

October 25th

I have another interesting friend in Tarragona. Santiago. I met him around three years ago at the fiftieth birthday party of Lourdes La Torre, scene director of La Caixa, who celebrated it in one of those boats that sail down the Ebro to the Delta. I also met Carod-Rovira and his wife! I remember that half-way through the dinner someone came spectacularly aboard from a motorboat and it was them. I remember Santiago because after dinner, when the boat had docked at a bank that looked like a Vietnamese forest, he said he was scared of being attacked by Charlie. I got a fit of laughing.

Santiago is a professor of Political Philosophy at the University of Tarragona. I met him again at a *Basta Ya*⁵ event in Barcelona, one day that the Basque professor threatened by ETA, Gotzone Mora, was coming. I recognized him and asked him whether he was a friend of Lourdes.

A strange character. He was formerly the PSUC⁶ representative in Tarragona and now he leans more towards PP⁷. I imagine this circumstance can be nothing less than problematic. It must be

5. *TN: Basta Ya* (Enough is Enough, in English) is a Spanish grassroots organization uniting individuals of various political positions against terrorism, notably ETA. Its principal activities are anti-terror demonstrations and protests. It welcomes any citizens willing to play an active part provided they adhere to three basic principles: defend against terrorism of any sort, regardless of origin or intensity, support all victims of terrorism or of political violence and defend the rule of law, the Spanish Constitution and the Statute of Autonomy of the Basque Country. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/%C2%A1Basta_Ya!

6. *TN: PSUC*-Unified Socialist Party of Catalonia. It was a Communist political party active in Catalonia between 1936 and 1937. It was the Catalan branch of the Communist Party of Spain, and the only party not from a sovereign state to be a full member of the Third International.

7. *TN: PP* (Partido Popular) is a conservative and Christian democratic political party in democratic Spain. It is one of the major parties of modern Spanish politics along with the Socialist Party. The two have alternated power over the last thirty years. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/People%27s_Party_\(Spain\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/People%27s_Party_(Spain)).

hard to have been at the head of the most complacent, self-labelled «pro-progress» group, and for them to now consider you a fascist, naturally. He's been pushed to one side at the university and, from time to time, he has some clash or another with the «radical» students. Radical in the sense of «nationalist fanatics», obviously.

It's an uncomfortable situation marked by constant, potential danger. I don't envy him.

October 26th

Pseudoscience in the newspaper, in relation to that girl murdered in Mijas, Rocío Wanninkhof. The article says:

Robert Graham had requested the hypnosis session to clear up some «memory gaps». In spite of the unusual nature of the request, the court authorised the hypnosis, which took place in Madrid 10 days ago. During his hypnotic statement, Graham did not contribute any new data about the crime.

Afterwards, I hear on the news that this proof won't be accepted due to its «dubious scientific validity». Thank goodness there is some grain of common sense out there.

The media, on television or in magazines, is many peoples' main source of information. And there is a great deal of confusion because generally the deceitful dress up their esoteric discourse in pseudo-scientific terms that aim to pass it off as science when they're really nothing more than ruses created to confuse and often deceive the public. Bernard Shaw used to say: «Science is always simple and always profound. It is only the half-truths that are dangerous».

Hypnosis is based on the other person's power of suggestion. If a person does not believe, nobody will be able to hypnotise them. What more can we say?

October 27^b

I am very fond of Eudald Carbonell. He's an incredibly generous person. Since he's a professor at the Universidad Rovira y Virgili, co-director of the Atapuerca excavations, author and many more things, when my book, "Polvo de estrellas", came out it occurred to me to ask him to present it for me and he accepted in the space of two seconds, even though he didn't know me from Eve. All I had to do was tell him what I did for him to say yes.

I went to see him today. There's a series of international organisations that promote scepticism, science and secular humanism and I want to create an umbrella association bringing them all together with a group of friends. I'd like the headquarters to be in Tarragona. I've already spoken of the subject to him and he has been very receptive and helpful. I almost can't believe the attention he pays me. He says we can collaborate in a human evolution centre soon to be created here, in the city, that he will direct; that we could be within the «communication unit». I don't know exactly what that is, the unit part, but it sounds fantastic. I insinuate that maybe we won't agree on everything. I can't help worrying that at some point the differences I foresee will ruin everything. Eudald defines himself as a Communist and as we're talking, I look over the Che and Lenin posters he has in his office. I certainly don't think either of those characters are exemplary. And I'm also surprised that there are still people who define themselves as Communists after the whole

debacle. But I imagine he'll say what they all say: that the idea itself is not mistaken, it's the people who have mis-applied it. I've heard more than one person say that. It's as if a doctor were really fond of prescribing a drug that killed all the patients who took it and, when asked why he keeps prescribing it, he claims that the drug is impeccable, that it's the patients' fault for not reading the indications. The normal reply would be, ah, ok, but don't you have anything else you can prescribe?

Anyways.

What Edualdo and I do agree on is our rejection of nationalism. The Catalan left-wing is crazy enough to believe it's possible to be nationalist and lefty at the same time. But Edualdo is a coherent man. It reassures me when he says it would be extremely boring if we were to agree on everything. He says I can count on it happening in the medium term

He kisses me as I leave and I recall how tall I thought he was when I first saw him. Just like now. He cuts a very impressive figure. And has deep, dark eyes.

Well, yes, I do find him disturbingly masculine. So what?

October 28th

There's an interview in *El Periódico* newspaper with Giovanni Sartori, the Italian political scientist. The journalist asks him whether he has more right-wing or left-wing ideas. «There are no left or right-wing ideas, ideas are either true or they're false», he answers.

I couldn't agree more. Plus, nobody seems to know exactly what it means to be left-wing or right-wing. I don't think we need to keep following that dichotomy anymore. Naturally, whenever I've been

brave enough to say anything I've received very varied reactions, ranging from surprise to attack.

In my case, if I were forced to choose one side or another I think I'd choose the centre, liked by neither the lefties nor the odd few who admit to being right-wing. It's where the conformists go, the grey area, the in-between land. The terrain of the reviled middle class. Reviled for some unknown reason: the most prosperous societies are those with the most extensive middle class.

The worst part about the non-ideological middle class, and I consider myself part of it, is its ability to vote for specific and measurable objectives. In short, its pragmatism. Non-ideological voters vote for what we deem useful and timely. Like Sartori says, for what «we consider true». We are the ones who judge a politician or a party for their management, and not for their ideological leanings or our dislike of their adversaries. It's irrational to vote for these reasons. I know people who have told me they'd vote for *Esquerra Republicana*, not because they believe in the benefits of independentism, but to vote «against Aznar». What an idea. And later, what will they do with them if they come into power?

The non-ideological voters, subscribers to *apriorism*, are people who would never vote «against» Aznar or Zapatero, but for an offer in line with our interests or in recognition of a job well done. Dislike or tribal feelings are not good reasons for voting. Sartori also understands that in the same interview when he replies to one of the questions:

—What is essential then?

—The leaders' response capacity, their ability to understand the wishes of the electorate and satisfy these demands. An individual responsibility needs to be demanded of the leaders similarly to what is demanded from

the lawyer in relation to his client.

Exactly, responsibility. The advantage of having voters who vote for ideologies rather than management is that the party has a captive parish available to it. Whatever it does, the voter knows what church it belongs to, who its flock is. The politician, the party, may get it wrong but they have to do a truly awful job for the voters to turn to the competition.

And no, we are not sheep.

October 30th

A friend lets me know that Leopoldo Barrera, PP representative in the Basque Country, is coming to Rovira i Virgili to talk about the *Plan Ibarretxe*⁸.

I'm interested. I sympathise strongly with all those people from the Basque Country who are threatened by ETA that the *PNV*⁹ supporters laugh at. I sympathise with both the socialists and the PP people. I'm definitely not one of those people who think PP is a fascist or non-democratic party. I don't know what all those people

8. *TN*: The Political statute of the Community of the Basque Country, better known as Ibarretxe Plan was a proposal by former lehendakari Juan José Ibarretxe to radically alter the Statute of Autonomy of the Basque Country proposing a free association of the Basque Country with Spain on an equal footing, including a right to self-determination. This proposal was not passed by Parliament. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ibarretxe_Plan.

9. *TN*: Basque Nationalist Party. Founded by Sabino Arana in 1895, it is the second oldest party in Spain, after PSOE, that remains active. It is the largest Basque nationalist party, having led the Basque Government uninterruptedly since 1979 (except for a brief period between 2009 and 2012).

who call PP fascists would say to a Tejero¹⁰, for instance. When we use a word as big as Fascism frivolously, we are left unarmed in the face of the true fascists. The only fascists are the terrorists. And it seems absurd to have to say it, but that's the way it is: we've gone this far.

Coincidentally, in the afternoon, I have a coffee with Elisabet, my friend who's close to Esquerra Republicana¹¹. Because it's a sure thing now: she is an Independentista. Completely.

I'd already had my suspicions. I could see it coming. But it seems that she likes me and I like her too. We have things that we do share. And she's an open-minded person, the sort who put themselves on the line. She's one of the few Independentista specimens who would accept a proposal as far out as the one I put to her straight away:

—Would you come to a talk today by someone from PP on the Plan Ibarretxe?

That's what I said to her. Just like that. I really am a bit kamikaze. She stares at me in disbelief and surprise. Trillions of figures pass rapidly over her eyes, like a demented android trying to politically and personally reclassify me. She seems to discard the possibility that I'm just «a fascist». It's because of what I just said, she likes me. I'm weird, no denying that. People from Barcelona, you know...

And the woman agrees! She says ok, and that she'll be there what-

10. *TN*: Antonio Tejero Molina (born 30 April 1932) is a Spanish former Lieutenant Colonel of the Guardia Civil, and the most prominent figure in the failed coup d'état against Spanish democracy on 23 February 1981. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Antonio_Tejero.

11. *TN*: The Republican Left of Catalonia is a Catalan nationalist and democratic, socialist, political party in the Spanish autonomous region of Catalonia. It played a central role in Catalan and Spanish politics during the Second Republic and the transition to democracy in Spain. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Republican_Left_of_Catalonia.

ever time I ask her. But that she wants to make some things clear:

—You should know that I completely agree with the Plan Ibarretxe. I'm *independentista*.

—I know, I know. But I'm not and I think it's disastrous. —I say categorically. And I add—: The least centralised country in Europe, if not the world, and look what we've come to: disintegration.

The part about disintegration throws her a bit. Especially given how much she must love disintegration. We glare at each other like two cowboys, but in a John Ford film. Fair play is guaranteed. It's not Tarantino.

Even so, what a role I got. With every minute that passes, I regret the previous scene more. What got into me to invite her? A nationalist! To a PP event! And I admit to feeling uncomfortable about going to a PP event in a small city where everyone knows everyone. I wish I wasn't so politically correct. And that my cowardice was not so deeply grained.

Very widespread cowardice, unfortunately (although that's not valid as an excuse).

Two hours later, I'm at the entrance to the Rovira i Virgili, waiting for her. As soon as I arrive, I meet a friend of my husband's. Cornadó, the photographer who took my photo for my book. He seems listless. He's just finished an exhibition and is in the throes of the anti-climax. He tells me that after a period of «looking outwards», he needs some time to «look inwards».

The problems people have! I tell him I understand. But I don't feel too sorry for him. He's a civil servant. He can afford it. My husband, who works like a mule and is self-employed, can't allow him-

self those «outwards» and «inwards» periods. If he isn't constantly on the go he can't pay any wages.

But obviously I don't tell him that. He's a very pleasant guy. Very smiley, he has a look around and asks me what I'm doing there. This... I tell him I'm waiting for a friend. I don't think he's one of the politically incorrect. I'd better not tell him anything else.

And Elisabet isn't here. I look at the clock on the other side of Imperial Tarraco square and it's already late. Naturally. Too much for her, I think. Inviting an *independentista*! But for a few seconds I had underestimated her: there she is courageously pushing forward. She really is what I call a woman, not like Mrs. Ferrusola¹²! She kisses me hello while making some nervous gestures when she sees Ricomà, who heads up the PP electoral list in Tarragona, appear next to us. Maybe it really is all too much. There's a crowd of us now. I just think that, if we're lucky, nobody will see us. We're not exactly in the centre and it's already late. My friend must be praying that nobody she knows will pass by. I'm almost praying for the same thing myself.

Vain hope! The Euclidean laws govern the macrocosm and the quantum laws the microcosm. But Murphy's laws are the only ones that are infallible whatever the time and place. We don't spend more than a quarter of an hour tops at the door, but half of Tarragona passes by. Two people in total. Half of Tarragona, like I said. First, Cornadó; now, a friend of us both, Marilú.

She greets us with a couple of kisses. At no time does she suspect that we have the slightest connection to the disturbing group forming around us («is that Ricomà?»). It's unthinkable.

12. *TN*: Marta Ferrusola Lladós (Barcelona, June 28th, 1935) is a Spanish businesswoman. Known to the public for being the wife of the politician, Jordi Pujol, former president of the Catalan region. Along with her husband and children, she has been indicted for corruption.

—What are you two doing, here?

—Well... you know...

—Have you seen who's standing next to you? —she says, thinking we're in Cloud Cuckoo-land and need help.

—Hmmm....

—But, what are you here for?

—There's a conference...

—Yes, a conference...

—What conference?

There's no way out: she wants to know. Apart from being beautiful, she's an educated woman, a distinguished professional. Always so busy yet now it seems she has nothing to do. Bad luck. There's no choice but to face the music: courage.

—Someone's coming to talk about the Plan Ibarretxe —we say as if it were the most normal thing in Tarragona and «entre nous».

—I'm sorry?

—Do you want to come?

—Ah, well why not... —she says, *maladroitly*.

That means she hasn't fully understood. She's only taken in the “conference” part. God help me.

We go inside. We go inside together with a certain degree of bewilderment. Predictably, there's just a handful of people. Marilú says she'll sit at the back because she'll need to leave early. Yeah, yeah, early. We don't quite believe her: we suspect that she smells a rat. Her head is coming out of the clouds.

I'm feeling more and more repentant. I've just moved to Tarragona and have barely made four friends and after today, I won't have any. It was not a good idea to come here with a nationalist. Especially with the unexpected latest recruit.

Elisabet is straining her neck and scrutinising every face present,

expecting them all to transform into Tejeros any minute. And since I'm all empathy, I'm a sort of emotional Zelig, I become infected with the same thing. I also start to think everyone looks very strange. In general.

The mobile phone of one of the guys in the front row rings while Mr. Barrera is in full speech. Instead of quickly turning it off, the guy starts talking. In a low voice, it's true, but it's perfectly audible to everyone. Elisabet glances at me and we understand each other perfectly: he's bad-mannered. He could only be a PP supporter. Everyone knows what these people are like. They're not like us, what will become of us?

Meanwhile, Mr. Barrera gives an impeccable and unimpeachable presentation of the trials and tribulations suffered by the non-nationalists in the Basque Country and gives his opinion of the Plan Ibarretxe. I completely agree. But my friend completely disagrees: I can tell by the snorts that escape her.

And when we leave, she explains it to me. While she admits how much those people who are threatened must suffer and the unfairness of the situation, the way she sees it, somehow they go looking for it. Yes, who in their right minds would be pro-Spanish? It's like being a traitor.

The victims are to blame for being wrong and stubborn. That's the conclusion I reach.

October 31st

I get an e-mail:

Hi, Teresa,

I have recovered, yes. And I didn't tell you! This morning, over coffee I bumped into someone who was at the conference yesterday. Until last Thursday, he'd barely glance in my direction; today he didn't stop bobbing up and down at me until I said hello. Will he think I'm in his tribe now?

Elisabet

November 1st

I meet a friend, Mariona, who has read my book. She says that in spite of being right, we shouldn't attach too much importance to some of the «nonsense people come up with».

My novel is about a young man and woman of nearly forty who have a sexual relationship. In spite of their strong attraction, they belong to different worlds and that leads to spectacular clashes. He is an astrophysicist and rationalist. She is a «rebirthing therapist», an esoteric practise that claims some emotional issues can be resolved by reliving the moment of birth.

In the book, there's a whole parade of things that heaps of people believe in: clairvoyance, astrology... even appearances of the Virgin Mary. I was trying to get people to defend themselves from practices claiming to be scientific. With what tools? Fundamentally, with reason and critical thinking.

For instance, in the face of astrology we should ask ourselves: why is there still debate about whether or not it's a hoax 4000 years on? How can the arbitrary relationship between stars which, moreover, depends on the observer's viewpoint, have any influence on humans? And, if it does influence us, how does it do so? What sort of mechanism is this influence based on? Does it have any unit of measurement? There is a whole host of questions marks that make astrology

suspect. In fact, suffice to ask ourselves why each astrologist says something different in every newspaper.

Mariona calls this the «nonsense people come up with». Fine, as if I didn't know that she has also gone to see the odd psychic and believes that the majority of alternative medicines and treatments are useful. And that's the least of it, let everyone spend their money on what they want. But to believe without any grounds is not a free ride for anybody and can be dangerous.

To think that the stars influence our lives might be innocent if it went no further. But the belief in supernatural powers has led and will lead more than one person to fall into the hands of sects or individuals who will go on to ruin their lives. I know people who have allowed themselves to be led up the garden path by opportunists telling them their houses were haunted and they needed «a cleansing». This «nonsense», if not reported, ends up becoming part of the landscape. Impregnating everything.

We live in a privileged society in terms of standards of living and respect for individual rights. But we have to defend these things daily. Obscurantism, in any of its forms, enslaves us.

November 2nd

They said on TV that the prince of Spain is going to marry a journalist: a really pretty 31-year-old girl, who is divorced. All of a sudden, this television presenter has become a celebrity. Even an «historic» character.

There are two types of people: those who will go down in history and the «anonymous citizens», which is what the TV journalists call the rest of us. Of course, we're better off being anonymous than pop-

ular in the way of some. Though you never know. There is comfort in the words of Michael Shermer, a science writer and editor-in-chief of *Skeptic* magazine:

The key to historical transcendence is that since you cannot know when in the sequence you are (since history is contiguous) and what effects present actions may have on future outcomes, positive change requires that you choose your actions wisely—all of them. What you do tomorrow could change the course of history, even if only long after you are gone. The alternatives to this scenario—apathy about one's effect on others or belief in the existence of another life for which science provides no proof—may lead one to miss something of profound importance in this life.

Choose your actions «wisely». Who knows if right now somebody is changing the world? The promoter of science, Robert Wright, said that nowadays Darwin is Darwin, whereas Wallace, who was at least as important as him at the time, is just an asterisk. Shakespeare also spoke of the same thing: «Ignorant of the story being written, men ignore the consequences of their acts».

Perhaps that is the true «meaning of life». For anyone who does not have faith, it has to be.

November 3rd

—Language provides us with a specific way of seeing the world. The Catalan language shows us the world as Catalans. It gives us an identity—says Elisabet.

And I'm flabbergasted.

Elisabet's idea—and it's a belief shared by the majority of the

nationalists— is that language provides those who speak it with a particular way of seeing the world. What they call «identity». The right to a political sovereignty is based on this collective identity. This is the core of the national-sovereign thinking.

But if that were the case, what would happen with other sources of identity such as sex, for instance, or age, or profession, that so many others claim equally determine their way of seeing the world? Could a political sovereignty also arise from these identities?

The truth is that not even the first premise is real. Language does, in fact, condition the mind. Any language. The mind's development goes hand in hand with the acquisition of a language. However, the specific language —and particularly the lexicon— doesn't. The idea that language lies at the origin of a certain world view (an idea known as the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis) was rejected years ago in linguistics, although lately it is being recovered by the most extreme branches of nationalism and multi-culturalism.

Chomsky —important linguist and abominable activist who first said that, regarding language, humans have a common neurological predisposition—, taught us that we are all born with brain modules that enable us to acquire a language. That syntax is universal. That there is no one peculiar and untranslatable way of seeing the world.

One basic theory among certain people is that we come into the world as a blank slate. Society is what imprints character on us: it gives us a language that makes us Catalans or a role that makes us men or women. All discoveries made by science in recent years point in the opposite direction. Humans have a shared nature. There are few things in which the Spanish and the Tutsis do not both see themselves reflected.

November 5th

I didn't have any bread for my breakfast this morning. I like a sandwich. Sweet flavours don't appeal to me much early in the day. And since I had to go out anyway, I went to the Rovira patisserie, one of the best in Tarragona. It's just one day! There were lots of different mini-sandwiches to choose from. I stuffed my face.

When I get home a friend from Galicia calls me, Xoan. It's been so long since we spoke that we spend a good while chatting. I don't think we leave any subject untouched. In the end we talk about political parties and voting for one or the other. He always defines himself as a «lefty». I did too until recently. Now I prefer to say I'm «sceptical», and that I vote for results or objectives.

—Ok. And what about the ideology?

—Ideology? I don't have any ideology.

—Everybody has one. We all have a values system that we use to interpret the world.

I don't see it like that and I try to explain it to him. Naturally, I have a series of beliefs and values. Like everyone else. But they don't correspond to any one ideology. I consider ideologies very similar to religions: they have a corpus made up of dogmas, a sacred book and chiliastic pretensions, they postulate an ideal future of which they offer no proof. And I am not a believer. Ideology refers to a closed and dogmatic values system, an allegedly infallible recipe for governing and directing people. The Marxists believed in a sort of classless paradise. The nationalists in the fantasy that achieving independence would solve all conflicts. Ideologies are based on belief.

—Hence, you'd be hard put to find a Marxist sceptic, for example. Apart from you. —I laugh.

November 6th

Today there was a lot of controversy over the words pronounced by Mayor Oreja¹³ comparing *Esquerra Republicana* to *Batasuna*¹⁴.

I think they've gone overboard. ETA and ERC (Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya) are not the same, obviously, and the situation of the Basque Country is not the same as that of Catalonia either. But there's no doubt that both the Plan Ibarretxe and the possibility of ERC gaining government power is a risk for the unity of everyone. And I, who consider myself as much from Tarragona (now) as I am from Catalonia, as Catalan as I am Spanish, and as Spanish as I am European, do not sympathise with separatisms.

Why can't we be a modern and enlightened country like France? A country in which people can feel proud to be French and, at the same time, from Brittany for example.

I go to German class in the afternoon. I started at the end of last month. Let's see if I have the patience to continue. I don't think it's a practical idea: I can go everywhere with English. But it bugs me to go to Germany and not be able to read the menu in a restaurant.

13 *TN*: Jaime Mayor Oreja (born 12 June 1951) is a Spanish politician of the People's Party. He has served as a member in the Basque Parliament, the Spanish Parliament, and the European Parliament, as well as serving in various ministries, within both Spanish and autonomous Basque Governments. He is known for his outspoken anti-ETA rhetoric. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jaime_Mayor_Oreja.

14. *TN*: Batasuna (English: Unity) was a Basque nationalist political party based mainly in Spain that was banned in 2003, after a court ruling declared proven that the party was financing the terrorist organization ETA with public money. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Batasuna>.

And it's not like those people speak such great English either.

November 7th

In the newspaper: «Chirac “completely” shares Aznar’s stance against the Plan Ibarrexe».

The French are wonderful! They have no doubts. They also have their regional peculiarities, but union has always stronger than difference. It is a more cultured country. Hot-headedness has been the norm here for a while now.

To be a nationalist is to pathologically seek the difference between people as similar to us as... us. We say «Spanish» and there's practically nobody here in this land of ours without Spanish relatives or who themselves don't come from Spain. A while ago I read that 75% of the Catalans have a grandparent from the rest of Spain. In addition, we are one of the countries with most religious, cultural and ethnic uniformity in the world. Who are the Spanish, then?

November 8th

I am also in favour of «re-reading» the constitution as Maragall¹⁵ proposes, but to get everything superfluous out of it, everything that consecrates or acknowledges any difference in duties or rights among Spaniards, everything that confronts us, separates us, or makes us

15. *TN*: Pasqual Maragall i Mira (born 13 January 1941 in Barcelona) is a Spanish politician and was the 127th President of Generalitat de Catalunya (the autonomous government of Catalonia). He had previously been Mayor of Barcelona, from 1982 to 1997, and helped run the city's successful Olympic bid. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pasqual_Maragall.

strangers to each other.

November 9th

Sunday. We stroll along the Larga. A beautiful, endless, wild beach. It's five kilometres outside Tarragona. There's practically nobody there today.

Josep writes his surname in the wet sand: Morera. He says he didn't like it when he was little. That the other children used to laugh at him and call him «silk worm». There you go. I don't like mine much either: Giménez. Surnames with zeds are so common... And the aspiration to be different is so human. And when I say different, I mean a bit superior to the average, obviously.

November 10th

I take part in various online distribution lists. They are virtual spaces in which people with shared interests gather to talk about their interests or concerns. I've made a lot of my closest friends this way. I know some of them personally. It's harder to get to know others: they can be from any country in the world.

I receive an article published in the Argentine newspaper *Clarín* by the French philosopher, Alain Minc. Minc speaks of the French fantasies of multilateralism and the role of Europe as a perpetual point of reference for the cultural and human origin of the United States. And also of Spain and the Spanish language. He says:

Spain, the Spanishness of which currently forges a particular bond with

the United States (50 million Northern Americans of Hispanic origin), holds a cardinal advantage.

He's right. I like to think that I'm connected to a vital and big world, filled with millions of people with whom, through my Catalan and Spanish sides, I share language and culture. I will never understand those who would like this to be a sort of Andorra. If France, in which we see ourselves reflected so much, had fifty million French-Americans in the United States, they would not let it go unexploited. Of course, in France there are no schools that teach history differently according to the region. That's not how you build a country, and they, being more cultured than we are, know it.

In a previous book, *Le Machine Égalitaire*, Alain Minc expressed astonishment that we should be promoting a European Union when the schools in France and Germany were still teaching history in an incompatible way, emphasising the irreconcilable historical differences between the two countries. I don't know what he'd say if he knew that in Catalonia, the Basque Country and the rest of Spain nothing is being done to reach a common perspective of history that underlines all that we share.

But just for saying that here, you'd be called a «PP fan», «Aznar-ist» or a «fascist» directly.

November 11th

I haven't heard anything from Elisabet. I'm feeling guilty. Maybe she hasn't managed to get over the contamination of the PP followers at the Barrera conference. Poor thing.

Today, on «Skepticos», one of the lists I participate in, we spoke

of Israel's right «to exist». It sounds crazy to debate about whether a country has the right to exist or not, but that's the way it is with Israel. There's a person on the list who, in spite of knowing that the State of Israel was created based on a United Nations resolution (decreeing the partition of Palestine), claims that since this organization exists to maintain peace and not to create countries, Israel doesn't have any «real» right to exist. And he isn't remotely fazed. On the one hand, he is questioning a resolution of one of the highest authorities on the planet. And on the other, he appears to believe that there are countries that have always existed, in which the people have been there since the start of time. And that these countries do have a «real» right. I ask what this «real» right—that he also calls «natural»—is, and which countries have it. And, of course, he is unable to respond. Naturally, all countries have been created based on invasions, migrations, usurpations, etc. Israel, in fact, would be one of the few created with the approval of a supranational organisation. To which he answers:

—I have all the right in the world to declare myself anti-Zionist and to debate the creation of the State of Israel.

Nobody's stopping you: go ahead. There are people who, like him, believe that Zionism is still an open option. It's like saying you disagree with the conquest of America. Zionism promoted the creation of a state for the Jewish people. And it was created in the 40's and generations of Israelites have been born there now. End of story. In any case, why continue to talk about the origin of the state of Israel? Does anybody talk about the origins of Sweden? Or Morocco, which obtained its independence in 1956 and still says the Western Sahara, as well as Ceuta and Melilla, belong to it?

November 12th

I honestly believe that Tarradellas was the best president Catalonia has had and, possibly, the best it will ever have. I'm reading the book *Memorias de un bufón*, by Albert Boadella. I've found it in Spanish in the public library here and I find it so interesting that I'd like to include an extract here:

Old Tarradellas was an exception to the tradition of mad presidents. President Macià was a soldier in the Spanish army, he was completely deranged and tried to invade the Catalonia of Primo de Rivera with 200 men from Prats de Molló. In the belief that the people of the towns and villages would join him. Afterwards, as president, he declared the independence of Catalonia but naturally, neither the invasion nor the independence had any success. His successor, Companys headed up the rebellion of October 6th in 1934 against the conservative governor of the Republic, foolishly believing that the people of Catalonia would take to the streets and risk their skin. A resounding embarrassment given that only the anarchists might have done something like that, but naturally they didn't feel represented by the Generalitat¹⁶ either. At present, Jordi Pujol offers the perfect image of an active and clever, patient president who considers himself smarter than the psychiatrist. The language, the gestures, the tics, the way he treats Catalonia as if it were his therapy exercise..., all that perfectly confirms the portrait of the president who fits with my theory. Those who know Maragall well, categorically claim he will be the next president of the Generalitat. I don't think it's unlikely either as superficially he seems to meet all the essential requirements for the post. They all present the same pathology in the land of delirium: a paranoid Messianism that leads them to rise up as

16. *TN*: Generalitat is the name given to the autonomous Government of Catalonia.

avengers of historical injustices; to do so they fabricate a virtual country and refuse to accept the Catalonia which, fortunately or unfortunately, they have been born into.

All the parties here promote this «virtual» country. I have no-one to vote for.

November 13th

Atrocious. According to a study, the latest textbooks created by the Palestinian National Authority instil students with the «need» for a «holy war» and for «martyrdom». All to «defend the religion» and «expel the imperialists» who supposedly exploit the Islamic countries and pervert them by criticising the laws of repudiation and polygamy or labelling inhuman the punishments, the flagellations, the mutilations and the public executions permitted under Islamic law.

According to these books, the jihad is a moral obligation of all believers, who must take it up when a Muslim governor calls on them to do so. The believers also have the obligation to make contributions for the purchase of weapons, boats, planes or «anything else those organizing the jihad need to defeat the enemy, to glorify the name of Allah and to strengthen faith». What madness! And, in spite of it, the European Union, including Spain, has not stopped subsidising these schools. The European bureaucrats turn the other way and limit themselves to giving Arafat the taxpayers' money and diplomatic excuses. In my opinion, Arafat is not a solution to anything, but rather the problem, the main obstacle. In spite of some of his words, he does not want peace but to throw the Jews into the sea. Or to continue playing the victim to fill his coffers.

A disaster for the Palestinians.

November 14th

Friday. We've had a fabulous afternoon, with a clean and sharp atmosphere, like fresh lemons. The Rambla Nova is packed with people and it all has the air of a big village. There's no merit there: Tarragona is a big village.

Elisabet and I decided we wanted to go for a walk and a chat. We arranged to meet in a café. One of those franchises, meaning decent standards and decoration made from a mould. We sit down and order some herbs for me and a coffee for her, and then have a lively and pleasant conversation. But not for too long. The same way they say that golf is a pleasant stroll ruined by a ball, our encounters are pleasant conversations ruined by a... nation.

—What nationalism does is insist on the differences (the blessed differential fact). However, the similarities, that which unites us and we can share, it's as if that didn't exist —I say piously.

—We are different and we need to defend that.

—But we are also the same, aren't we?

—The language...

—What? Its maximum service is communication. You even invent that it creates a special way of seeing the world. That's a scientifically proven falsehood.

—I don't want to lose my temper.

Pity. Me neither. If I did, I'd keep going and tell you that the only legally defensible nation, based on a feeling of emancipation, is one made up of free and equal citizens. And, the way I see it, the more people it includes the better.

There are peoples in Spain in the same way that the Spanish people exists. Just like someday the peoples of Europe and the European people will exist. I say «someday» because, naturally, there hasn't been time to create the mutual complicity and familiarity that the peoples of Spain (or those of France or those of the United Kingdom) share. Half the Spanish population is married or has some relation in another region or province. Now we are starting to see people married to a Russian or a Bulgarian. But it's not the same.

In spite of this reality, the nationalists weave the fiction of a mythical homeland and strive to forge a bond of belonging that supports the separatist claims with the idea, not to mention dogma, that they suffer intolerable, almost colonial-style, pressure from Madrid. An hallucination they want to render collective.

Fortunately, no international organisation has swallowed it. The fact is that the invocation of a legendary golden age of the ancestral Basque, Galician, Catalan, Breton or druid surnames is already very trite and the majority of countries are immune to it. They are perfectly aware that the falsely historical anecdotes stand in for real data, and pseudoscience for genetic science, which is what really has something rigorous to say about migrations, race and other pretexts used to hide prejudices under.

It's very dark by the time we leave the café. In spite of everything, we're in a good mood. And the fact is that true to our girlish side, we've spent the last half hour talking about all sorts of clothes and accessories. She is a professional, after all.

First things first.

November 15th

Saturday. I've had to go to Barcelona to run some errands. Since I was there, and still under the spell of my conversation on fashion with Elisabet yesterday, I visit each and every one of my favourite stores.

I have friends who find it hard to see things they like; they always find something wrong with the season's displays. I have the misfortune to like almost everything. If I try something on and it looks more or less ok, I'm unlikely to leave without buying it. Better not go there

Josep can't come until late. He has to work. He'll come by train, that way we won't have to go back in two cars. I'll pick him up at the station on Paseo de Gracia and we'll go and stay at my parent's house.

I have lunch with Mariona, whose husband is away on a business trip. Mariona is a friend from when we were both «free». She was single and I was separated. We used to go out a lot on the prowl. Now, funnily enough, she's also become strongly nationalist. There must be an epidemic. She wasn't before. At least, neither of us ever talked about it. We had never, ever talked about politics and even less so nationalisms. We didn't have partners and had other things on our minds.

Now, since she got married and had two daughters, I don't know if it's because her husband has these fixations, but she's adopted a surprising line. Similar to Elisabet's. We end up having a very bad-tempered conversation. Clearly, I'm on a run of bad luck this weekend.

—We are an oppressed people.

—And why are you the only ones who notice? I mean, if there really were a situation of oppression, the rest of us would notice it too, don't you think?

—This is a place that has been and continues to be occupied and

plundered by the Spanish and French states.

—Well I don't see that at all.

—Well, all you have to do is look.

—It's madness. This reminds me of those people who go up to Montserrat at night and claim they see UFOs. Nobody else sees any, just them. And they, by the way, are the only ones to gain anything from the whole story.

—Are you telling me that we're hallucinating?

—I'm only saying that the *Esquerra* and *CiU*¹⁷ voters are the only ones to have this feeling. Because there are different reasons for voting for independence, including putting a spoke in the works or being different.

—Putting a spoke in the works is what you're doing by denying you are Catalan.

—What do you mean I deny being Catalan? You're the one who said that!

Clearly, calling the oppression imaginary makes me a «renegade». I'm afraid I've been sent down to the second division in her eyes.

November 16th

We spend the weekend with my parents. They live in a lovely place, with a pretty walk downstream and, in the distance, miles of park. From the top floor of their house you can see a big green pasture

17. *TN*: Convergence and Union (Catalan: *Convergència i Unió*, *CiU*) was a Catalan nationalist electoral alliance in Catalonia, Spain. It was a federation of two constituent parties, the larger Democratic Convergence of Catalonia (CDC) and its smaller counterpart, the Democratic Union of Catalonia (UDC). It was dissolved on June 17th, 2015. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Convergence_and_Union.

spread out before you and a small chapel. We open the window and look on a Vayreda¹⁸ landscape. What more could you ask for?

November 17th

Carod said that CiU was *Cosa Nostra*. Maybe he's right. But it's depressing to see how a man like him manages to stir everything up. His idea of a government based on unity is to get rid of PP. And they say that as if it were the most natural thing in the world. No problem.

The Catalan political class has implicitly accepted a very dangerous distinction: adversaries and enemies. The nationalist parties are adversaries: they compete among themselves, they are rivals in the political struggles, but they belong to the same club. PP have been positioned, or the intention is to position them, outside the borders. They have been excluded from *Catalan-ness*, and in doing so democracy has been undermined. Similar to the strategy my friend Mariona has tried on with me. She doesn't do it in bad faith, but the bad part of anything is contagious.

We had already seen very worrying signs before now. In the local elections in May, the PP candidates suffered public aggressions and the rest of the political forces didn't react as categorically as the facts demanded. Somehow, the idea that these people deserved it was in the air.

18. *TN*: Joaquim Vayreda i Vila (23 May 1843 - 31 October 1894) was a Spanish landscape painter. He was originally influenced by the Barbizon school, but later became one of the founders of the Olot school. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Joaquim_Vayreda.

November 18th

When Tarradellas arrived in Catalunya, he was an elderly man, yet he helped guide the transition in those troubled times. As Arcadi says in his book *Contra Catalunya*, «during the transition, he was responsible for maintaining the anti-Francoist image from an advanced but supportive Catalonia».

Thanks to Tarradellas, Catalonia gained itself unrivalled prestige. His biggest shortcoming was not to create a party of his own. It would perhaps be the one I'd be supporting now.

I find it hard to accept the increase in independentism. Tarradellas was pro-independence, he didn't try to deceive me. But over time he changed. That's what makes him a person who is intelligent enough to understand that what might work in one period won't necessarily work in another. At present, the political and economic situations have greatly improved. We have an incomparable level of autonomy and self-government in Europe, but now it seems it's time for independence. It wouldn't be if we had a leader like him.

November 20th

I went to Barcelona, for my dental check-up. I have almost all my medical appointments there. I still haven't got used to Tarragona in that sense. Bit by bit.

On my way to get the car I pass by a delicatessen and go inside. I can't resist. I love preserves, vinegars, oils... that are a tad select. Now I'm in front of a shelf of spices and, what are my eyes seeing?: a brand called Fabra, with the Catalan flag. In Caprabo there's also a milk brand called *La Nostra* or something like that. I don't know

what people would say if they saw spices with the Spanish flag. Or if they'd laugh cruelly at a milk called *La Nuestra*.

Any impartial observer will inevitably realise that Spain is not currently a place with an abundance of demonstrations of nationalist affection or overexposure to patriotic symbols. Whereas in Catalonia, the *senyera*¹⁹ is even used to seal jars of spices.

There was a big controversy a while back because the Minister Trillo erected a huge Spanish flag in Plaza Colón in Madrid. There's no doubt that it's a flag to be reckoned with. But, let's be realistic, there's no comparison to the ones you see around here. We are streets ahead of it. They say the longest is the one Esquerra Republicana carried to the Olympic Games in Barcelona. It was three kilometres and obtained the world record. An awful lot of work went into sewing that.

And the funny thing is that they talk about Spanish nationalism as if it were a big thing. There's no comparison to the nationalism deployed in our historical regions. No comparison. Here the weatherman gives the forecast from Perpignan. Can anyone imagine the Spanish government treating the Philippines or Cuba like that? Sometimes, when I say I'm not nationalist, people say that I'm a Spanish nationalist then. Because people don't seem capable of conceiving a world without nationalist feelings. It's as if I were to say, surrounded by Catholics, that I'm not a believer and they were to

19. *TN*: is the official flag of the Spanish Autonomous Communities of Catalonia, Aragón, the Balearic Islands, Valencia and the historically Catalan-speaking city of Alghero in Sardinia. It is also included on the flags or coats of arms of Pyrénées-Orientales, Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur, the flag of Roussillon, Capcir, Vallespir and Provence in France and is a quarter of the coat of arms of Andorra. All these territories were, at one time or other, part of the Crown of Aragón, which was ruled by the Count of Barcelona, and today the parts of these territories where the Catalan language is still spoken are known as the "Països Catalans" or Catalan countries. <https://www.barcelonas.com/catalan-flags.html>.

reply: «Ah, in that case you must be a Protestant».

Well no sir: neither Catholic, nor Protestant, nor nationalist. I simply don't believe, that's all.

November 21st

My «national» jars are in the pantry. Nobody can claim I'm not patriotic.

November 23rd

It's a splendid day and we're going for lunch on the beach. Tarragona is fabulous, with each day that passes I feel gladder to live here. We eat just 10 metres from the water's edge. In the sun. Afterwards we read the newspaper and my Pepe half falls asleep.

I've convinced Elisabet to sign up to «Skepticos» and «Politikastra», my online lists. We don't have anyone who votes Esquerra Republicana, and she'll cause a lot of debate. On the other hand, she's a very intelligent woman and she's capable of clearly expressing her opinions. Let's see if we can get anything clear out of it.

I'll tell Marc too. He's another friend of mine who's also on the list and he hasn't shown himself for days. He's a somewhat sceptical CiU supporter.

November 24th

I write Marc an email.

Marc, damn it, where are you? I have a girl from Esquerra and maybe someone else who'd like to give a sceptical talk on Politikastra. But there doesn't seem to be anybody...

Teresa

He replies:

Ahhhhhhh!! I'm sorry, Teresa, but a series of events have kept me away. Work, basically (the work crisis to be precise). Thumbs up for the debate with the Esquerra girl, although my convictions have suffered a bit of a (not very radical) change. I had the brilliant idea of canvassing for PP in the last elections. And... what a surprise, I met the grass roots militants of the party: God almighty!!! What a bunch!!! I swear that Franco was a lefty by comparison. If you like I'll explain more about it on Politikastra and that way I won't repeat myself, but I can tell you that I suffered a huge shock. And there was I thinking they were all like Piqué:-), but there's no comparison between the PP and the CiU militants. Even PSC²⁰ seems more reasonable. The ERC people seem cool, trendy... but the PP guys... I mean, the average age must be 60 and one of them (from Torredembarra, by the way), when he was young was in favour of not having any *mossos*²¹, in fact, to be exact, among his other curious ideas, he was in favour of them being «exterminated». My God, girl. Not to mention that they were

20. *TN*: The Socialists' Party of Catalonia (Catalan: Partit dels Socialistes de Catalunya, PSC-PSOE official acronym) is a social-democratic political party in Catalonia, Spain resulting from the merger of two parties, the Socialist Party of Catalonia-Regrouping led by Josep Pallach i Carolà and the Socialist Party of Catalonia-Congress and also the Catalan Federation of PSOE. It is the Catalan branch of the Spanish Socialist Workers' Party (PSOE). https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Socialists'_Party_of_Catalonia.

21. *TN*: The *Mossos d'Esquadra* are the autonomous police force of Catalonia.

all Spanish speakers. Oh, my dear Teresa, I am not one of them. And you either, methinks. I love Catalonia and they didn't seem to. They spoke more of Madrid than Barcelona. Maybe I'm wrong but the trauma was so great that I don't know if I'll ever fully get over it.

But, enough, I'm beginning to drone. Talk on Politikastra?

Yours,

Marc

It was very late when I received this and I'm not going to reply. But it left me worried. There's something niggling me.

I'll think about it tomorrow.

November 25th

I've just re-read Marc's email more slowly. I know now what was niggling me yesterday. What do the sorts of people you meet in a political party have to do with the fact of voting or not for that party? I know Elisabet, who votes ERC, I adore her, I love the way she is, she's my friend and... I wouldn't vote Esquerra for anything in the world. What does it have to do with anything? This isn't like joining a club, is it?

November 26th

Tarragona is invaded by pigeons. They filthy the façades, make us slip on the streets... Now I'm having tea and I see the cheeky rotters strolling calmly all over my terrace. They trigger an immediate persecution reflex in me. They have me well-trained.

The news. I read an article in *El País* newspaper on the Ulster peace process. Over 3660 deaths in thirty years. Rogelio Alonso, a researcher, has just published his book *Matar por Irlanda. El IRA y la lucha armada*, in which he poses the question of whether so many years of conflict have served any purpose. The author says: It has been a failure. There's an abyss between what they aspired to and what they've achieved.» There's an important moment in the book. A repentant IRA terrorist acknowledges that he was a victim of indoctrination and explains an enlightening anecdote: «I remember when I was arrested in 1974. An RUC policeman asked me: "Why are you Republican?" And I said to him: "To unite Ireland". He said: "Boy, why do you want to unite Ireland?". I simply stopped talking and realised that I didn't know why I wanted a united Ireland».

Here, if we were to ask our *independentistas* why they want independence or what would be good about it, they wouldn't know either. Or maybe they would. I don't want to always think the worst. I'll ask Elisabet. I'll say to her: Why should we want independence? What will we gain from it?

Better to ask the question sooner rather than later, when someone has died.

November 29th

I'd really like ITER, the international fusion reactor they want to create here, to go ahead. It would be great for Tarragona.

I've been angry with ERC lately, but they make it even worse today. They've opposed this project because of the «hazardous waste» it could generate. What waste are these apostles of modern and progressive Catalanism talking about? The little plastic cups dispensed

by the coffee machines?

Nuclear fusion does not generate any waste. Or very little. When a person is irrational, they're irrational about everything.

November 30th

Elisabet and I met Àngela Guiamet, a friend we have in common. A lovely girl who, like me, is also a subscriber of Friends of the Opera of Tarragona. By the by, she tells us that she knows Carod-Rovira's wife. After the elections, she met her on the street and expressed her support and said something along the lines of «not making her suffer». Mrs. Carod assured her that «everything would be fine».

Wonderful. I feel much more relaxed now.

I need to study my German, I have an exam.

December 1st

In the Basque Country and the rest of the «historical regions», they insist fervently on past injuries and creating a breach where previously there was none. So we're going backwards: from integration to disintegration. And it's so hard to build! The close bond between the Basques or the Catalans and the rest of Spain is not just economic: it affects all levels of society, history and culture. Even Sabino Arana²² acknowledged that, due to his racist and separatist vision, he considered it a reason to very bitterly complain. He used to say:

22. *TN*: Sabino Arana, (26 January 1865 - 25 November 1903), was a Basque writer. He was the founder of the Basque Nationalist Party (PNV) and father of Basque nationalism. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sabino_Arana.

Do the *euskeriano*²³ and the *maketo*²⁴ form two opposing groups? No! They are friends, they love each other like brothers, though nobody can explain this union of two such antagonistic races.

And to think that there's a street in Barcelona dedicated to that madman! A guy who indoctrinated people with the poisonous idea that the Basques were a superior race humiliated by the *maketos*, of inferior race.

At present, this childish ambition is no longer mentioned in public (another matter entirely is what happens inside certain families or in nationalist circles). But it is not exactly dead. And it's a mistake to think that this hogwash is only widespread among primitive and basic people. In the same way there are people with degrees capable of believing in UFOs and Virgin appearances, the ethnic nationalist also exists in the best families. Years of propaganda and indoctrination in schools and the media have done a great deal of damage in closed and traditionalist societies like the Basque, and they've left their mark here too.

In Catalonia, history is taught with an emphasis on former grievances, whether true or imaginary, and we are worse off now than we were twenty years ago. We are not closer to the Spanish, but further. Last July, the European Council warned that the communication of culture and knowledge based on a nationalist concept that excludes and offends the non-nationalists, occasionally reaches «racist and xenophobic» proportions. It also indicates that a «significant part» of the non-nationalist population in the Basque Country is the «object of social exclusion, threats and violence that occasionally result

23. *TN*: Neologism for native of the Basque Country.

24. *TN*: derogatory term used in the Basque Country to refer to immigrants from other regions of Spain and who do not speak Basque.

in fatal victims».

December 2nd

Fernando Savater²⁵ and Arcadi Espada are authentic models of honest and independent people in my eyes. I really admire Arcadi. When I read his book *Contra Cataluña* (a book that doesn't defend any stance «against» Catalonia, rather the contrary), I decided that I had to meet him. Now that I know him, I admire him even more.

I read an article a while back that mentioned him, labelling him «civilized centre-left». Taking it upon themselves to hand out the “civilized” certificates.

December 3rd

I don't form part of *Basta Ya*, but I try to take part in everything I can. Now I've found out that on the 13th, there's going to be a protest against the *Plan Ibarretxe* in San Sebastián and that there's going to be a bus going from Tarragona. I think it's important to support them and I let by friends know by email, including Marc.

I imagine that you can't, but I think I will go.

25. *TN*: Fernando Savater is one of Spain's most popular living philosophers, as well as an essayist and celebrated author. Born in San Sebastián, he was an Ethics professor at the University of the Basque Country for over a decade. He has taken an active part in several organizations engaged with peace in the Basque Country and against terrorism and Basque nationalism, such as *Movimiento por la Paz y la No Violencia*, *Gesto por la Paz*, *Foro Ermua*, and currently *¡Basta Ya!*. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fernando_Savater.

I'm already on the attack in Politikastra.

And he replies:

Thanks, Teresa, for the invitation but even if I had time I wouldn't go. I'm going through a political identity crisis. Since I met the true PP people (the Grass-roots militants) on election day, I can't look at them in the same way. Imagine the impact they've had on me when I'm starting to believe in Carod. God, it's hard to know what to think.

When I have a clearer idea of things I'll try to express it on Politikastra.

Enjoy the journey and let us know what the experience is like.

Talk soon,

Marc

We'll see if that's true, you've been promising it for days. Look at him, with his "identity crisis". Pity. If someone close to CiU were to slightly acknowledge Basta Ya it would have been promising. It was probably too much to ask. We'll have to make do with things as they are. Marc in any case is an atypical CiU supporter. But then he's a sceptic. Schizophrenic but sceptical. Because, in any case, a nationalist sceptic is an oxymoron. A contradiction in terms. However, at the very least Marc tries to be somewhat empirical: he goes out onto the street and investigates. I'm sure they have nobody else like him.

And the poor thing has come up against the «authentic» PP supporters. For the record, I do understand him. What I don't get is what this has to do with the protest against the *Plan*, when he himself is against it. He doesn't need to share his sandwiches with anyone from PP.

There's a superstitious terror of coinciding with them. Everyone admires the bravery of Fernando Savater, but they reproach the fact

that he «converges» with PP on some points.

In my opinion, we seem to compromise on ethics in favour of aesthetics.

December 4th

I have a good friend from Madrid: Fernando Peregrín. He was vice-president of the sceptic's association I collaborate with. He's extremely cultured and a really good person. It's been a while now since I've heard from him and I miss him. The last time was in the summer, when he sent me this:

How would you like to be a BRIGHT?

Come out of the closet!

Fernando

He was referring to a new movement that's been created in the United States. It's called the *bright*. It's a movement of atheists inspired by the gays who have «come out of the closet». It claims the right to express ourselves as such without any fear whatsoever, and to make our voice and our influence heard publicly, in the same way that political, social or religious organisations do.

The same way the word gay came to replace homosexual as it is a dark, pedantic word associated with derogatory terms such as queer, etc., the word bright aims to replace atheist because it is considered too loaded with negative echoes. To say «I'm an atheist» is as weighted down as to say «I'm a homosexual».

Which is why the term bright has been chosen; it's short, positive and refers to two concepts in English: bright like light or bright in

the sense of being clever. The risk lies in it sounding too presumptuous because of this last connotation. Two of the drivers of the manifestos announcing the movement are Richard Dawkins and Daniel Dennet. The former is a zoologist and the latter a philosopher. Both Darwinists, evolutionary scientists and excellent writers.

In any case, this is what has brought my friend to mind. Say something, Fernando, we miss you!

December 7th

I've been travelling in Tenerife with the Friends of the Opera of Tarragona. It's a very well-run association by Anna and Luis Mezquida. When I moved here I was determined to become integrated into the so-called «social fabric». In Spain, social life is not easy. Despite what people say, the Mediterranean countries are family-oriented, tribal, not very open to the world. In Catalonia, it's taken to extremes.

I'm not the only one to say so. I'm reading *Una vida entre burgueses*, by Manuel Ortínez, and he himself, member of the Catalan bourgeoisie, states that even the Madrid aristocracy is far more permeable than the Catalan middle-class. He should know, he has experienced both. We are more closed people here. And in a small city like Tarragona it would have taken me time I don't have to start making friends. I decided straight away to join something. I'm rubbish at sports; that excluded tennis clubs and such. But the Friends of the Opera is good. I like music and I like travelling. I've met all sorts of people in it: architects, salaried employees, industrial workers, shopkeepers, doctors...

I also met a distant relative, another Barbat. He has the same second surname as me. I met him on our first trip, to Stuttgart. He

asked me about my grandfather's second surname and where I was from. He's writing a sort of family history.

Friends of the Opera... Fortunately, the majority of the members of this group have a relaxed attitude to our activity. Because there's always a risk. All those people who talk about cultured music very frequently in reality are making themselves feel «delightfully complacent by differentiating themselves from others», as Gustavo Bueno says. Of course. It's part of the game. Some play with more self-irony and others with less.

December 9th

«Boadella is far more than an irreverent rule-breaker and tireless provocateur; he is a free spirit.»

So says Isabel San Sebastián in her interview of Albert Boadella in the newspaper, *El Mundo*. I'm not going to reproduce it here as it's too long. But it will be an underlying theme for a few days. To me, Boadella represents the firm, critical, rational, ironic Catalan, capable of laughing at himself. A man who is local yet cosmopolitan at the same time. He fits with the «eccentric» individual described by Stuart Mill that serves as an introduction to this diary. Moreover, he's a man interested in the political reality of our country and the encumbered direction it has taken in recent years. The type of human I'd like to see more often among my fellow countrymen.

December 10th

Consuelo, that friend who has such faith and who invited me to her daughter's baptism, called me. We chatted about a number of things and when we said goodbye, she said to me:

—Goodbye, “atheist church-burner”.

I was flabbergasted.

—You're not serious, are you?

—Don't take offence, I'm not referring to you. But you atheists are the ones who burnt the churches in the Civil War.

Really, I have one friend stranger than the next. This one was moderately religious and now she's talking about the Civil War. What is the world coming to. It seems like everyone is becoming more and more radical around here. The nationalists, the religious...

She went too far. I didn't have time to react. I should have explained that I define myself as a sceptic atheist. Because scepticism, rationalism or critical thinking are the steps prior to a view of the world that almost always includes atheism, and is based on the idea that a statement is methodically not considered true until duly proven, «judgement is suspended» until the definitive data has been gathered, and all assertions on reality are provisional in the sense that they leave room for potential improvement as the information about them becomes more exact.

Critical thinking comes first because, otherwise, one could laugh at someone who believes in an infinitely good God who nonetheless allows the massacre in Rwanda or someone capable of believing that the alignment of the stars forges the personality. Or that class struggle is the driver of history and that this will end in a Worker's Paradise (that is, if any are left).

I have nothing to do with the people who burnt churches. If there's one thing I'm not, it's anti-clerical. They are not the right models for me. History, with its teaching and its examples, belongs

to everyone, and each individual is entitled to choose their moral or formative affiliation. That is the privilege of people who consider themselves free.

But now there's an irrational and fundamentalist sector that demands (to boot!) that atheists take on a burden that is not theirs. I choose my heroes and my moral tales. The sort of fanatic who burns churches in the name of Leninist Marxism or the concept of free conscience put forward by Savonarola is as removed from my way of thinking as a crazed warlock.

December 11th

I'm going to German. There's a girl in my class I really like: Berta. Her husband manages the Chinchilla photography studio, one of the oldest shops in Tarragona, from what I've heard. She's an English teacher. We always sit together and swap notes.

Afterwards I go to the gym, and on my way, I see Elisabet. She's wearing a gorgeous necklace: a chain with silver leaves. She has good taste. It's been a long time since I had a friend I could talk to about fashion and show each other «our gems». This complicity between women is great from time to time. Only when we're not talking politics, obviously.

December 12th

The idea of «irreversibility» that Maragall talks about and that everyone sees as an unstoppable march towards independence (that we don't even know the meaning of) amazes me. It smells a bit too

much of totalitarianism. Carod has said that he'll «go all out» and that he won't accept «minimum agreements». This radical Statute reform that Maragall and Carod are planning feels off.

I believe that all the political parties, particularly *PSOE*²⁶, have endowed nationalism with a respectability subject to not using violence. Of course it's worse to go around with a gun in your hand, but it's wrong to consider all political stances and ideas acceptable regardless of their level of respect for the constitutional values with the sole condition of not turning to crime to impose them. Are the totalitarian aspirations of ERC legitimate and worthy of so much attention because unlike *HB*²⁷ part of its structure is not in the hands of a band of terrorists?

I'll go to San Sebastián, to the meeting of Basta Ya against the Plan Ibarretxe. I'll do it to show my appreciation of the courage and heroism of so many people who have risked their lives or died to defend their ideas.

My Pepe doesn't like the idea one little bit. He has a cross to bear with me, poor boy. I'll have to find a way to convince him. He's impervious to the time-old tricks.

26. *TN*: The Spanish Socialist Workers' Party (Partido Socialista Obrero Español, PSOE), is a social-democratic political party in Spain. The PSOE has been in government for longer than any other political party in modern democratic Spain: from 1982 to 1996 under Felipe González; from 2004 to 2011 under José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero, and currently under Pedro Sánchez. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Spanish_Socialist_Workers'_Party.

27. *TN*: Herri Batasuna (English: Popular Unity; HB) was a far-left Basque nationalist coalition in Spain. It was founded in 1978 and defined itself as *nationalist*, left-wing, socialist, and supported the independence of the Greater Basque Country. It was re-founded as Batasuna in 2001 and subsequently outlawed by the Spanish Supreme Court for being considered the political wing of the terrorist Euskadi Ta Askatasuna (ETA). https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Herri_Batasuna.

December 13th

I haven't convinced him, even though he understands my point of view. He's great. The only one of my husbands to respect my independence and personal interests. I've been married twice before to older men because deep down I thought I'd feel better understood and protected. And now Pepe, who's my age, has given me more leeway than the other two put together. So many years wasted, so many prejudices.

He comes with me as far as Plaza Imperial Tarraco, where the bus will leave from, to give me all sorts of advice and warnings.

—Above all, watch how you go.

—Don't worry.

—Do you have your mobile phone with you?

—Yes, don't worry.

—Make sure you call when you arrive.

—Okay.

—And if things turn nasty, don't get involved.

—I wooon't.

I get on the bus and look for a seat. It's a double-decker. I doubt many more people are going by private car. As we pull out, I blow kisses out the window and we wave goodbye to each other until we're out of sight.

I get comfortable and relax. I entertain myself looking around. I check out my travel companions. I want to see if they're all from PP or what. There are two women chatting close to me. They've been living in Quebec from what I hear. I discover a unionist from *UGT*²⁸

28. *TN*: Unión General de Trabajadores (UGT, General Union of Workers) is a major Spanish trade union, historically affiliated with the Spanish Socialist Workers' Party (PSOE). https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Unión_General_de_Trabajadores

behind me, and a couple of young lawyers further back (a married couple of around thirty), PSC voters, with whom I'll get talking later. These are the travellers I'll communicate with most over the eight hours of the journey.

Shortly after starting out, little clusters of animated conversation start up. What I talk most about with my Quebec neighbours is their experience in that country. They insist that the view of independence referendums that's been communicated is highly idealized in some Spanish autonomous regions where the nationalists are in government. That they went through it and it wasn't all as rosy in the garden as we imagine. There was quite a lot of tension between the groups. Even without any gun-wielders. I'm not the least bit surprised.

We agree that separation is never easy; there are too many ties. People don't spontaneously want division, they want to open up to others. But people are often the victims of political manipulation that has the sole aim of gaining power and doesn't hesitate to exalt difference and hate. It cultivates the worst emotions. We look at each other and understand each other. Canada or Spain: people are very similar wherever you go.

The journey feels long, even though we stop every now and then to eat or rest. I imagine I'm not the only one to think about the possibility of a bomb on the bus. I notice a certain sense of alert every time we get off. 1000 fatal victims in this country make you suspicious.

What must we seem like! We're a hub of irrationality in a civilised Europe.

It's almost night-time when we arrive and we only have time to go straight to the protest. We can't even drop our bags off at the hotel.

[al_de_Trabajadores.](#)

I find the protest quite emotional. A lot of people have come from far and wide, by bus or by car. They've come because they need to express their solidarity. Even though they suffer huge incomprehension. They convey a strong sense of ethics and heroism to me.

We start out from the council. We walk along a main avenue, I don't know what it's called. I raise my face in the midst of all these people. I look around in surprise. It shocks me to see that the balconies of the streets we walk along are locked up. In Tarragona, everyone would be looking out. Here maybe they're afraid of being pointed at.

The majority of the people are either PP or PSOE supporters. I also see a very large group from the Unificación Comunista de España²⁹ carrying a huge Spanish flag, and the very odd (very well-dressed boys and girls) member of the Falange, or so it says on some cards they're handing out. I didn't even know it still existed. They must all be here.

It goes by without incident. That doesn't mean that I haven't noticed the bins (that are sealed) or the parked cars.

It's not fun.

December 14th

In the Boadella interview by Isabel San Sebastián:

—In fact, very few Catalans are seen in the Basta Ya protests in the Basque Country.

—Of course not! And it's not because we don't want to go, but because when they come back here they'll be massacred on the talk shows of Cata-

29. TN: Communist Unification of Spain (UCE).

luña Radio or the newspaper, *Avui*.

As if it were premonitory. That's exactly what happens us!

When we return from the protest, someone uses the bus microphone to read out an article that Manuel Trallero has published on *La Vanguardia* newspaper that same day. To our great surprise, we discover that on the way we had this journalist among us and that he has written a very derogatory story about our group.

Bloody hell... We all start to mentally go over what we said, where he must have been sitting, what did he look like. The final outcome is disappointment and discouragement. I suppose that Trallero is travelling more comfortably on the way back. He must think that only a shower of idiots would do this sort of killer journey by bus. The truth is that the majority of the passengers are humble people. And there is no doubt that it has been a sacrifice for everyone here. Which is why his mocking sarcasm is so disheartening.

When I arrive, I call Arcadi to tell him about the adventure. My husband isn't home and I feel like talking to someone who understands me. Like hell he does! Zero compassion. Arcadi has a good laugh. Tells me we shouldn't take any notice of the article. He knows all about this guy who does «journalistic drudgery».

Well, it's not much consolation, but it's appreciated nonetheless.

I go to bed feeling tired and sad, with Josep muttering things like «I told you so».

December 15th

All I needed was to read the paper and see that Maragall has completely lost the plot. Where does this old man spouting codswallop

like «nobody can stop the Catalans from fulfilling their dream» think he's going? What dream? Some are going to think it's the dream of independence. He's treating us like imbeciles.

I also listen to his inaugural speech on television. There are things I agree with and things I don't. But I do find one of his phrases sarcastic. He more or less says: «those who tremble and thrill at the sight of the Catalan flag as opposed to those who are hostile and indifferent».

Crikey what patriotic emotions! I recall having felt them once or twice...I remember once I was in a foreign country, I don't know where, and all of a sudden I heard a *sardana*³⁰, and a tear came to my eye. I'm sure Maragall is even less of a cry-baby than me. The same thing happens to me when I hear songs like *El cant dels ocells*. Maybe because my mother and grandmother were always very soft about these sorts of things and they passed it one to me. Even my Dad, being from Aragón, cries when he hears them. I am proud to say that neither them nor I get emotional about war songs, or war feats like *Els Segadors*³¹. It must be because we don't see ourselves with a sickle in our hands («with the blood of the Spanish we will make red ink», which one version of the little song went so far as to say).

As for Maragall's phrase, the one about «trembling and thrilling» before the flag, I think that such intimate requirements and exhortations are a bit like when you have duty sex: you lose interest. Maybe willingness is always present, but duty kills it. Whenever I've felt obliged to perform well in bed, I've lost any heat on the spot. You can of course pretend. And with patriotic feelings that's even easier. Look at all those politicians bowing to the Rafael de Casanovas³²

30. TN: A *Sardana* is a type of Catalan music and dance.

31. TN: *Els Segadors* is the official national anthem of Catalonia.

32. TN: Rafael Casanova i Comes (Moià, 1660 - Sant Boi de Llobregat,

monument, that dubious hero of September 11th: they tremble like prostitutes.

To do it out of duty takes all the pleasure out of it, to be honest.

It's a good thing that at this rate, there'll soon be Big Brother style committees or councils. I'm referring to George Orwell, obviously, and not the reality show. People like me, without any appetite for patriotic sentiment, will have a psychotherapist to re-educate us. Maybe, while we're at it, she'll even have the face of Mercedes Milá³³.

December 16th

—Look what the press says, Josep: «Carod doesn't feel comfortable in Spain».

He replies that «he couldn't give a toss». He's foulmouthed. My Pepe doesn't have such complicated troubles. Too much work. But there are people who spend a lot of their time on this. At present, a whole host of people claim they don't «feel» Spanish. Twenty or thirty years ago, when this country had lower levels of self-government

2 May 1743) was a Catalan jurist, and supporter of Charles VI, Holy Roman Emperor as a claimant to the Crown of Spain during the War of the Spanish succession. He became mayor of Barcelona and commander in chief of Catalonia during the Siege of Barcelona until he was wounded in combat while commanding La Coronela during the counterattack on the Saint Peter front on the last day of the siege, September 11, 1714. He recovered from his wounds, and after the war he continued his fight against absolutism as a lawyer. It has been claimed that he is the author of the book *Record de l'Aliança fet el Sereníssim Jordi Augusto Rey de la Gran Bretanya* (Remembrance of the Alliance to George I of Great Britain) in which Catalonia reminds England of the Treaty of Genoa and their obligation to Catalonia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rafael_Casanova.

33. TN: Mercedes Milá, a Spanish journalist and presenter of the Big Brother reality show in Spain.

than we have now, levels that no American state or other region in Europe can claim, whether it's called a *land* or anything else, anyway back then, as I was saying, nobody ever even remotely considered the idea of independence. Just a couple of madmen. You might come across one or two who claimed they didn't «feel» Spanish, but they were practically aliens. But now...

I feel less alone when I see that Boadella is shocked too. I'll let him speak, he'll do a better job than me.

P.- Define nationalism in general and Catalan in particular for me.

R.- Basically, nationalism is a tribal nostalgia. In the Catalan case, it's also a nostalgia for feudalism. We shouldn't forget that here it was King Ferdinand the Catholic who put an end to the feudal abuses through the Sentence of Guadalupe. That is, the Catalans had to turn to King Ferdinand to gain a slightly fairer land... I see it here every day. I live in a town and I see that it works under a feudal regime in which the lord is the mayor. But it's not that they do it with evil intentions; it's almost genetic.

It might well be genetic, yes. A few days ago, I heard two women in the market complaining that Pujol³⁴ had retired and with him Pujolism. And one of them said, hopefully:

—But Pujol has children, doesn't he?

Indeed. That's all we need. As if this were the family saga of Kim Jong Il, the president of North Korea. As Boadella says: we miss feudalism. Just like the Basques.

In the evening we go for a walk and I try to talk about something

34. *TN*: Jordi Pujol i Soley (born 9 June 1930) is a Spanish politician who was the leader of the party *Convergència Democràtica de Catalunya* (CDC) from 1974 to 2003, and President of the *Generalitat de Catalunya* from 1980 to 2003. He has since been charged and investigated for money-laundering and corruption charges. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jordi_Pujol.

else. Here Pepe is sick to the teeth of everything.

December 17th

At half past two, Lourdes Latorre from La Caixa museum calls us. It turns out we had arranged to meet for lunch today. La Caixa organises lunches with artists who exhibit in what they call *Espacio O*, a corner close to the entrance where they show the work of less consecrated artists. They had already invited us on other occasions. I go alone; Josep can't make it.

The artist is Joan Ill. He has exhibited a fabric that renders transparent a hidden part in which some very rustic stones rested (they still have lichen on them) that were supposedly Roman. The presentation programme says «the translucent fabric confers unusual presence and protagonism on the frame that grows in volume and changes its role while at the same time altering the concepts of medium and support».

Seriously. The things a few stones and a frame can do. «What would Boadella say!», I wonder. The Doctor of Art History who wrote it goes so far as to say that with them «the hidden secrets of the material are almost revealed to us». «Almost», by the way, which means by the skin of its teeth. It's too much. Someone said that the most abominable literature lies in the texts that accompany a work of art. I agree.

The artist looks like a really clever guy. Tall, strong and with greying hair pulled back in a ponytail. Dressed in black, he looks to be in his early forties, like his partner who has also come, an attractive woman with long, wavy, blond hair.

There must be around fifteen people, associated with or interested

in art, I imagine. Around four or five take part in the, let's call it, versed, discussion of the work. They dedicate a long time to the origin of the stones, and offer a friendly critique of the efficacy of the montage when transmitting the message. Bearing in mind that the result is that it almost reveals «the hidden secrets of the material», there's not much to discuss. In fact, there's never anything to discuss.

Over dessert, the atmosphere is relaxed enough to talk about «local» issues too. About Petrochemistry, for instance. It must be a classic subject of conversation in Tarragona. The guests talk about the ups and downs of the possibly bigger source of income and the employment of the city and its suburbs. They say things like: «we don't know», «they haven't told us how contaminating it will be», «they could do it differently» (without specifying how). They express a few typical «eco-lefty» ideas to make their political leanings clear, but it's obvious that they value the jobs it creates. From what I can tell, if they don't have a wife, they have a father or a brother-in-law working in this company.

They also talk about acquaintances in the city. The Heritage councillor, for instance, who is not here. A girl everyone showers praise on while also crossing themselves because, although she's «so nice», she may be with PP. There appears to be agreement on this. Nobody at the table would be surprised if someone «so nice» were with Esquerra Republicana, in spite of the fact that, based on the electoral results, there are as many supporters of one side as there are of the other.

Someone remarks piously that hopefully the day will come when people are considered regardless of their political convictions. Everybody agrees but they're the ones who have said the councillor is so nice «in spite of being» with PP. Nobody has obliged them. They commit the sin and then ask for contrition. They make their beds

and then they lie on them.

Of course people should be considered regardless of their politics as long as we live in a democracy. What's strange is that after so many years it's still not the case. Maybe because it's advantageous for it not to be.

But the comment is very well received. We're all people with «good vibes».

December 18th

I've gone to Triangle, the shopping centre in Plaza de Cataluña, to do my Christmas shopping. I leave the car in level 4 of the underground carpark and get in the lift with a quite good-looking guy of around thirty.

The human brain didn't evolve in an era in which it was ordinary and everyday for a male and a female to be hermetically enclosed for a few moments in a space measuring $1.5 \times 1.5 \times 2.5$. We instinctively move to the sides putting distance between us and I discreetly button my cardigan closed. I'm not doing it for him, of course, but because I imagine it will be colder upstairs.

On level 2, we're joined by a couple of worldly-looking men of around forty. They look at us. They see a couple keeping its distance while she closes some buttons over her chest. They have a curious look in their eyes.

Ah, isn't it lovely. The furtiveness was only in her mind, but I think everyone got the meaning. We watch way too many films.

Tonight I'm watching Carod Rovira on Pedro Ruiz's³⁵ TV pro-

35. *TN*: Pedro Ruiz Céspedes (Barcelona, August 17th, 1947) is a Spanish radio and television Producer, actor, singer and deadpan comedian.

gramme. It's all too unutterable, but what grabs my attention is the way a person from ERC talks about the «individual» and how the individual, according to him, «is over and above everything else».

It's odd that it should be precisely the representative of an essentialist party who never stops uttering phrases as ethereal as «it is the will of the nation to...», «the nation has spoken», etc. What could be more mystically nationalist than these phrases? The nation cannot have a «will» and cannot «express» anything because it is not a person. He must have meant «the voters». And there are a lot of different types.

A few days ago, I heard someone from Esquerra criticising CiU «for having placed pragmatism over and above the essences». For goodness sake, that's what they were voted for. That's why I voted for them! It was the only good thing about CiU! Is there anything more worthwhile and responsible than making policies everyone agrees on and focusing fundamentally on what is feasible? What's truly disturbing is to hide behind the «essences».

But look, at the end of the day let's hope this passion for the individual lasts. They have to prepare themselves for the day «re-structuring» returns. Then they'll say that «they had always said so».

December 19th

At sunset, my son Àlex comes for dinner. He voted for Maragall and he's delighted with the tripartite. He's not a supporter of Esquerra Republicana, but he was at the end of his adolescent years. However, there's no denying he's the typical anti/PP-Francoist Madrileño-Fascist guy who has always got a sort of «national pride» out of the Barça feats.

He tells me, with all the self-importance of a person who's leaving the most beautiful time of his life behind:

—I'm cancelling my subscription.

Apparently, a number of things have undermined the good times spirit. He's obviously against the stupidity of the *Boixos Nois*³⁶, and he doesn't agree with Laporta's way of doing things either, he calls him every name in the book. He says one of the reasons going to the stadium is not like it used to be is that the security controls for people like him who go to the popular zone are very thorough and the security people aren't blessed with a lot of scruples.

—They even look in our arseholes.

The boy doesn't beat around the bush. I understand that this humiliates him. He's very prone to making deliberately heroic and para-religious comments about his great Barça adoration (irreproachably conscientious and rationalized: he is very hot-headed in his emotions but not in his intellect), and it's always very funny to listen to him.

—My last day at the stadium, you know?...

—Yes?

—A bottleneck formed behind me at the controls...

—Right.

36. *TN*: Boixos Nois (English: Crazy Boys, from the Catalan word “Bojos” meaning crazy) is an ultras supporter group organised around the football club FC Barcelona, based in Catalonia. Founded in 1981 it was composed of left-leaning Catalan nationalists, until a surge of skinheads joining in the mid-1980s saw the political orientation turn from Catalan nationalism and socialism to far-right Catalan separatism and far-right Spanish nationalism. For many years the Boixos Nois enjoyed a close relationship with FC Barcelona until former president Joan Laporta banned their presence at games in 2003. They are notorious in Spain for their violent behaviour and frequent clashes with authorities, with some members being convicted for death threats, murder, illegal firearms possession, extortion and drug trafficking. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Boixos_Nois.

—I almost entered alone.

—And?

—Silence, lights and, in front of me, the pitch, enormous.

—And you were aware of the visual potency of the moment.

—Exactly. I put on the *estelada*³⁷ like a sacred cape and walked slowly down with all the majesty of a Viking burial. A memorable ending to all these years of suffering and disappointments.

—You certainly have suffered, that's true. As a boy you used to cry so bitterly over the team's failings...

—Well, now I can't keep up. I have a disenchanted void inside of me and a certain desire for revenge.

—Next, you'll be voting for Esquerra to get your own back, just to take the rivalry with Madrid to another area.

—I suppose you're joking and you can laugh all you like. But don't underestimate it—he says, hurt because he thinks I'm laughing at him.

But I'm not at all. I even suspect that this is largely true. I have before me a prototypical fan accustomed to speaking of Catalonia in terms of «pride», «defeat», «humiliation», etc., to waving the *estelada* in the wind without even being an *independentista*, but he is a guy with a strong will to mark his territory against the *Madrileños*.

Maybe Carod has managed to double the vote because Barça has been humiliated and doesn't seem to have any future. And these

37. *TN*: The Estelada is an unofficial flag typically flown by Catalan independence supporters to express their support for either an independent Catalonia or independent Països Catalans (Catalan Lands, i.e. the territories where Catalan is traditionally spoken). The use of this flag as a protest symbol within Catalan nationalism has become more notable since the 1970s' Spanish transition to democracy. The design of the Estelada comprises the red-and-yellow bars of the Senyera, with the addition of a five-pointed star in a triangle at the hoist. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Estelada>.

not just the malevolent ravings of a sardonic non-nationalist. The club's capacity to bring together people who were «somewhat more» than football fans and to condense all that force of tribal consensus should not be underestimated. Someone more capable than me will have to analyse it soon.

December 20th

Carod-Rovira was in Bilbao today, on the invitation of *Elkarri*³⁸. He asked the *Partido Socialista*³⁹ for the «courage and bravery to defend a different model to PP's». And he says: «Because in no part of the world do the left and the right defend the same thing». Don't they? Maybe it's not in their interests to create anything else. On both sides there are people who defend abortion, people who call themselves Catholics, people who call themselves atheists (Vidal-Quadras, for instance), people in favour of legalizing gay marriage...

I'm reading a book by Peter Singer these days. He's one of the new worldwide lefty gurus. The book is called *A Darwinian Left*. I mention it because it is one of the few «left-wing» volumes that not only rejects Marxism and strongly criticises its scourges and abuses, but also offers a clear and comprehensible definition of what it is «to be lefty»:

[...] it would still be on the side of the weak, poor, and oppressed; not the oppressor [...] the vast quantity of pain and suffering that exists in our universe, and of its desire to do something to reduce it [...] If we say that

38. TN: Elkarri: Social movement for peace, dialogue and agreement in the Basque Country.

39. TN: Partido Socialista: Spanish Socialist Party (PSOE).

that is just the way the world is, and always will be, and there is nothing we can do about it, we are not part of the left. The left wants to do something about this situation.

But, can we claim that only the left has good intentions? At the end of the day, these words (of Singer's) or other similar words were also claimed by Mother Teresa of Calcutta, who I consider a reactionary for her insistence on Christian resignation and her rejection of birth control. And when it comes to social matters, let's remember that it was Franco who created the Social Security and fixed employment.

No, solidarity, altruism and cooperation don't belong to either the right or the left. They are part of human nature in its most enlightened dimension. To deny a political rival's good feelings, good intentions, and good nature is low, and that really is fascist. Anyone who belittles the weak, who exploits them, who prefers gratuitous violence to peace, who spurns goodness is neither left nor right: but what we could simply call a SON OF A BITCH.

No label offers any guarantees to anyone. In this sense, the only thing that serves is what we read in the Bible, that «for their works we will know them». So, why this proposal from Singer, this definition of the left? Because of the mental habit of defining oneself according to an opponent that is always —oh, what a coincidence— bad. And because the left/ right dichotomy is, naturally, one of the most successful forms the primates' innate tribalism has taken on in the last hundred years.

December 23rd

When you get close to the Balcó, to the right, there's a street, the Bajada del Toro, and a surprising spectacle. It's as if you were in a fish bowl: neither the beach nor the horizon are visible yet, but a great expanse of sea and sky spread out before you. On foggy days, the line of the horizon becomes blurry and, if you're lucky enough to see one or two boats out, it seems as if they are floating in front of you. It's my favourite place.

December 24th

Tomorrow we'll go to my parents' house and today Àlex will come for dinner.

Oh little town of Bethlehem... I don't think they can be very happy, the Christians of Bethlehem. Approximately 50,000 Christian Arabs live under the control of the Palestinian Authority, 2.4% of the total population. A significant drop compared to 1948, when the proportion was close to 20%. In Israel, however, the Christian population has multiplied four-fold. This increase, that is over 200%, is largely considered the result of Israel's policy of guaranteeing the freedom to worship all religions. It is also fair to say that numerous courts in the United States have granted asylum to Christian Palestinians as they would suffer reprisals were they to return.

The anti-Christian discourse is recurrent in the official broadcasts of the Palestinian Authority. In its homily of Friday the 13th of October in the year 2000, broadcast live on the official Television channel of the Palestinian Authority from a mosque in Gaza Dr. Ahmad Abu Halabiya declared:

Allah, the All-Powerful, has called on us not to ally with Jews or with

Christians, not to love them, not to be their partners, not to support them and not to sign agreements with them.

Christian women in Bethlehem accused of wearing «daring» Western attire have reported numerous cases of intimidation and abuse, and, far more seriously, there have been frequent reports of rape and kidnapping. According to the witness statements obtained by the media organisation, Grupo Prisma, the Christians in the areas controlled by the Palestinian Authority are the object of ceaseless persecution.

An unusual and politically incorrect manger could be created with all this information. But it would be too mould-breaking.

December 26th

Yesterday, I had lunch at my brother's house. Today, Saint Stephen's Day, everyone is at my house. I've bought a ham from the Canaries and baked it in the oven. With some nibbles as a starter and this gigantic ham, I think I'll make quite a good impression.

The leg is spectacular.

December 28th

Ibarretxe, in an interview in today's *El País* newspaper:

The very same day the Partido Socialist was saying in Barcelona that Catalonia was a nation, we were watching Zapatero attending a protest with the PP and the Spanish Falange. I know that afterwards he was quite dis-

appointed, but you have to think things through beforehand.

What cheek! He's talking about the same protest in San Sebastián that I went to. There were PP people at it, of course there were. The best of PP and the best of PSOE. I know there was a tiny group of the Falange⁴⁰ because I read their stickers. But there were hardly any of them. There were far more from the *Unificación Comunista de España*. Far more. And they were carrying a Spanish flag. Ibarretxe won't say so because they're left-wing and it's not in their interests. I'm glad the people from UCE are not as blind as IU⁴¹. But the majority of the protesters were people like me.

How low can this man sink!

January 1st

Ellen is a friend I made in the «Escépticos» list, one of the first created online seven or eight years ago. She is an atheist, left-wing, of Jewish culture who lives in Buenos Aires. She must be around sixty

40. TN: Falange, in full Falange Española (“Spanish Phalanx”) or (1937-77) *Falange Española Tradicionalista y de las Juntas de Ofensiva Nacional-Sindicalista* (“Traditionalist Spanish Phalanx of the Juntas of the National Syndicalist Offensive”), extreme nationalist political group founded in Spain in 1933 by José Antonio Primo de Rivera, son of the former dictator Miguel Primo de Rivera. Influenced by Italian fascism, the Falange joined forces (February 1934) with a like-minded group, *Juntas de Ofensiva Nacional Sindicalista*, and issued a manifesto of 27 points repudiating the republican constitution, party politics, capitalism, Marxism, and clericalism, and proclaiming the necessity of a national-syndicalist state, a strong government and military, and Spanish imperialist expansion. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Falange>.

41. TN: United Left (Spanish: Izquierda Unida, IU) is a political coalition that was organized in 1986, bringing together several left-wing and far-left political organizations. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Left_\(Spain\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Left_(Spain)).

years old and she is a grandmother already. Today she argues with another participant from the «Escépticos» list.

—The Zionist adventure has ended in failure —he says.

Ellen replies:

—Zionism constitutes the maximum success of the twentieth century. Fifty years after the defeat of Hitler and the Mufti of Jerusalem, this state with five million Jews, exports products for a value of one billion dollars or more to western Europe, the United States of America, and even Japan, each year: it has an exemplary democracy, has created an army considered one of the best in the world, there is very little violent delinquency and there are many, excellent concerts. People of all religions find freedom of worship, and the non-believers are also welcome. Ten percent of the citizens of this country are new immigrants, and 89% believe that in spite of all the difficulties, it's a good place to live.

I suspect she's right, that for a long time now we've been subjected to biased propaganda. I'd like to go and see this country myself.

January 2nd

We watch the TV programme *Día a día* while we're eating. They're talking about domestic violence. It appears that another woman has been killed by her ex-boyfriend. During the discussion they've been insisting the whole time on the role of education to prevent machismo. They think they are socially instilled vices.

M^a Teresa Campos, the presenter, is not there today and in her

place we have a woman who's normally a substitute, a certain Yolanda. I find her even more predictable and politically correct than the usual presenter. She concluded by saying goodbye and offering stereotypical phrases like «if you love the person who's with you to the marrow of your bones, if there is love, violence is never possible».

Pathetic. I felt embarrassed for her.

January 3rd

Conversation with Santiago. He's one of the few people I know who doesn't have a pro-Palestinian posture to begin with. He doesn't have a clue how to use a computer and cannot participate in a debate list like «Skepticos», so I can explain to him the lengths my Argentine friend must go to not to be hopelessly associated with everything Sharon does just because she defends the rights of Israel.

The truth is that information is brutally distorted. There is nobody as anti-Israeli and anti-American as the Europeans. And both the right and the left subscribe to the anti-Israeli camp. My uncle Pedro, for instance, a man who has been conservative his whole life, is capable of saying things like «the Jews do to the Palestinians what the Germans did to them».

Very strong. You can't talk about this to anybody. As soon as you say anything, they accuse you of being in favour of Sharon, or they call you a fascist directly. Like they say to Ellen.

—There are still people, Santiago, who ask themselves things like whether Israel «has the right to exist».

—They must believe that it's an American colony established there just because. People have no idea that the creation of the Israeli state was the result of the United Nations resolution that allowed for the

partition of Palestine.

Not even a week after this resolution, Israel was attacked by all the surrounding Arab countries. But I bet the majority of the anti-Israeli people you ask will neither remember nor care. It's a simple and cheap way to be on the leftish side. They call Sharon a Nazi and give the Nobel Prize to Arafat.

I read an article by Pilar Rahola. Pilar Rahola is not my cup of tea, but she appears to be one of the few columnists capable of saying anything sensible on the subject:

If before this Intifada, the Palestinian citizens had the highest economic standards in the Arab world, today they are among the Yemen ratios. Nonetheless, are you familiar with the figures? The World Bank has given twice the amount per inhabitant of the National Palestinian Authority that Europe received in the Marshall Plan; the European Union has given 330 million euros towards the Palestinian education system (which teaches them to hate the Jews); the corruption reports speak of Arafat's fortune reaching over a billion dollars, with significant investments even in the Coca-Cola factory in Ramallah; where are the fifty million dollars that Saddam gave Arafat for his help in the Gulf War?; where is the economic legacy of the PLO, with the hefty donations from the KGB and the Saudis?

Good question: where are they? Moreover, Santiago tells me that in the last few years of the Intifada, there have been more attacks against synagogues in Europe than on the Night of Broken Glass. On November 16th, there was an attack on one of the synagogues in Istanbul, killing 23 people and wounding 277. And on the same day, a Jewish school in Paris was burnt down.

Israel's problems are not the fault of a dispute for more or less territory, but because the Arab countries do not want Israel as they

consider all that land Muslim.

January 6th

At the hairdressers'. I always hate when it comes to tipping. The idea of putting a little something in the hairdressers' pocket, like so many people do, seems so feudal to me. I put it in the piggybank they have on the counter. Of course, I know that the majority of them couldn't care less and have no problem with it. But I wouldn't do it in a million years. I just can't. But who am I doing a favour to? Me or them?

I have a seat for them to dry my hair and they say to me:

—Will I apply the re-structuring cream?

These sorts of offers make my head swim. I answer:

—What does it do?

—It's to seal the cuticle.

I say, another day. Quite expensive fantasies if you don't defend yourself.

January 7th

Arcadi is writing a diary online. It will be the basis for the second part of *Diarios*, a book he published a couple of years ago now.

I had no idea he was going to write a new diary. He didn't mention it that day we went for lunch. If I had known, I would have found a different format for mine. Now it looks like I did it on purpose.

Ah well, it's too late now.

January 8th

On telly they talk about the Universal Forum of Cultures, a sort of Olympic Games of liberal thinking to take place next summer. Based on the information that's filtering through I suspect that it will be an exaltation of the politically correct, the entropy of political thinking. An urbanistic operation under the pretext of «multicultural», «it's all relative» and «here there are no authorities in anything».

January 10th

Zapatero accepted Maragall's fiscal policy and set himself the goal of ending the solidarity between autonomous regions. The statues needed to be reviewed and seventeen regional high courts created. Tarradellas used to say: «We the Catalans do not want to be the “*emmerdants*”⁴² of Spanish politics». There's no need for me to translate “*emmerdant*”, a word that already smells for itself. Catalonia cannot be an obstacle for any Spanish political solution.

But he would be perplexed by the amount of «*emmerdants*» there are now.

January 12th

There is a mantra, a sort of stereotype blaming PP and, particularly, Aznar for the extreme postures that exist in Basque and Catalan nationalism. The theory is that if one day he's no longer here (which will happen soon since he says he's leaving), the nationalists will no

42. TN: Catalan term meaning “shitheads”.

longer want to separate from Spain. I look forward to seeing that. My bet is that nothing will change or it will be even worse.

Riling? But it's normal for a constitutionalist party to phlegmatically agree to things like the *Declaración de Barcelona*⁴³, the agreements of the Basque nationalists with Batasuna (*Pacto de Estella*), the papers signed with ETA or the «de-structured» reading of the Constitution.

And what's riling is to become alarmed by this.

January 13th

The Americans from the Center for Inquiry, an organisation that promotes scepticism and secular humanism, want us to travel to the United States to talk about the collaboration with our association.

I wish the headquarters were here, in Tarragona.

January 15th

I was once invited to a TV programme, one of those debate shows with numerous guests. A silly woman taking part assured us she had

43. TN: The *Declaración de Barcelona* (Barcelona Declaration) was a manifest drawn up and signed by the peripheral nationalist Spanish parties *Convergència i Unió*, *Partido Nacionalista Vasco* and the *Bloque Nacionalista Galego* in defense of the «national rights» of their respective territories versus the centralist policy promoted by the first government of José María Aznar, leader of PP. The declaration was made on July 16th, 1998 and the representatives of the three nationalist parties agreed that they would meet again in September in Bilbao and in October in Santiago de Compostela. https://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/Declaraci%C3%B3n_de_Barcelona.

alien creatures in her fridge who could predict the future. Silly might not be the right adjective, mind you, because the woman made a killing. A fortune. And the fact is that the media does everything in its power to allow these sorts of people to make money. We see TV programmes with quacks and psychics. Apparently, they are «unmasked», but they are not serious programmes that deal with the issues based on documented arguments. In the end, there's always someone who says: «Well, this guy is a conman, he has nothing to do with the “true” psychics».

«True», he says. But, who are the true psychics? Why don't they ever bring anyone on the show who can demonstrate their powers? A sceptic would say that, very probably, it's because there are no true psychics, because people with special powers that go beyond shrewdness and their experience do not exist. But it's not interesting to say that, because this way they can make one programme after another and keep looking at magazines with dubious content.

January 17th

Santiago invites us to lunch in his house. He and his wife live in a house on the outskirts with a garden full of olive trees and a small pond where they place and replace coloured fish that are systematically fished out by herons and other attentive birds. In the end, they put up a protective net but it doesn't look great.

They give us «traditional» dishes to eat: *escudella*⁴⁴ and meat in a sauce. At the lunch, there are us, them and another couple we know, also from Tarragona. A textbook couple; traditional lefties. He's an educated type who likes to make pleasantly anarchistic comments

44. TN: *Escudella* is a traditional Catalan soup and stew.

like «order may emerge from the chaos» and other post-modern slogans. But he doesn't leave it there. He has to go from the abstract to the specific. Demonstrating how mould-breaking he is, he offers a heated defence of the peoples' right to not work. Yes sir, the right to professionally twiddle one's thumbs.

Since there won't be any people who produce, there can't be any food or anything, the question is who will be the drudge who has to work for everyone else. Because nothing comes completely free of charge. Someone always has to pay. My husband stares at him in disbelief and slight resentment. He suspects that, as usual, he'll be the one who ends up paying. The typical distrust of the self-employed or the small businessperson. And the anarchist doesn't even realise. It must be because he's a civil servant in the university. There are worlds he doesn't know of, lucky him.

He also defends alter-globalization and feminist perspectives. He insinuates that a different world is possible and that this, from what I seem to understand, would have something to do with a matriarchal society. Pity the conversation veers off in other directions; the myth of the matriarchate is one of my pet topics. It's also a question that has divided feminists. To our misfortune (women's', I mean), no proof of a golden era in which women ruled has been found. Even in the matrilocal cultures, the ultimate power in the family nucleus lies with the mother's brother. And I only wish I could claim otherwise.

It goes without saying that we end on the topic to beat all topics. Identity and the nation. They are passionately in favour of the latter. But neither Santiago nor I nor our respective «other halves» are nationalists. The poor things don't find much enthusiasm among their audience. I don't remember the details of the conversation, but my impression is the same as always: that there are differences between the regions, and there are two classes of Catalans: the people who

are not integrated or second-class —that is, the constitutionalists for PP like Santiago and the centre-lefties (let's say) like me— and the nationalist *independentistas*, of a superior class.

January 18th

We go for a walk along the beach. La Larga beach, obviously. We see a girl with a dog. It's still winter and there are not many people, and nobody is sunbathing, but she has a little bag and she's scooping the poop. Admirable. I remember yesterday's conversation and the civil servant's allusion to the existence of better or worse Catalans. That sort of talk does us so much damage. Certainly, there are no good or bad Catalans. What do exist are good people and then others who are less good. I don't know what class of Catalan the girl walking her dog is. But it's clear to me what class of citizen she is: I can see it with my own eyes, right now, by how she behaves. Her awareness of living in a society and not bothering others with the excrements of her dog is indicative of being a good Catalan by being a good citizen. The only way.

January 20th

Tonight, while we're eating a salad with some ham for dinner, a certain Mariano Xandró talks about graphology on the news on channel 1. He says he's a member of the pompous-sounding graphological society. Graphologists believe that handwriting is a physical manifestation of the subconscious mental functions and that it can reveal specific things about a person. But graphology does not have

a convincing theoretical foundation: there is no evidence that the subconscious (and this is also a questioned term) is a reservoir of the truth about a person, and even less so that graphology supplies an entryway to this reservoir. One thing is to say a piece of writing, a signature, may have characteristic traits that identify the author (that's what the police or the justice system does when authenticating a signature, for example) but it's quite another to standardise certain traits to tell us something about a person's personality. The hypotheses of how graphology might work has never proven useful, and there is no empirical evidence that links any significant graphological characteristic to any significant personality trait. But they pass it off as science, no doubt about that.

I spent a few years working in Human Resources. I did so until quite recently. Now I've taken a sabbatical, to see if I can write. But I have worked in personnel selection companies that practiced a great many "*maguferies*". Nothing special about them: they were just like so many others in the sector. To support the skill or experience of the person responsible for the selection (the only thing that truly counts), psychological questionnaires with some scientific echoes are used, or even practices more at home among the psychics.

In one of these companies, the boss, a peculiar character if ever there was one, had taken courses with the ineffable Professor Fassman, a windbag who created a sensation in the world of esoteric showbiz in the seventies and eighties. Naturally, I was quite reticent, but I also wanted to make a good impression and prove that I was in the vibe. I had just separated from my husband, I no longer had the safety net of marriage and I had an uncertain future. I had no intention of arguing in the place they were giving me a job. So I asked her to teach me the technique.

Patiently, over time, the Fassman disciple gave me classes. The

pole of the letter T, the curves of the Qs or the Fs... It all had a meaning. Until one day when I was reviewing a candidate's dossier, I thought it was time to show her how my knowledge had progressed. There were handwritten notes on the pages that I thought appropriate. I studied them for a while and then I went to her office.

—Look, I saw this page and I've tried to come up with a short graphological analysis.

—Excellent.

—I'd say that the subject is a nostalgic person, based on the way their lines lean to the left, backwards, and possibly somewhat reactionary for the same reason.

—Aha.

—He's seductive because of how the curves of the Qs and the Fs twist. And, above all the Gs, that are authentic hooks. Whoever wrote this must be a compulsive liar—I said smiling and giving her a wink—. Anyway, let's see what you think.

I pass her the page. She looks at it and, instantly looks up at me in anger. And I, still pleased with myself, shake my little head:

—What's up?

—If this is a joke, it's in very poor taste.

—Crikey! Why?—I ask, dumbstruck.

—You must know that this is my writing, don't you?

Actually, no; I didn't know. I'm sure I had seen her writing. But I hadn't really paid much attention to it. And I didn't know that she had made any notes on that dossier. I thought it was new. I'm a suicide joker but not to that extreme.

The conclusion was clear: my analysis was correct because I had followed the theory exactly. But it wasn't valid if it was applied to the boss. It's one of the differences between science and pseudoscience. A diabetes diagnosis, if well made, is applicable to anyone even if

they're the boss and they don't like it. But the same does not apply to pseudoscience, as proven by the lovely head of human resources.

In any case, I didn't last long there. I wouldn't say that the good relations were ruined by this anecdote (there were more weighty reasons), but it certainly didn't help strengthen bonds. It proved to me that it's never worth stooping to the level of any *magufo* just to please them: you never win. Graphology students, take note: a hooked G can indicate a cunning spirit as long as it's not the hooked G of the person who pays your salary.

January 21st

There are Basques who believe that the Rh factor comprises a differential fact worthy of attention. But the Rh is only one of the genetic traits that can be passed down, just like hairy ears or a tendency to retain gases. For some strange reason, the Rh has made them say things that the Rh doesn't say. It's the same as with graphology. But the nationalists are capable of believing that this makes them different to everyone else, in the same way they also reinvent history to make it fit with a biased legend. With that sort of predisposition, why wouldn't one of their maximum priests believe that the stars influence us?

Josu Jon Imaz, new president of the PNV, has spent years drawing up the astrological chart of members of the Basque government. Last Tuesday, Juan José Ibarretxe congratulated him on his new position by thanking him, among other things, «for the reprimands his Zodiac has caused in the Government Council».

Yes sir, «Zodiac». Because Imaz, who is a doctor in Chemical Sciences and a researcher of polymers, has been responsible for the

horoscopes of the Basque Government members in recent years. It may sound like a joke, but it isn't. Luis Alberto Aranberri, ex director of *EITB*⁴⁵ head of the Cabinet Office says:

He is a born scientist who believes in astrology. He generally says that if the stars moved the tides, they may also have a certain degree of influence on other more light-hearted aspects of life. Which is why he does not disbelieve in the horoscope and the Zodiac.

I'm not surprised. He believes in stronger things. The tides? The gravitational effect of a midwife on a baby is far greater than any effect the moon might have. Not to mention Planet Mars, my God, it's so far away. No scientist in his right mind would believe in astrology. Or that language generates any worldview.

Pity that my friend Fernando has disappeared off the face of the map. I'd tell him about this now and we'd have a good laugh.

January 22nd

Breakfast with a literature professor from the Rovira y Virgili university, José María Fernández. Santiago told me he'd talk to him about me and my book and we met today. He's a thin, serious, educated man with an ascetic air about him. He promotes a series of Spanish language Literature Days held each year. He says they are scheduled for next March and that there are quality guests including Fernando Savater and Gustavo Bueno.

45. *TN: Euskal Irrati Telebista* (EiTB, Basque Radio-television) is the Basque Autonomous Community's public broadcast service. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/EITB>.

I tell him I'll attend, of course. I give him *Polvo de estrellas* and he says he'll read it with pleasure.

An extremely cordial person.

January 24th

Elisabet and I are walking along the street. We're chatting about the distribution lists I take part in and that I've invited her to. She has registered, but is somewhat wary. They're not her kind of thing, but she has promised me she'll take part. Meanwhile, a van with a beer ad preaches: «Traditions preserve and reflect the identity of a people: come to the *calçotada*⁴⁶ of Reus».

—Even identity —I say— serves to make money. If you want to be a good Catalan, eat onion!

And she finds it relatively funny.

January 25th

My friend Josep March, who's a doctor, is raging and he makes those of us on the «Skepticos» list aware of it. He's read on *La Vanguardia* newspaper what he believes is «the most foolish news of the day»: «A young film director questions fast food».

Apparently, there's some guy who films documentaries and has made a report on the effects of fast food. The best he could come up with was to go on a McDonald's diet (couldn't it have been a differ-

46. TN: traditional *calçotades* are annual gastronomical celebrations from January to April where barbecued spring onions (*calçots*) are consumed in massive quantities all over Catalonia.

ent restaurant? What an obsession) for a month. And, of course, he's gained eleven kilos, as well as suffering headaches, getting depressed and a whole list of other things.

And March says: «I really like a bean and pork stew, but I prefer not to imagine the result of eating it three times a day for a month. Not to mention the effects of such a diet on my social life: run away, monsieur "le pétomane" is arriving!».

He says the most sensible comments are the ones made by the McDonald's spokesperson: «We are not familiar with the film but, apparently, Spurlock chose to eat 5000 calories a day and do no exercise. He could have consumed those calories at home or in another restaurant and the result would have been the same».

The woman is completely right.

I explain the McDonalds diet to Josep and he fully agrees with March. And the conversation about American mythology and food brings us back to the memory of the turkey that Bush was photographed with last November 27th in Iraq. We're sure that an awful lot of the people we know really believe that Bush had his photo taken with a plastic turkey.

January 26th

I'm having my morning tea and looking over the online newspapers when my eyes widen like saucers. That's all we need! It's been discovered that Carod met with ETA and, on top of that when he was already the First Minister of the *Generalitat*. And Maragall claims he had no knowledge of this meeting.

A right scandal.

In the afternoon, I go to La Caixa, to a talk by Manuel Moreno,

one of the two friends who presented my book in Barcelona. The other was Arcadi Espada. Manuel is a Professor of Physics in *UPC*⁴⁷ and has a subject that deals with science within science-fiction. And a column in the *Ciberpaís* section of *El País* newspaper on the same subject. He's great fun and educational. Since I think he might be interesting, I let both Santiago and Elisabet know.

I arrive but she hasn't got there yet, but he gets there in no time. I tell him I'm keeping a seat for «that friend of mine that you're so fond of». He's polite, gives a half a smile. He can't stand the sight of her. Nonetheless, when she arrives he greets her very politely.

I get myself into such trouble. Because the truth is that she can't stand him either. In spite of the fact that if you think about it they do actually share interests. From opposing sides, but with the same passion. I'm sure they'd both love to talk about Carod and the meeting with ETA. But there won't be time and, in any case, I already know what each of them are going to say.

The conference is somewhat disorganised and the speaker makes some historical remark that Santiago, a professor of Political Philosophy considers incorrect. No, he doesn't like what he's hearing, he's nervous, and he passes me a note expressing his disgust. I tell him he should leave then. I've been so successful. Elisabet is also nervous, but as a rule she never leaves until the end. It forms part of what she considers good manners. And she's completely right.

Santiago resists until nearly nine and dashes out. She gives him a look of reproach. Pity, because the talk gets more lively towards the end. But Elisabet says once again that only a centralist could be this boorish.

47. TN: Universitat Politècnica de Catalunya.

January 27th

I grab my cup of tea and run to read the news of the day. Carod offers to hand in his resignation but Maragall disagrees. Zapatero demands that, as president of the PSC he accept it. The Esquerra people must be hitting the roof.

In the end the PSOE manages it. Tonight I get a furious email from Elisabet. She says, as part of her tirade:

«He's finally allowed it! After a true and solid description of Carod's political and personal career, Maragall has succumbed to the plan of deep, Nazi Spain, that refuses to admit difference (or divergence) and that trivialises its own multiple and considerable failures!».

The part about «deep, Nazi Spain» is very unfair. All this anti-Spanish nonsense does a lot of damage to the Catalans. There are people from all over Spain on the list. And they're sick of being told these things, as if Spanish meant Fascist and Catalan meant Liberal.

I bet you anything they're going to be livid.

January 28th

Indeed: they are. Especially Ricardo, one of the most veteran colleagues on the list. Elisabet says he's supporting Carod's actions... in memory of Ernest Lluch⁴⁸! And also «because he defends dialogue».

48. *TN*: Ernest Lluch, (21 January 1937 - 21 November 2000) was a Spanish economist and politician from Catalonia. He was Minister of Health and Consumption from 1982-1986 in the first post-Franco era Spanish Socialist Workers' Party (PSOE) government of Felipe González. He was assassinated in 2000 by the Basque separatist organisation, ETA. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ernest_Lluch.

Ricardo reminds her that he went to dialogue with a band of assassins responsible for the death of hundreds of people.

«The one to go and talk to assassins after being appointed first minister, without giving a fig not only about the central government, the body responsible for the fight against terrorism, but the very victims of terrorism themselves, nor the opinion of his colleagues in government, was not someone from deep, Nazi Spain, but the maximum representative of ERC, the second highest authority in the *Generalitat*.»

All of this leaves me with a feeling of frustration and discouragement. Josep tells me it's just politician hogwash as they prefer to amuse themselves with nonsense rather than dealing with the real needs of the people.

But it's more than just «nonsense».

January 29th

I didn't like what Elisabet said yesterday at all either. Even though she is my friend (or maybe because of that) I have to tell her what I think. I dislike this insistence on the thuggishness of «deepest Spain», that ignorant, poor and illegitimate Spain, in constant and unfavourable contrast to the wonder of «historical nationalities» that are, as we well know, almost Aryans they are so perfect. This feeds many the individual ego and is taken advantage of and encouraged by unscrupulous politicians who see themselves as heroes and liberators with a future full of more than honourable titles and more than acceptable salaries.

I write:

Regarding the « memory of Ernest Lluch» that you mention:

1) Lluch believed in dialogue and was assassinated by a gunshot. Moral of the story: THERE IS NO DIALOGUE WITH ASSASSINS.

2) Carod did not go to dialogue, he went to offer a pro-independence programme with a calendar, acting on the advantage he thinks he holds right now. To do this when it's clear that ETA is dying out thanks to the firm hand of the government and the justice system, demonstrates that both Basque and Catalan nationalism, each to a different degree, reap and have always reaped the benefits.

If it wasn't Elisabet, I would give a tougher answer. The good thing about online lists in general is that sort of impunity... they allow you to throw a stone and hide your hand. The fact that I know Elisabet personally makes everything more uncomfortable, and I have to exert a lot of self-control, given that the subject incenses me and what she says irritates me beyond belief. We are friends outside and... whether here, on the list, we are also friends I don't know.

In any case, every time I answer her there's the underlying fact that I know her, she's a friend, we're going to the theatre on Friday (to a Flamenco concert!), I know how she laughs, the warmth of her kiss when we meet, her sudden spurts of shyness, so like my own...

Friends in spite of everything. Will we last?

I meet Santiago in the evening. He's strolling along the Rambla. He's a big man, but things affect him a lot and he must be feeling rotten. I explain what I've been talking about with our friend. He understands me and says:

—And it's also true that, if we had known what twenty years of dialogues falling on deaf ears were going to result in, we could have taken the recent measures back then and, among other things, never tolerate Batasuna accepting the position (and salaries) and promis-

ing «by legal imperative» to abide by the law. Such sarcasm! All we got out of all that understanding were hundreds more victims.

—What do you think is going to happen with ERC?

—It will grow.

—It will, won't it? I think so too. All they need is a martyr, someone who cares more about their «convictions» than the law.

—They couldn't give a toss about the whole thing. The man, with a scary arrogance, said that he doesn't regret anything because he was, in fact, acting according to his «convictions».

—Yes well. The way I see it, that's a typically Fascist argument in that they justify a series of irresponsible or criminal acts claiming personal reasons, beliefs, prejudices...

—Of course! If this were a valid argument, there would be no need for justice to exist: «I killed her because she was mine» would once again be a respectable cause for murder.

—Precisely.

January 31st

I get up in the night to go to the bathroom. I immediately notice a strong smell. I didn't know where it could be coming from. It was so surprising that I almost thought it was a sort of hallucination caused by the dryness of my nose or something. I went back to bed quite worried, and got up again almost immediately, paranoid, thinking it could be a computer cable burning.

In the morning they took no notice of me. Josep says I must have imagined it.

I have a brain tumour!

Elisabet must be feeling guilty as she acts like she's joking and

writes on the list: «What do you call that pointless skin around the penis? Answer: Man».

That's what you call a «soothing manoeuvre».

February 1st

In the newspaper: «An ethylene leak from a chemical industry causes alarm in Tarragona».

See! I wasn't imagining it. I couldn't make up a stink like that out of the blue. These things form part of the appeal of Tarragona. We have Port Aventura and we have petrochemistry. Both, potential sources of strong emotions.

The truth is that I'm not all that conscious of having the whole *Blade Runner* theme next door.

February 2nd

I read in *El País* newspaper:

Four patients report a neuro-psychiatrist for sexual abuse. His colleagues warned of «his inappropriate conduct» in 1993, he is accused of sexually abusing his patients between 1997 and 2000 with the excuse that he had to touch them to transmit «positive energy» and as part of the treatment.

Let's see, just to be clear: these energies don't exist even if a neuro-psychiatrist says they do. And telepathy doesn't exist either. Like I told Nieves, if it really did exist we would already be paying bills to the National Telepathy Company. There's an inevitable link between

what works and paying quotas.

February 3rd

These days there's an action called *Caravana de la Solidaridad* taking place that aims to raise awareness throughout Spain of how people live in the Basque Country. Carod and many more of his ilk have objected to it, obviously. The limited attention, or even scorn shown by so many lefty parties for the *Basta Ya* movement, is one of the biggest disgraces of the last ten years of democracy. One of the few services ETA has done this country is to show us the true attitudes of each party towards the maximum expression of contemporary, real and active fascism, not the virtual or former kind. A large part of PSOE has refrained from action. Not to mention PSC. And that's the ultimate test for me.

Naturally, the PSC in Tarragona has stayed away from the caravans.

February 4th

Problem: I have tickets to the opera this Monday in the Teatro Metropol, in Tarragona. But now it turns out my Mum will have surgery the same day. It's nothing serious. A knee problem and the next day she'll be home.

We had tickets for the two of us and Elisabet. Josep can go but I don't know what to do with my ticket. My friend is looking for someone interested and I'm thinking about who I might offer it to. I thought that maybe, Santiago might like to go but I discarded

that idea straight away. He and Elisabet are incompatible. Mutually exclusive. Pity.

But then I think twice about it. Why not? They are too mature adults. Can't they live like two normal citizens? Do I have to be careful just because they are positioned in opposite political corners? Plus, isn't Elisabet always on about the need for dialogue? Dialogue here, dialogue there... And then she can't go to the opera with my husband and a quasi-PP supporter (as she says herself)?

If I can't find anyone else, I'll say it to Santiago. Absolutely.

February 5th

Email from Fernando Peregrín! Finally! I adore Fernando. He was my witness at the wedding. I hadn't heard from him for months. He's been sick. I thrilled to hear from him again. I call Arcadi to let him know and it turns out he already knows because he called him. He telephoned him first, the bastard.

Nonetheless: it makes me happy to see that Arcadi is as pleased as me. Affection is the best thing you can share with your friends.

I go to sleep very, very happily.

February 6th

Walking along the Rambla at sunset we meet Santiago. Yes, again. There's nothing strange about us bumping into each other so often: he teaches classes in the Rovira y Vigili university, fifty metres from our house, and he goes out for a walk at the same time as us.

Whenever we see him, he always initially seems to be deep in

thought and in a hurry. But as soon as you mention something that interests him (almost everything), he gives us a lecture. He can't help it, he's a university professor. And Josep gets tired of standing still for so long, he can't bear it. He says that one day he'll just leave us there and we can sort ourselves out.

February 7th

I have dinner with two girl-friends from when we were all «single». Beautiful girls, by the way. Now they are both «taken». With husbands and even kids. We had good times back then but I don't think any of us miss the time we were «in the market».

And who would have thought that we'd end up talking about politics. And what politics, nationalism! They think it's priority to amend the Statute. I say there are more important problems, problems of real interest to the people. I've already said that one of them, Mariona, is a nationalist. And in favour of reforming the Constitution.

—With certain changes to the Constitution, we'd be more similar to Germany.

—Bloody hell, I don't know why I'd want to be like Germany. Obviously, it would be worse to be like Luxemburg, which is what Carod says we'll be like.

—Germany, Germany. With the *länder* and all.

—But, look, let's think about the differences...

—Go on.

—Spain has four languages and Germany has one. In Spain there are four nationalist parties and in Germany there are none.

—And?

—Crikey, «and?». The nationalist parties see Independence on the horizon!

—Well...

—Moreover, they've just reunited. Precisely the opposite of what you want. And the Eastern and Western Germans really could be considered very different, after so many years being educated in different ways of seeing the world. But they have focused entirely on what they have in common. Now, to be practical, this doesn't apply to the others. They appear to understand the insurmountable differences of, let's say, Yugoslavia: they were the first to recognize Slovenia, weren't they? Coincidentally, an allied region. Everyone is so clever around here.

Germany... what a joke. It's all impulse and no brains.

February 9th

Good news this morning (well, it's ten): «Left and right join forces in France to prohibit the veil in public schools». I think they're right. It's admirable to see parties with different perspectives yet who agree on the basics. If only we were to do the same here on important issues, like terrorism. There was a time in which it looked like that might happen. But then positioning their own people became priority.

February 10th

There's controversy about whether Carod in reality is called Pérez. I'd be surprised to discover he was that stupid, because that's not the

sort of secret you can keep. But this reference to surnames at the very least implies an attempt to give the impression of a sort of nobility.

Let he without sin among you, throw the first stone. It would appear that human beings are really obsessed with their lineage. That's why we suffer over our status. There are also lineages among the primates and ranks handed down from fathers to sons. Although power, being boss, is gained for other reasons (strength or intelligence), the young born of a low-class mother are less likely to survive. It's not nonsense. It must be the root of why people are obsessively interested in their parentage and, if we know about it and it isn't especially impressive, we tend to «dress it up».

And that reminds me of that relative I discovered in the Friends of the Opera in Tarragona. My friend Barbat wants to know who my ancestors were and who our common relatives were. I know a bit about the origins of the family, but it's taboo. Today I asked my mother, at the hospital where she's recovering from her knee surgery. Half-jokingly, I ask her if she thinks it's a good idea to give this information to my opera excursions companion.

She is much recovered and in a relatively good mood. From her horizontal position, she reflects for a moment and then gives me her opinion. She says it's better not to. Why? Because they were different times...

February 11th

Blimey, the rotter Bové has given the brush-off to the Forum people. I'm glad. Bové is a very famous French farmer among the anti-system and alter-globalization movements because he is in the habit of attacking McDonald's. That is, he's a guy who attacks the properties

of others because he feels he has a right that he grants himself. He says he's against these foodstuffs, but what he does is protect the interests of the French farmers for those claiming market privileges. That is, he clears the way for his home team. The third world receives his humanitarian aid, and he allows them to sell tomatoes at the protectionist price fixed for them.

Idiots for inviting a cretin like him. He says he's not going «because of Barcelona 2004's intention to work in close collaboration with numerous multinationals». Who knows what's the real reason he's not coming. I couldn't care less.

February 12th

Go figure. I love Francesc de Carreras but we completely disagree on the subject of the Islamic veil. Now he says in the newspaper that «doesn't the exhibition of luxury labels constitute a sign of identity just as much as the Islamic veil does?». The article is called «Doubts about a prohibition». And it makes these remarks:

By any chance, are the girls in French schools prohibited from wearing trousers or mini-skirts? Doesn't the blatant display of garments made by luxury brands in reality constitute a sign of identity indicating belonging to a group in the same way as the Islamic veil? Cannot the prohibition of the veil be interpreted as an interference in the free development of each individual's personality or, going a bit further, an attack on the freedom of thought or even freedom of expression?

Well, it's possible, of course. But the most fundamental difference compared to the miniskirt or the Nike t-shirt is that the Islamic veil

alludes to an expanding religion that, wherever it comes into power, leads to infra-development and the oppression of women, and it has caused thousands of deaths all over the world. Three thousand bodies and two collapsed skyscrapers because of what lies behind the fanaticism of the veil.

They say that Islam desires peace. But that remains to be proven, and the opposite appears to be true.

February 13th

In M^a Teresa Campo's TV programme, *Día a Día*, a woman who appears on it frequently, Curri, announces that she's read somewhere that it's been scientifically proven that man does not descend from Adam and Eve. As simple as that. She thinks this rubbish, that she's read somewhere they had nothing better to print is worth mentioning. A country in which the media spends fortunes on spreading superstition.

And, continuing with non-scientific castles in the air, another panellist, Del Pozo, talks about cloning experiments carried out by the Koreans that are also news today in all the media. Although he agrees with scientific investigation, he believes it's important to remember that one of the dangers of cloning is the ridiculous possibility that if it fell into Nazi scientist hands (*The Boys from Brazil* made a resounding impression here), people could be raised the same way chickens on a farm are. And nobody laughs! What's more, another journalist adds, half-jokingly, the danger of digging up Napoleon's tibia and managing to create an army of Napoleons.

Naturally, we all come into the world with a character and certain predispositions. But to become Hitler or Napoleon, very specific

circumstances in the lives of the individuals need to concur. Probably the exact same as the circumstances they experienced. We would need Hitler's genes, but also his context and the exact conditions that forged Hitler. Impossible with just a farm.

There's no need to spend so much money to create armies of madmen. Millions of people have always gone to their deaths, forced by coercion or convinced by the propaganda of States. Hundreds of children who have been brainwashed in Koranic schools are capable, when they grow up, of volunteering to knock down the Twin Towers. Maybe in this instance genes dictate who will be capable of actually doing it.

The genes of the most brutish.

That's what telly is like. And it doesn't end there: the newspapers also spread superstition. Today I saw an enormous page on *El País* announcing a special radio programme on a very old subject, Spain in the seventies: the famous B elmez Faces⁴⁹. Instead of faces, they should say «the cheek of B elmez». A whole page dedicated to the ghosts that appeared on the tiles of the house. And it's a progressive newspaper. I'm not surprised that afterwards people go mad seeing things where there are none.

Speaking of ghosts, spring has brought me mine. There's a male mannequin on the Massimo Dutti window display wearing a safari

49. *TN*: The B elmez Faces is an alleged paranormal phenomenon in a private house in Spain which started in 1971 when residents claimed images of faces appeared in the concrete floor of the house. These images have continuously formed and disappeared on the floor of the home. Located at the Pereira family home at Calle Real 5, B elmez de la Moraleda, Ja en, Andalusia, Spain, the B elmez faces have been responsible for bringing large numbers of sightseers to B elmez. The phenomenon is considered by some parapsychologists the best-documented and "without doubt the most important paranormal phenomenon in the [20th] century". https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/B%C3%A9lmez_Faces.

jacket.

If I believed in the soul, I might say that mine has become leaden.

February 14th

The people from *UCE (Unificación Comunista de España)* sent me a communication for me to sign (and pay) for the publication of a manifesto against the Iraqi war and in favour of the unity of Spain. I'll have to dig deep, it's eighty euros (Josep doesn't know; if this gets published he'll find out, and tell me I'm an idiot).

I'll forward the manifesto to other friends, in case they're interested.

February 15th

The Rambla Nova is wet and it's a bit cold. There's no daylight left when we reach the rail of the Balcó. The sky and the sea are so black that they merge into one piece that reaches the beach whipped into white tips. In the middle, shining like a golden brooch set into the dark canvas, is the foreshortening created by the lights of a very big oil tanker; optically, like the diameter of three moons together. Higher up, Sirius, the brightest star in the northern hemisphere, is almost no competition for the wealth of kilowatts emitted by the boat.

But there it is, beneath the constellation of Orion, presiding the winter like it does every year.

February 16th

The pigeons again. They've shit on my sheets. What a burden. This is also typical of Tarragona.

As I try to clean the stain, Elisabet calls me to tell me she's going to Madrid. From time to time, she has to go for work and from the way she speaks you'd think she was going to enemy territory.

—Go, go, I don't know how they put up with you.

—Ha, ha.

February 17th

«And why did we go?», says Fernando Savater in an article published in the newspaper, *Diario Montañés*, in which he explains the reasons for which he got on a bus and dedicated four days to travelling Spain.

Because for the people from the rest of Spain, it's not the same to read in the newspaper that the non-nationalist councillors need an escort in the Basque Country as it is to speak on a one-to-one basis with people who have been attacked, whose houses or cars have been burnt and whose family has been threatened day after day. Totally normal people, with the sole 'abnormality' of having to put up with living close to intolerant brutes of the worst sort who believe that they hold the divine right not only to the land they walk on but also the land their neighbours walk on, along with them.

I wholeheartedly agree. Savater is one of the few Spanish intellectuals, or maybe the only one, who can talk about ethics as a model

practitioner himself, through his own personal situation, offering proof of his commitment and courage and even risking his life.

Among so many armchair philosophers, mediocre but well-marketed authors, Savater stands out not only for the depth of his opinions, but because he is an excellent writer, with a literary style marked by great beauty and clarity. A man who, in spite of what he has to put up with, has not lost the cordiality and joy of living. And that comes through every time we read one of his texts. Or every time we have the pleasure of listening to him or the huge privilege of having him as a guest, even if just for a moment.

Like that time he was kind enough to attend a dinner organised by my old association, when we awarded him the Mario Bohoslavsky prize, granted to those who stand out for their work in defence of critical thinking. I picked him up from the *Señor Parellada* restaurant, where he was having lunch with some friends, and brought him to Castelldefels, where the awards dinner was to take place that night. I had him all to myself for the half-hour the journey lasted, although I fear my shyness prevented me from talking to him about all the things I had planned the day before.

The day I sell the car, I'll keep the seat he sat on. Everyone worships what they deem important. And I have my own secular book of saints.

And, speaking of travellers, in the afternoon I received an email:

Gorgeous: I'm back from Spain!

Everything ok with you? Would you come with me to an Esquerra Republicana rally next month?

Muak.

Me? To an Esquerra Republicana rally? I call her straight away:

—I'm not going anywhere without knowing why.
—Because we want independence.
—We? —I say jokingly—. And what do we want it for? In what «real» aspects will it improve our lives? What reports have been drawn up?
—I don't have that data right now... —she says sighing.
—But you must have some idea.
—Yes. We'll talk about it later.
We'll talk about it later. Right. What do you bet we don't?

February 18th

Fernando calls me. He's that friend who was sick and I hadn't heard from for so long. Now we call each other quite often. He's my closest friend again.

He says to me:

—Aznar is not to blame for the escalating tension between Catalonia and Spain. You know who is?

—Who?

—Florentino Pérez⁵⁰.

—Right, right. You should read my diary.

It's the same thing Àlex said to me! And he really knows his stuff when it comes to tribal passion. Or have we forgotten that flags are banners of military origin? Sports logic is inspired by the war-mon-

50. *TN*: Florentino Pérez (born 8 March 1947) is a Spanish businessman, civil engineer, former politician, and president of Real Madrid C.F., as well as Grupo ACS, a civil engineering company. He is most famous for ushering in Real Madrid's period of *Los Galácticos*, a time when the club paid extremely high transfer fees for elite footballers. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Florentino_P%C3%A9rez.

gering enterprise! And experience proves the falsity of certain conjectures from psychologists who believe that sports fury diverts aggressiveness. There are studies that say, precisely, the opposite.

What's happened in Catalonia makes it clear: if we use the national symbols («we are more than a club!») we don't «sublimate» conflict, but rather make the political rivalries nominal and executive, as well as the bad blood between neighbours and hatred between people who, (damn it!), are brothers.

And the fact is that I'm furious. The news of the day, the sad news, is that ETA has announced a ceasefire in Catalonia: the key that Carod is showing off is more like Bluebeard's keyring: it opens and closes rooms that may contain corpses.

As a Catalan I am ashamed. But as a citizen, which is the only thing that matters even if it does sound very melodramatic, I reiterate: NOT IN MY NAME!!!!».

In the afternoon, I go to German. Waltraud, the teacher, is a girl in her late forties, with a good figure and a young, bohemian air.

I don't know how, but during today's class, we talk about the United States and Waltraud badmouths them. I'm always amazed when teachers get on their soapboxes in class about political matters before a captive audience which, moreover, has to be careful with her because she's the one who grades it. Maybe I find it scandalous because I haven't been to class for years. I, in favour of a secular education, believe that young people should be given a non-ideological education too. And to see Waltraud in action reaffirms that idea. To me, it's all the same whether the influence is religious or dogmatic. Adolescents are not capable of defending themselves against either.

I suppose teachers have never tried to stop dogmatically influencing their students, often subconsciously. But having lived the way I've lived, at the age of forty-something too, today's experience was extremely irksome. I am gobsmacked by how irrevocably and authoritatively Waltraud decrees scorn for all things American. In class, the adolescents (and some of the older students too) agree with her offering more clichés. For instance, one quite mature student says that the Americans «are like children». Another guy comes out with the same old «they have no culture». So original. And Waltraud encourages them, delighted with herself.

They spend a few good minutes ranting about the Americans. But when she says that the Americans are «descendants of criminals» who escaped justice by fleeing to America, I can't take any more and I explode. At the end of the day, it makes little difference to me whether she passes me or not. I'm luckier that way than when I went to university:

—Waltraud... in the early days, the majority of the immigration to the United States was by people seeking a religious freedom that they didn't have in Europe.

She's surprised to find that someone contradicts her and contributes opposite information. She tells me that it's not true and gives quite a long and heated dissertation. It's all so irrational that I can't be bothered to argue with her. And to crown her speech, she vehemently claims that the Americans are nothing and that «they owe it all to us».

Some people are fixated with this. Anything bad the Americans do is their affair. But if there's anything valuable (art, refinement, etc.), it's thanks to Europe. As if they were a sort of franchise. I say:

—Listen, the Americans are as much the heirs of that Europe as we are. Those Europeans are the ancestors of both. We are all their

children, both the Americans and us. So they have as much right to say they're the fruit of that culture as you do.

—They owe us everything —she insists without any arguments.

—They don't owe anything to «us»; if anything is owed to anyone, both us and them, owe it to those ancestors. Plus, in the last century, their contribution to science and culture in general has far outstripped Europe's.

Uproar in class. That's going too far.

—There is no culture in the United States —she says, cuttingly and very disappointed in me.

—Well, I think they have a culture that's at least as rich and potent as ours.

And I speak to her of New York, of art... and a load of other clichés. Clichés for clichés, I also know a few. She practically cannot believe it. But everyone knows that the Americans are nothing and have nothing!

—It's a country of bandits who killed the Indians and allow guns to be sold freely.

—Well, Canada and Australia allow it too and you don't hear anything bad about them.

—Of course! They descend from the same scum.

That really does get on my nerves. Even if it were true, if the people who immigrated there had suffered prison and misery, their children should never be branded with the same stigma. And this from the mouth of a lefty? What a liberal! The state of the left nowadays. It reminds me of Michael Moore, the writer and film director who, in his book *Stupid White Men*, is so offensive against Bush for having been an alcoholic that, in spite of not liking him at all, you end up becoming fond of him (Bush, I mean). The high-mindedness of the liberals is pitiful.

Would you look at Waltraud! Ha! What she doesn't seem to know is the considerable German population living in the United States in that period of «European criminals» she's criticising. So many in fact, that when choosing the country's official language (to a certain degree, given that the American constitution does not stipulate any one official language), German almost won: it was the second most widely spoken language. I remember perfectly in *Little Women*, the first book without any pictures that I read, the younger sister, the one who was so good, gets sick when a baby from a poor family that she protects and brings food to, dies in her arms from scarlet fever. And it was a German family which, from what the author describes, could easily be compared to a family of Romanian gypsies like the ones we see nowadays.

What a hullabaloo we've caused. Some very young classmates say the Americans «are racists». I remind them that there was a Holocaust in Europe not too long ago. There's no need for me to mention the word Germany. The children shut up and look in fear and amusement at the teacher.

February 19th

Elisabet is really upset about Carod and the ETA ceasefire. Not because the man went to speak to them, but because of how everyone is attacking him, poor little thing. She sends me this email:

I'm really, really sad about what's happening. Even if you don't think like me, you understand me, don't you? Today I'm in mourning.

Elisabet

Poor girl, she's worrying me. I call her and tell her to come over, that we'll talk. When she gets here, we sit on the sofa and have a cup of tea. She's in bits.

—Girl, what's up? —I ask her.

—You know.

—You like messing things up and then look what happens...

—We have the right to our ideals.

—Independence?

—We're different to the Spanish. I don't know how you haven't realized it, but we are.

—And what if I don't realise it because there's nothing to realise? What if it's your problem?

—I don't feel comfortable in Spain. Just think, I always feel more at home when I go to Paris, Berlin...

—What a bummer... But, be careful, what if the Parisians or Berliners consider you exactly the same as a woman from Extremadura.

—Of course they won't.

—I can't believe you... In what way are they different? Are they so different?

—Totally, don't you see how backward they are? Take it from me, I go to Madrid every second week.

—Well, if you think they're so backward in Spain, and as you're such a charitable person... help them raise the standard! Do something socially beneficial for everyone!

—Me? With all that arrogance they have! Look, I feel... invaded.

—Fuck, don't tell me there are invaders... Maybe there are aliens among us and I haven't realised.

—Don't laugh at me.

But I do feel like needling her a bit. Like making her laugh, but also like needling her.

—Maybe you're like that crowd who go to Montserrat I don't know what day of the month to see UFOs. They see loads of them. They're the only ones to see them, but they always see them.

And we while away the time with this little game until she leaves.

A short while later, my son calls me. He says he's cancelled his Barça subscription. That things are really bad. That a lot of people have stopped going to the stadium, even though they haven't cancelled their subscriptions like him. I jokingly ask him if he'll exchange Barça for a team that wins more matches. But he takes it to heart. He considers me useless in these matters.

—Nobody switches teams, you don't understand anything.

—Why not?

—It's a feeling, you have it in your heart. You can change political party, girlfriend, nationality. But never your team.

Now I get it. What you carry in your heart is stapled on.

February 20th

Here, as long as they differentiate themselves from PP, people are happy. They no longer need to work. If we do everything wrong, it makes no difference. The citizen needs to be convinced that «the enemies» are to blame for everything and a spirit of anti-Spanishness and anti-PP (they appear to be the same thing) has to be cultivated.

I still remember *El entierro de la Sardina*⁵¹ from two years ago.

51. TN: The “Burial of the Sardine” (Spanish: *Entierro de la sardina*) is a Spanish ceremony celebrating the end of carnival and other festivities. The “Burials” generally consist of a carnival parade that parodies a funeral procession and culminates with the burning of a symbolic figure, usually a representation of a sardine. The “Burial of the Sardine” is celebrated the Saturday following the end of Easter Week and is a symbolical burial of the past to allow society to be reborn,

Let me recount it, it's worth hearing. It's a popular feast, that's celebrated a lot in Catalonia. In Tarragona, the people really participate. It is traditionally closed by «*Sa Majestat Carnestoltes*», «Her Majesty Lady Carnival», usually represented by the devil or some other rule-breaking figure, so to speak. A basic requirement is for the speech to be as vulgar as possible. And this certainly was, vulgar that is: pronounced from the Council door and, I imagine paid for by all the taxpayers. The reference to the taxpayers is not accidental, as the object of the insults (because that's what it's all about) were, obviously, the members of PP. The way they spoke about the wife of the then president of the Government was intolerable. Look, look at the opening speech:

*As if there weren't enough
at the great PP circus,
now there's a new jester,
in a dress with a cleavage.*

*A new monster has emerged
from Aznar's franchise:
at home she's his whore
in Madrid she wants to be in charge.*

*Look at her with Gallardón,
how she takes pleasure, Botella⁵²
he must stick it right in*

transformed and gain new vigour. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Entierro_de_la_Sardina.

52. TN: The surname "Botella" means bottle.

*as far up as her neck*⁵³.

Just writing it makes my hairs stand on end. The citizens of this city and, probably those of many other places in Catalonia or elsewhere too, have to put up with this sort of thing. And Tarragona is quite civilised! It's not a particularly nationalist city. It's more "Tarragonist". A collection should be made of this type of messages in popular festivals throughout the Catalan geography (and then, very carefully, the same should be done in the Basque Country).

I'm going with Josep to «touch the iron» and decompress.

The whole atmosphere is very charged.

February 22nd

At least on the debate lists the subject matters are very varied and interesting so you can take a break from all this drivel. Like today's subject. Is it natural to walk around naked? A friend of mine, Dr. March, who's a practising nudist, defends this idea. But not everybody is so sure. Héctor, a member from Argentina, says on «Skepticos»:

Might it not be possible that the use of clothes is precisely the essence of the human being and that we can't term the person who has never used it human? It's like speech. How much of it is culture and how much innate? Can the person who speaks no language be termed human? Perhaps I'm

53. Per si eren pocs a la conya / de la gran farsa pepera, / ara hi ha un nou bufó, / amb vestit i regatera. / Ha aparegut un nou monstre / de la franquícia Aznar: / a casa és la seva puta / i, a Madrid, vol manar. / Mireu-la amb el Gallardón, / com disfruta, la Botella, / segur que li endinya a fons / fins a tocar gargamella.

posing very obvious questions that already have old answers from the anthropologists.

It's a fascinating subject. In fact, there are scientists who think the natural state of the Homo Sapiens is precisely to be dressed, given that man is the only primate to do so. It would appear that the hominids who lived before us and were extinguished already wore clothes. The Neanderthal and the Homo Erectus very probably did.

The female human is the only female not to go into heat. Not only is she the only one not to offer regular and obvious propaganda of her sexual availability. Men are also the primates with least hair of all. Possibly the nakedness has replaced heat as a sexual offering and that's why the image of a naked body is always exciting and disturbing. It is because of this that nudism will never be a natural practise, as my friend March would like to believe. Culture would have to change dramatically for a group of naked human beings to share a space as if there were nothing unusual about it. That is the most sophisticated and artificial idea possible.

Some scientists criticise the fact that when Carl Sagan designed the images and messages of the Voyager spacecraft (which must now be leaving the solar system), he decided to include the image of a naked man and woman. They considered it an old-fashioned idea as, in their opinion, a human depicted as they live in reality would offer far more information to an alien: that is, dressed.

February 23rd

The PNV and EA⁵⁴ always say that «you live really well in the Basque

54. TN: EA (*Eusko Alkartasuna*): political party operating in Spain and

country», in reference to their high income and standard of living.

Certainly, you live very well in the Basque Country from a material point of view, as also occurs in the rest of Spain, with slight differences from one region to another. But the only place this well-being is stained by crime is in the Basque Country. They are tough words, but they describe the reality. This «we live really well» is an insult because often it is an exhortation to people to ignore the lack of freedom experienced by some of their neighbours in exchange for certain material advantages.

However, it is also true that the economy is such an important value, as reflected in that «we live really well», that few arguments would undermine the PNV pretensions more than money. The Basque economy is closely bound to the economy of the rest of Spain in a network of interests that, should it be broken, would lead to serious consequences for everyone, and particularly for the Basques. We should get into the habit of starting here. Every time the politicians propose something extraordinary (particularly if it's very risky and independence certainly is that), we should say: what do we want it for? How much will it cost is? Who will pay it?

February 24th

Under Paquita's newspaper stand. It's a curious place and a densely populated ecological niche. There are numerous humans dispatching newspapers, a canary and a husky, Bowi. All in a space of two

France. The Basque language name means Basque Solidarity and is abbreviated as EA. The party describes itself as a Basque nationalist, democratic, popular, progressive and non-denominational party. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eusko_Alkartasuna.

metres.

I pick up the papers and read:

The secretary general of Esquerra Republicana (ERC), Josep Lluís Carod Rovira, yesterday received a serious reprimand from numerous directors of Catalan companies due to his interview with the leaders of ETA. Carod, who presided a lunch in the conservative *Círculo Ecuéstre de Barcelona*, tenaciously defended his right to contact the terrorists as long as it serves to prevent new violent acts and saves lives. And he categorically stated: «I have already more than paid the consequences of my meeting with ETA». The unanimous opinion of the businessmen against Carod was made clear when the auditorium applauded the speech by the lawyer, José Manuel Moya, who reproached Carod for his silence «before the Parliament and the people» about the contents of his «six-hour long» conversation with the leadership of the terrorist band. The ERC leader held his breath. And, puffing up his chest, he answered: «I prefer to know that I've saved a single human life rather than winning elections or holding onto the position of first councillor».

I am indignant. Carod should tell us what human life he has saved. And what is the price that he has already paid? No, no, no; We have all paid it. And we've all paid it because his interview has interfered with the anti-terrorist fight. If we have adopted some poor misfortunate without asking to, at least let them give us the details. And if there is no proof of someone whose life has been saved, then it's a robbery. Because Carod has not only not paid out of his own pocket, but he will gain from it: he will gain extra votes. He's a hero at the cost of the majority.

Carod, like Octavio Areces⁵⁵ or Aramís Fuster⁵⁶, will say that this human life belongs to someone who could have been killed but has now been saved thanks to his intervention. I say Fuster because Carod works along the same lines: magical thinking (or rather, brazen thinking), that lobs the burden of guilt to the lap of the dissenter, in the knowledge (or, what's even worse, without knowing) that the truth of a denial cannot be proven. Nobody will ever be able to demonstrate that a person has not been saved for this reason. Likewise, nobody will ever be able to demonstrate that a person has not been saved thanks to the fact that I've written this book. Cosmovision of philologists and psychics who ignore the fact that proof holds the last word.

By the way, the mantra of «a single human life» we hear so much in the media aims to justify actions driven by good intentions, but carried out with more emotion than intelligence and that lead to a very humble outcome in relation to the effort invested. As Benjamin Bradford says in the book *Media Mythmakers*, «a single human life» is a failure, whatever way you look at it.

In the case of Carod's meeting there will never be any provable life saved, but we have ETA back on the daily news again.

February 25th

The magic thinking of Carod and today's black magic have more in common than they seem. Tahar Ben Jelloun reflected in *La Vanguardia* newspaper on Haiti in an article entitled «Under the weight

55. TN: Octavio Areces: renowned Spanish psychic.

56. TN: Aramís Fuster: a self-appointed psychic and witch, who is well-known in Spain.

of the curse». Among other things, he says:

The whole island is under the influence of Voodoo. The Duvaliers elevated Voodoo to an everyday practise, transforming it into an instrument of their domain and, above all, in a means to rid themselves of their enemies. They tell me that the dead never fully die. They return. They torment both homes and consciences. Passing by a cemetery one day, where there had just been a burial, I saw two men spreading nails on the path. They explained to me that the family spreads nails to stop the dead from hurrying back.

Yikes, it's scary to think there are places where this type of irrationality governs the country's life. The absence of rights and laws gives rise to randomness and, above all, the power of voodoo. Voodoo is the belief in a sort of black magic (loaded with deep-rooted superstitions) that governs the lives of people. Voodoo is destiny, and it can be represented by the image of a black rooster or any other animal in possession of the soul of the dead. There are so many people who believe, and who believe so fervently, that many of the African prostitutes who work in Europe need only hear these threats to become hostages of their pimps.

This lack of sanity would be laughable if we didn't find the same irrationality in our own society which, taken to extremes, converts people into slaves to their fear.

In the afternoon, I go to German and on the way out I stop to talk to Berta, my classmate from the photography shop. She's a lovely girl and a good classmate.

But today she's very upset: her brother-in-law, who was sixty years old, has just dropped dead. Of a heart attack that nobody expected. And she adds that this has shown her that, «whatever you do», everyone has a set moment and whatever needs to happen, happens anyway.

I can't help remembering the article on Voodoo that I read this morning. The irrational tics that Westerners share with the rest of the cultures feed off the same misunderstandings.

—My brother-in-law did sports, he was slim, he didn't smoke. This proves that it's pointless to take precautions.

—I couldn't disagree more —I answered—. It's the same as saying there are people who die in traffic accidents going slow, or that even if you are law-abiding and drive carefully a suicidal person can drive into you and kill you, or that you can have a mechanical problem, that it makes no difference if you behave like a maniac... that it makes no difference whether you drive at a hundred miles an hour or two-hundred. Is this the advice you'd give to a son of yours?

—No, of course not.

—Berta, a person can die for many reasons. There's no need to think that «their time» has come. The statistics are clear: more men of sixty who are smokers, obese and sedentary die than healthy men due to a hidden disease that nobody could have foreseen.

She's a bit surprised that I'm so against the idea of destiny. But I believe these harmful ideas cause us to take longer to realise the true problems. The idea of destiny is a deep-rooted superstition in our society. The difference compared to these unfortunate African countries is that here it doesn't prevail over the laws. But it's a question of levels.

February 26th

Mariona calls me today to tell me that today in Barcelona there's a protest against the latest communication from ETA about the cease-fire in Catalonia. I tell her I'm not going because the motto is:

In defence of democracy, the self-government of Catalonia and in solidarity with all citizens of the State. No to ETA, not here and not anywhere.

—Wow! It's against ETA and you're not going?

—Of course I'm not going. What do they mean in «defence of self-government»? We're back to the same old, same old. The fantasy of independence and sucking up to the nationalists.

—The one who's back to the same old, same old is you. Catalonia is part of Spain, not because it wants to be, but out of pure and simple historical imposition.

—Come off it!

—Yep. And now I have to leave you, the child's crying.

And she hangs up on me. Flabbergasted and frustrated because I can't answer her.

So you see: «historical imposition». What a strange thing, don't you think? She must find it anomalous. The only country I know of that has been legally constituted by an order from a supranational organisation is Israel, which was constituted by the United Nations. And that didn't prevent any blood from being spilled, as we very well know.

Myths. The reality is that no countries have been created without the «force of weapons». And that there are no people anywhere who can be called «autochthonous». Everything flows. People are not mushrooms. What's more, an ecologist would also question the

idea of «autochthonous» mushrooms. Flora and fauna take advantage of conditions that propagate them. If these conditions change, they also change or emigrate in search of a more favourable habitat. Now, the Mediterranean pine or the holm oak might be autochthonous, but five-hundred years down the line, who knows what will be «typically Catalan».

I think it's corrosive to search for differences and there is never any end to it. In addition, if one day Catalonia were to become independent, after a while we would have someone with aspirations to becoming a worm head instead of a mouse tail. People from Tarragona or Girona rising up against the centralism and the *pixapins* and the *camacos* of Barcelona⁵⁷.

And it wouldn't be the end. The people from Reus can't stand the sight of the ones from Tarragona, and those from Vila-seca can't stand those from Salou. The Republic of Tarragona wouldn't last long. It would just be a question of time before some politician came out to take advantage of those pitiful yet real feelings.

February 27th

I go to the hairdressers'. They go on about the «restructuring» treatment again. I don't know what they think a restructuring product can actually restructure. Their intentions are good; it's what they sell. I defend myself as best I can. One day they'll catch me in a weak state and I'll give in.

The owner is a very friendly and professional girl. She styles my

57. In Catalan, *Pixapins* [literally: piss against pine trees] means city-slickers and *camacos* [literally: how nice] means day-trippers, in reference to the daft and drooling reaction of the city dweller when faced with the rural landscape

hair today. Meanwhile, I read the newspaper. In *La Vanguardia* there's an interview with a certain Carl Djerassi who they say is a writer and the inventor of the contraceptive pill. The headline catches my eye: «I hate being eighty years old». Very direct, yes sir. They ask him how he came to be a writer, and he says:

—When I was 60, the great love of my life, the woman I had been living with for five years, left me for another man, a writer.

—How old was she?

—In her early thirties. That abandonment was an insult to me. I thought: «But she has the most interesting man she could have!».

—Age is a perception.

—I know, I feel young, but the world doesn't know it. I'm not interested in people of 80, they're too old. I already know it's an absolutely stupid posture, but that's the way it is.

What a nerve men have! It turns out that, as the interviewer says compassionately, «age is a perception», but, even though he agrees, the guy wanted her almost thirty years younger. If it's just a perception, why didn't he look for someone his own age? The fact is that men want women to be beautiful and young, while they can be «interesting».

And what man doesn't consider himself interesting? I don't know a single man who doesn't consider himself interesting, funny, good in bed and a better-than-average driver. Not one.

February 28th

I check my lists email to see what the hottest topic is. It would ap-

pear to be the famous turkey Bush had his photo taken with when he went to Iraq for Thanksgiving. Again! Newspapers the world over claimed it was made of plastic.

The truth is that the animal was decorative, but not plastic. It was authentic. It's not that strange: it's a banquet for a lot of people, they prepare the turkey (or the suckling pig, or whatever) in the kitchen, it's carved and it's served on the plates. Often, a full, cooked and well-presented turkey is placed on a separate table, in a privileged position. It's done here too, not just in America.

This is an example of how urban myths are formed. They're launched by some American, anti-Bush newspaper and here (and everywhere, really) the story is taken up with more enthusiasm than critical sense by both the right and the left-wing media. Probably to show up American society's hypocrisy and lies. A society in which everything is as fake as that controversial turkey made into a metaphor for a barbaric civilisation in which, unlike ours, only appearances and money matter.

February 29th

We go for a walk by La Larga. We are constantly saying hello to people. La Larga is the same as the Rambla de Barcelona. The same. A pleasure.

Afterwards, Elisabet calls me to know if I'll go to the Esquerra rally. She says it's only fair since she went with me to the PP talk in the Rovira y Virgili University.

—I didn't take you to a PP rally. I don't support that party. I did it for a different reason. Someone from the Basque socialists could have been giving the talk.

—Whatever you say. But you made me go. Now it's your turn.
—Fine... Pain in the neck...
This is what I get for muddling matters all on my ownio.

March 1st

As we eat a carpaccio with oil from Vallbona de les Monges —the town Josep is from— and parmesan that I've grated, we watch television. The *Día a día* programme is on. The journalist, Isabel San Sebastián, and the presenter, M^a Teresa Campos are talking about the possibility of Bin Laden already having been arrested (as the news hinted at a few days ago) and they maintain that the news will only be published when it's in their political interests to do so.

One of the characteristics of the anti-American spirit is the general obsession with the idea that they're behind anything bad that happens in the world and that everything is under their control. Like for instance, the suspicion that the Americans control and administer an event as important as the arrest of Bin Laden.

The most fervent believer of the theory is Carmen Rigalt, another panellist on the programme. She is so sure that she gives the impression of believing the Americans are Gods. She's so fixated on them, that she magnifies them.

At night, the literature professor I spoke to a couple of months ago, José María Fernández, called. A series of days dedicated to Spanish Language Literature are being prepared for next week. He tells me that Gustavo Bueno, one of the speakers —a very elderly gentle-

man— has got sick and can't go. All of a sudden he asks me if I'd like to talk about my book for an hour. He leaves me open-mouthed. I thought he was calling to ask me if I could think of anyone he could invite instead. Arcadi, for instance.

But he asked me. Me instead of Bueno? Good grief. And won't they notice the difference? Has he taken some strange medication, this Fernández?

Before he has second thoughts, I quickly say yes. As the saying goes: «Take the money and run». But I practically can't sleep tonight.

March 2nd

I go to the Esquerra Republicana rally. I promised Elisabet I would in a flash of open-mindedness. And I'm really regretting it. It's in the Palacio de Congressos, a new building that overlooks the port. It's packed. I stop to say hello to a few known faces. The atmosphere is very festive.

My friend is really happy. She glances at me every now and then. Maybe the atmosphere will work a miracle, she must be thinking. Something like taking me to Lourdes. She already knows that I won't do things like applauding and that, and I think she must be a bit wary in case I don't behave myself.

While we're waiting, we talk about the people on the list. She doesn't like them at all. Practically nobody thinks like her. And on top of that, they give out to her. Like Josep March, my doctor friend, who reproached her for deriding the victims of terrorism a few days ago. She must think he's over the top and not to be trusted.

—Have you seen his signature? —she says—. He signs «José», the Spanish name, and not the Catalan version, «Josep».

It's true. I think it grabs my attention too. He once told me that he didn't write in Catalan because his generation didn't learn it and, rather than doing something badly, he preferred not to do it. He is originally from Seo de Urgell. His grandparents are from Irán, a little village located close to Pont de Suert. I sometimes joke with him about being «Iranian». He speaks Spanish with his wife, who is Catalan. And not because they're snooty, God no. I used also speak Spanish with my first husband. He was from Valencia and I spoke Catalan with my son and with everyone else. But we met in Spanish and we never changed language. I imagine that March, a non-nationalist lefty, doesn't see any problem with it.

The big hall is filling up. We sit on two seats near the aisle. There's a free seat next to us, closer to the centre. A woman sits down. After a while, another one comes along to say hello. Elisabet and I are in the middle. The one who was passing by is standing on my side and she practically leans on top of me to talk to the other one. We can't talk with this woman on top of us. I tell Elisabet that her spittle is going to hit me and she agrees, laughing. Very nice. Thanks

The two friends have a shouted conversation in a very cultchie accent and completely ignore us. They're bordering on rude. I look at Elisabet and think that she must think the same of them as me. But I suspect that she thinks something else as well. Clever-clogs, she knows me well, what I'd like to say to her now is: «If they were from Extremadura you'd be insulting them up to the eyeballs». She's very astute.

All of a sudden, the rally people come in and the music of the *Cant de la Senyera*⁵⁸ plays. I wonder whether to stand up like everyone else or not. Elisabet, who has a sort of radar for these things, notices and, shocked and scandalised, says to me:

58. TN: A de facto Catalan anthem, alongside "Els Segadors".

—It's the *Cant de la Senyera*! Aren't you going to stand up?

—I already know it's the *Cant de la Senyera*! Who said I wasn't going to stand up?

And I do so quite brusquely. I don't know if I would have stood up, in any case. I find the whole business of standing up for anthems a bit formal and patriotic. But she didn't even give me time to think about it. I'm really annoyed. I feel the same mix of indignation and shame I used to feel as a teenager when my mother gave out to me. It has brought back those sorts of reminiscences.

When the show ends I go home feeling as if I were twelve years old. And I don't like it. Josep is at home, of course, and laughs in my face when I explain it to him.

March 5th

Ah, Friday. To me it's the same as any other day: my life is very similar every day of the week. But a husband who is «bent over double» from working, as they say here, infects me with the pre-festive air of this day. And now we're at the start of the Rambla, looking out over the Balcó, naturally.

What a serene view, what a lovely breeze. My hair blows softly. Josep and I look out at the sea in wonder. Some pigeons fly over the edge, at our eye level. We could almost reach out and touch them. A couple next to us is also relaxing looking out over the view. Since we're a pair of nosey-parkers, we eavesdrop on them. He must be from somewhere else, while she's from here. And they say:

—I've spent my whole life travelling to Catalonia and every time I come, I have to listen to things like: «But the thing is that here in Catalonia we do things this way or that way».

—Yes, there are people who have that fixation...

—Why do they explain everything from the perspective of being Catalan? Is there no other way of explaining things?

—Plus it's dangerous. If we have to be superior in everything, what will we do if things go wrong one day?

It's a pity Elisabet is away. I haven't heard from her since the rally. There were a lot of people, but not all Catalans were there. Now she should be here listening to these two. I bet she doesn't even know their sort exist. It's a pity that our politicians never waste their time leaning over a «Balcó», without any more «flights of fantasy», than those visible from here and surrounded by conversations among normal people. We would have a better future.

March 6th

I've just come back from seeing *El retablo de las maravillas*, by Els Joglars. Boadella is fantastic. I love him. He has the same phobias as me.

Then.

Arcadi sends me an email telling me that on Monday he'll be presenting Savater's book, *El gran fraude* at the CCCB⁵⁹. And he adds: «Today they told me that they're preparing a ruckus. I don't know».

Ruckus? Ah, of course, it must be because Savater is coming. I tell him I'd go and support them if I could, but that I'm speaking in the Rovira i Virgili University on Monday.

Just mentioning it makes me shake.

59. *TN*: The Centre de Cultura Contemporània de Barcelona (also known by its acronym, CCCB) is an arts centre in Barcelona.

March 7th

Santiago calls and tells me he'll come and pick me up at ten and that trouble is brewing. Seriously, here too? Arcadi talks about a «ruckus» and Santiago about «trouble». Apparently, there are posters at the university saying things like «the seagull that shits itself» and that Professor Fernández is a fascist.

Lord, more fascists. Now it turns out that this Fernández is one too. Why? Well, I imagine because he organises seminars called «Spanish Language». I imagine, you know? And my novel is not even exactly in the Spanish language. It talks about characters from Barcelona. Some speak Catalan and others Spanish. «That's real life, idiot».

Who knows what will happen. Yesterday I was joking with Josep about whether they might throw tomatoes at me for being a bad speaker but maybe they'll throw them at me for being a... «fascist».

I'd better not tell him anything.

I'm upset. All this love of the homeland is a problem. There's nobody who doesn't love their country, their people, their landscape. But I always say that to make it obligatory is like fucking out of duty, you lose interest.

I don't know if I have any interest anymore. The day Elisabet said to me «It's the *Canto de la Senyera!* Aren't you going to stand up?», I realised that I'd need to watch an awful lot of nationalist pornography to feel anything. And Carod already did loads of nationalist pornography there in the Palacio de Congressos.

But it didn't get me hot...

Afterwards we go to the beach for lunch. The sun is shining splendidly, but there's a crappy wind. You can't even walk. I have to cover the sides of my face with my hands to stop myself from getting an earache and from having to get my mother to go tomorrow instead of Bueno.

Later, when I get home, I find this email from Arcadi:

I just got a message from Savater. Apparently, the government in Catalonia and the police are advising him to suspend the talk he's supposed to give tomorrow in the faculty of law in the Rovira i Virgili university, within the Writers Encounter. I don't know what to expect in the afternoon in the Centro de Cultura Contemporánea.

This is the absolute limit. Josep gets alarmed and says he doesn't want me to go. That all we need is for someone to hurt me. I tell him this riffraff just wants to prevent Savater from coming (which is bad enough in itself), that he shouldn't talk nonsense. Why would they attack me?

—Bring your mobile phone with you and let me know if anything happens. If anyone lays a finger on you I'll kill them...

Damn it, man. What's up? This is madness. I feel so bad about it. Maybe it's all an exaggeration. Although it's also true that none of the speakers wants to be made suffer. If they'd wanted adventures they'd have become soldiers or war correspondents.

And this poor man, José María... They've really put him out of joint.

I see (because she wrote on the list) that Elisabet is back from a su-

per-luxury trip that she enjoyed with friends, all from the world of fashion and textiles. I call her and explain what's happening. I tell her that maybe Savater won't be able to come. She doesn't quite say «hurrah!» but almost.

I get really het up:

—It feels like the Nazi era!

—They do the same thing.

—Do you mean that they sabotage the acts of the nationalists?

—No, not that, but they're constantly insulting them.

—Well, they should insult them back, shouldn't they? Actually, they already do. But they shouldn't use violence.

—I don't want to fall out with you over this.

—I don't want to fall out with you either.

—...

—...

—I brought you back some chocolate. And I'll be there tomorrow when you give your talk, ok?

I'm left feeling really sad. I don't know if we're going to be able to stay friends. We're talking about aggressions, physical attacks, not insults. I don't know what's going to happen, but there are disturbing precedents; in Barcelona itself, in fact. This would be no joke in the Basque Country.

We'll see tomorrow.

Before I go to bed, I recite the text I'm going to read to Josep. I like the light-hearted and funny way the Anglo-Saxons spread some of their ideas, so I include the odd joke and ironic comment. Josep says nobody will get it and I'm not going to make anyone laugh.

What does he know.

March 8th

Today is the big day. While I'm waiting for Santiago to arrive, I read the mail. One of the emails is from Paul Kurtz, the director of the Center for Inquiry, re-sent by Miguel Ángel. They ask us to travel to Buffalo from April 7th to 11th. That's Easter Week. It sounds great. I'll need to speak to Josep about it.

Santiago arrives after 11. I had already called his wife because I thought it odd for him to be late. He explains the whole thing: that Savater won't come. He shows me the letter he has sent:

Dear Jose María:

I'm sorry to say that, despite our agreement, I won't be there with you in Tarragona. The reason is sad but simple: a group of radicals, more or less students, has decided to try and stop my entrance into the Faculty and boycott my talk in the Writers' Encounter. Of course, I could insist on attending the act I've been invited to, as per my right. But since I already have a sad experience of similar situations (the last in the Universidad Central de Barcelona) I know that to do so I'd have to either rely on the police or risk my skin, alone in the face of danger. Neither of the solutions persuade me much. I've always been against police presence at the University and now I only consider it acceptable in the form of a minimal essential escort for those people directly threatened by terrorism. To give my talk in Tarragona, I would need a police deployment that would transform an academic act into part two of the disembarkation in Normandy. That sort of exaggeration doesn't seem advisable. And as for risking my skin alone... well, as the dramatist Valle-Inclán said, it is honourable to be a martyr devoured by lions, but there's no honour in being kicked by the mules. And since that's what's awaiting me, I renounce my martyr's crown.

So I am sorry, but I won't be with you. And it is up to you, students

and professors of the University of Tarragona, to judge the fact that in a democratic society such as the one we share, a group of die-hard thugs should decide who you can and cannot listen to. If I am not mistaken, the aggression is against both you and I: let each of us reflect on what should be done in this situation.

Kind regards to you all and a hug to you.

Fernando Savater

What a disappointment... well, we'll adapt to what we have.

Santiago and I talk a bit about how he'll introduce me in the act and we head for the Faculty of Law, where a press conference is taking place.

Some elements of the Tarragona media are represented. The line of questioning revolves more or less around how real the threat is. They don't seem to believe it much. Among the nationalists (and the media here is nationalist, obviously), there is a frivolous and uncharitable habit of thinking that people like the *Basta Ya* members complain just for the sake of it. It's all very uncomfortable. The police and the Government Delegation advise Savater not to come; moreover, Savater himself is sick of threats. But what the media and the nationalist politicians of Tarragona will try to sell is that the man is exaggerating and that he's a chicken. I can see it clearly. It's very hypocritical to call someone else a coward when you're not the one who has to go through the world with escorts.

But the most messed up part of all is that since everyone else has failed to show this first day... it will be up to me to open the Seminar. God Almighty! That really is awful. It's like finding yourself standing on a chess board in which the king, the queen and the tower have all disappeared... and you're left alone. The pawn is opening up the game... because there's nobody else. If I had known I would

have said no. And now I can't disappear with dignity.

In terror, I join a lunch with a bunch of participants. Apart from Santiago and José María, the only one I know is Enrique Gómez León, who was supposed to introduce Savater. Enrique, together with Eudald Carbonell, presented my book in Tarragona. He's the brother of my husband's brother-in-law.

After lunch we head for the faculty and, as soon as we arrive, I am thunderstruck. I had imagined a function room more or less the size of the one the press conference had taken place in. But it turns out it's in the Aula Magna. On top of that, there are loads of people. Do they know that Bueno's not coming and they're going to get me instead? I see Elisabet and other acquaintances. Not a hope of improvising anything. I'm too new at this and I'm petrified.

I climb onto the stage and, after Santiago's introduction, I read mine and I don't move a centimetre. I try to explain how I, «a common civilian» who is not part of any academic caste, a person who has always worked in the private sector, came to be interested in science and critical thinking. And I appeal to people to fight against irrationality to preserve civil rights and freedoms.

At the start I get stuck, but in the end I keep going. Just like Josep had warned me the day before, nobody gets any of my jokes. Rather than making people laugh they make them frown. But the text is the text and it saves me from drowning.

I end with a certain amount of dignity (it seems). When it comes to question time, it's all very sensible, but one girl is unfriendly. She makes a really odd observation: she says my lecture reminded her of Michael Moore's in *Bowling for Columbine*. That's unbelievable. Michael Moore is a hero of the most fundamentalist American, and now European, left. And she mistakes me for him? I ask her if I've really understood her correctly. And she says yes, that the means

exactly what she says. It's as if someone had sent her just to stand out. Or they passed her a note with what she had to say written on it and she doesn't know who she's talking about, or maybe what she means is that I remind her of someone who comes out in the film. Mystery. Neither I nor anyone else understand her. She doesn't insist much either.

End of the conference. I see that there's a stand with my books. So kind of them, but this audience doesn't really seem to be the buying kind.

Still dazed, I go straight to the *Taller Abat* to explain everything to Josep. When I'm about to go in, I see him with a cigarette in his hand. Liar! He had sworn to me that he didn't smoke anymore! I'm about to go in like a tonne of bricks when I stop to think. A smoker like him, with toughened arteries and a heart in God-only-knows what sort of state, who is over forty and terrified of me (a lot of fear and very little shame), could suffer a heart attack if they were to see me enter in such a fury. It's not like I want to kill him. And even less so on the day of my debut.

I let it lie and go home.

I send an email to the list explaining my adventure. I go over the story of what had happened in the run-up, of how José María Fernández had thought of me when I thought he was just calling me to help him look for a substitute. And Elisabet answers really quickly:

I can testify that your talk in the aforementioned Seminar was definitely worthwhile. As a group of young people were saying on the way out of the Aula Magna of the Faculty, your dissertation was extremely interesting. Congratulations!

But she can't resist adding:

As for Savater... I don't know what happened, but if you say that the Regional Government of Tarragona advised him not to go to the act and he paid heed to the illustrious Sagardoy, what a hero! Freedom of expression, Teresa, is for everyone and you can't back off in the face of those who think differently to you. He is only courageous in «private», is he?

Elisabet

What did I say before? That the nationalists would sell his absence as an act of cowardice. As if it were an unimportant detail for a guy who receives death threats to be advised not to turn up. We already have the first proof: Elisabet.

Everyone on the list is shocked. I thank her and reply:

As for Savater, I think it is public knowledge and a well-known fact that he is valiant, that he risks his skin. Maybe you believe he has a bodyguard in case he feels like a game of cards on his travels. Seriously, Elisabet, you and your ideas.

I'm sending the note from Savater.

Teresa

Can you believe her?

March 9th

I'm taking the teabag out of the cup when Santiago calls me. We go over the previous day. Among other things, he tells me how his wife was astounded when Elisabet said that Savater was a coward for not

going.

—She said it to your wife too?

—Yes.

Jeepers... She didn't hold herself back even slightly. Making friends, I see. Now Santiago's opinion of her is worse than ever. I am sorry.

I buy the newspaper, *Diario de Tarragona*, to see what they had to say about it. In response to Savater's statement that it had been the Regional Government and the police to recommend he shouldn't go, they say:

This newspaper contacted the local government offices yesterday, which denied any knowledge of the matter whatsoever. In fact, so unaware were they that they didn't know posters had been put up about the it. The Regional Government of Barcelona was not aware of the possibility of incidents either before, after or during Savater's conference. Indeed, there were none. The seminar took place in complete normality in the Faculty of Law yesterday.

This stinks. There's something that doesn't make sense here. I don't believe them. In addition, the mayor says: «Savater has brilliantly used the URV and Tarragona for his own purposes».

Poor man. We all know what dark «purposes» Savater has: to face the music for those under threat. It must coincide with the press release of the coordinator of the Catalan student organizations, *Estudiantes de los Países Catalanes* and *Alternativa Estel*:

The cancellation of this act responds to the will of the Spanish extreme right to criminalise social movements and Catalan society. Mr. Savater has no reason to feel threatened, the students of the Universitat Roviri i Virgili,

the Catalan students, respect everyone's freedom of expression. And he could certainly have given his conference freely. This radical nationalist, has studied so much medieval literature that he has ended up seeing giants where there are only inoffensive windmills. This is not a fortuitous controversy, Fernando Savater intended to use his presence for electoral purposes, and he is doing so.

Take that. The «Spanish» extreme right. Savater is one of the few who could be called a «committed intellectual». Committed like in the Franco years: risking his skin. What am I saying, in the Franco years! At the end of the Franco era, people basically risked going to prison or getting beaten up. But they didn't risk their lives.

What morons: only the people from Batasuna could say something like this. What will they say in the rest of Spain, about the inference that Savater is part of the «Spanish extreme right»? Savater is a guy who's close to the PSOE, especially the socialism of Redondo Terreros⁶⁰. A liberal, an atheist, almost an anarchist. An eccentric in the sense of Stuart Mill. If this is the extreme right, where would Blas Piñar⁶¹ be, man of God that he is? They deserve a few true right-wing extremists. They're going to conjure them up with all this talk of theirs. They'll rise up from their tombs.

Savater is a man who could live like a God in the shadow of the

60. *TN*: Nicolás Redondo Terreros (Portugalete, Vizcaya, June 16th, 1958) is a Spanish politician who was secretary general of the Spanish Socialist Party in the Basque Country (PSE-EE) from 1997 to 2002. https://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nicol%C3%A1s_Redondo_Terreros.

61. *TN*: Blas Piñar López (22 November 1918 - 28 January 2014) was a Spanish far-right politician. Having connections to Catholic organizations, during Franco's dictatorship he directed the Institute of Hispanic Culture (*Instituto de Cultura Hispánica*) and served as a lawyer in the Courts and as a national councillor. He later became a member of the Congress of Deputies in 1979. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Blas_Pi%C3%B1ar.

PSOE in Madrid, if he were so inclined. In addition, he'd be subsidised from all sides. Since I collaborated with *Basta Ya* in Tarragona, maybe I would also be at risk of being boycotted. That's why Josep is so reticent about it.

I feel sad and confused.

The first signs that what I'm doing is not right are starting to reach me. Mariona congratulates me on the conference, but says:

I think maybe you were better off (that Savater didn't come). The acts focused on the book, which is what really matters. In my humble opinion, the attendance of the guests you mentioned would have made a strictly literary act political.

Regards

Not «love» or anything. «Regards». It's her way of telling me that I'm not behaving the way I should.

March 10th

Early morning (well, around eight-thirty) with my tea, the newspaper and Kertész:

«Beauty is desire's impossible dream. Thus, man's purest state in the face of beauty is always pain.»

It leaves me feeling somehow withdrawn. It may be true. I under-

stand what it means. A feeling of disquiet, of yearning...

March 11th

Yesterday beauty and today terror.

March 12th

I can't stop crying since it happened. I turn on the television and cry. I think and cry. Last night I was speaking to Àlex. He's really affected by the possibility that it's the Islamic fundamentalists.

Elisabet didn't open her mouth all day yesterday. She didn't call me, or send me an email... In the end, last night, she was visible on the «Skepticos» list. She said something along the lines of feeling very sad. Today I sent this:

An expert in safety and defence, Mr. San Agustín, appeared on TV3 today saying that at one stage ETA and the Palestinian terrorists collaborated and that «Eta was very affected by it».

In spite of everything they're saying out there, not one of the experts consulted doesn't almost entirely point their finger at ETA.

Later on I send this to Arcadi's blog:

If it's not ETA, it's worse. And not because it favours one of the two parties on the lists, but for the following: 1) The Islamic fundamentalists are even worse. 2) For the first time, our terrorist stars have competition: the dead killed by the traditional terrorists will pale by comparison to the 200

in Madrid. When they say to us: «ETA caused 30 deaths» we will respond, in relief, «thank goodness». People can get accustomed to anything. What scandalized us at the start of «trash television» is now the norm. In reality, the number makes no difference. The horror is elastic, it knows no limits. I imagine there will be a limit for the chaos, but I don't know what it is. 3000 deaths and two skyscrapers tumbled to the ground triggered a war.

I never would have imagined myself making these sorts of calculations.

We've arranged to meet Santiago at the university entrance to go together to the protest along with other colleagues. We will act as if we were from *Basta Ya* (even though there is no branch of *Basta Ya* in Tarragona, it will be morally represented). But Josep finishes class at seven thirty. It's better to go together, even if it is half an hour later. He doesn't like me calling attention to myself much. He's not sure about it.

Anyway, I talk to Santiago and tell him the situation.

Everyone from the city council is carrying the banner mentioning the Constitution. I feel much better. As if I were doing something really meaningful for the dead.

Against fanaticism: law and consensus.

March 13th

I'm at my parents' house. A day of madness: in the end it was Al-Qa-eda.

I can't stop thinking about the Schrödinger cat paradox, a famous experiment designed by Erwin Schrödinger. It consists of assuming that there is a cat inside a box in which there is a poison connected to an Alpha particles detector; if a single particle reaches the cat it

dies; if none reach it, it lives. On the inside, the cat is either alive or dead. But we can't know which unless we open the box. The last few days, Aznar's management of the situation has been questioned. Depending on whether it had been the ETA terrorists or the Islamists, whatever was in the box would have come out walking or be dead. The objective facts of his mandate would have remained the same: a recovered economy, a successful fight against ETA terrorism, the collaboration with the United States in the Iraqi war... All of this has been kept in suspense for two days. Or maybe less, depending on how biased the observer's point of view and the information being communicated was. The thing is that it wasn't the cat's whiskers that would be burned, but Aznar's. The ones that Bush could always count on.

I find the analogy so fitting that I even look at the «foreign» press to see if anyone else has thought of it. I don't know if anything like it has ever happened in history before. If it was ETA, the handling would have been not only good enough to make them victorious (as some from both sides were assuming), but even better. If it had been the Islamists, Aznar would have got us into an unfair war, he would be to blame for the massacre and that's the decisive argument for his failure.

Over the last two days, things have been neither dead nor alive. Everyone was demanding «the truth». The sad part is that we wanted this «truth» in order to know whether we had any hope of «our side» winning, not to gain justice for the dead.

I wish the whole thing would just «cave in» for once and for all!

March 14th

Such shame. They are all so caught up in lobbing accusations at each other that they don't even remember that there are killers out there who have killed over 150 people. PSOE has organized a sort of «spontaneous» action and they're protesting in front of the PP headquarters. And not a word about the killer Muslims.

March 15th

Zapatero has won. The Aznar cat was dead. Having done exactly the same thing, with exactly the same actions (including the Iraqi war), Aznar could have been the winner. Now he's a killer.

They are exchanging insults. Claiming that it's all a PSOE complot. That it had information about what was happening before PP did. That PP deceived the people by hiding information. Poor us. And the least to blame are the Islamic fundamentalists. Almost nobody talks about them.

On Arcadi's blog, people are ironic. I read someone called Fugazi:

«Maybe they'll ask for the Alhambra to change hands».

He's right. I reply:

Less than three days ago an Arabic association requested permission to return to pray in the mosque of Cordoba. I read it in *El País* newspaper.

Ferrusola for president!!!!

As long as they also have a cocktail bar, of course.

Everyone agrees that, if the things before were not going well for those of us who are not nationalists, now they're going to get even

worse. As a colleague puts it, «we're in the corner». If the nationalist *independentistas* are happy, we shouldn't be. And an email from Elisabet confirms the idea:

Good morning, kiddo. How is everything going?
Personally, I can't say that I'm completely sad.
Love.

Why the hell should she be. She's as happy as Larry. She says we should celebrate it. They must think that with Zapatero we'll soon be able to declare a Free Republic of Catalonia. Or something along those lines.

March 16th

The whole situation is still in turmoil. At dusk, someone on the list says:

It would be logical to give true information calmly, with a solid police investigation behind it. What they cannot do is shout out: «It was ETA», without any proof, and even after finding quite solid clues as to the «innocence» of ETA and the «guilt» of the Islamist radicals, they kept on shouting «It was ETA». That's what I think was really mishandled by PP.

And another replies:

But what information did they hide? They told you: «We have this information and we think it was ETA». You drew a different conclusion, I don't know whether from the beginning (almost everyone thought it was ETA),

but based on the information the minister was giving. I repeat, what lie did they tell? There was a misinterpretation of the data, at the worst, but the way I see it, there was no hiding of any information.

What is true and what is lies? Who is demanding truth now? It would appear that it's no longer of interest to anybody. There's no longer any rush to discover the true perpetrators and we all trust again in the efficacy of the security forces. We let them do their jobs. The day before yesterday, we all knew better than anyone else and we didn't want it to influence the elections.

I'm exhausted and I want to go to bed. I try not to wake Josep. He's sleeping like a baby.

Better, this way he won't see the time and give out to me.

March 17th

A participant in the blog, a girl who votes ERC whom I asked the same question I always ask Elisabet, tells me:

I don't vote ERC because I want Catalan Independence (although sometimes I look around me and I would prefer not to form part of this State). There are other more weighty reasons for voting for them. However, if you ask me what advantages independence would bring the Catalans... I don't think I am informed enough to give you a worthy reply; nonetheless, these are some of the benefits that spring to mind: not depending on anyone but ourselves with everything this implies (and it's quite a lot), having our own role in Europe (very important). There would obviously also be disadvantages, but is there anything in the world that doesn't have downsides? Like I said, independence is not something I particularly yearn for (I do long

for better self-government, a new Statute, a more outstanding role for Catalonia in Europe, etc.), at least not in the short term. With a government like the one we've had up to now, I'm not surprised that lots of people don't want to form part of Spain (wanting independence or abstaining from voting are normal reactions to an incompetent government).

She is polite and good-humoured. But I am shocked by the frivolity with which some vote for suicidal ideas just because they hate the governments of the moment. Like someone having a tantrum. She doesn't have information, but votes for the most extreme option possible. And among the advantages she considers certain, «not depending on anyone else» stands out. Spain has agreed to depend on the European Union, reducing its sovereignty. Would it have been better not to do this? There are heaps of countries that only depend on themselves that would give anything to lose that privilege and form part of the European Union (or a state like Spain). This proves that not depending on any one does not guarantee anything.

And doesn't what she says about «not having a role of its own in Europe» contradict what she said before? And why is it good to go as a small country instead of a big one? Does she think that Luxembourg wields the same power as France?

I'm all for people voting against the government, but they shouldn't vote against themselves. In any case, isn't there such a thing as a blank vote?

I'm going to bed, but first, with my glass of milk in front of me, a reflection: if Zapatero shows signs of weakness in the face of the Islamic attacks, if he conveys the idea that it was this country's own fault for having gone to war with Iraq, won't he be doing the same thing as Carod when he asks for an exception in Catalonia in exchange for looking the other way? It's like telling Al Qaeda to look

at the map, that their enemy is Zionism and American imperialism, not us. That they should plant the bombs in the Israeli Embassy in Buenos Aires, as Héctor reminded me recently on the twelfth anniversary of that tragedy. In that attack and another in a different Jewish centre in the same city, hundreds of people died.

A bad idea.

March 18th

There are more and more fatal victims. I don't know how many there will be in the end. It's horrifying. You watch television and you cry your eyes out.

I go outside to buy something to eat. There's a mountain of flowers and candles at *Els Despullats* (The nudes), which is what people around here call a sculptural composition on the Rambla. I get a lump in my throat.

It happened a week ago today...!

March 19th

It's Saint Joseph's Day. My «own» has sold his Land Rover and bought a mega-van. He took me for a spin. A bit tatty. Anything for work; he couldn't fit anything into the Land Rover. But this is not very cool.

I speak to Santiago, who is getting more and more nervous and is more and more forsaken. He tells me that he goes to the gym, he describes the weights he lifts, what he eats, that he has a yoghurt at night, that he can't go to bed on an empty stomach, etc. He says he's going to buy a digital camera to take photos of the hostile students

who approach him. That he'll connect it to the computer to upload the photos.

I feel sorry for the man. A digital camera connected to the computer! He's not even able to type! He does everything by hand. He doesn't know how to turn on a computer and he's devising self-defence plans based on advanced technology. He's hysterical. With PP's defeat, he feels even more exposed. Mother of God, the things it can do to you to have ideas that go against the trend... He tells me that the most regressive people voted for PSOE: the ones from Extremadura, Castile and Andalusia. Funnily enough, I've just read that news in a right-wing newspaper:

PSOE's electoral triumph comes from two main sources: one that is territorial and the other that is localised, in Catalonia, Andalusia and Extremadura, bastions of socialism mobilised by the abrasive campaign based on misinformation and intimidation implemented even on the reflection day by the conglomerate formed by PSOE-Grupo Prisa⁶².

Andalusia and Extremadura... So Santiago agrees with Elisabet: there is a deep and backwards Spain. The difference is that she sees them as «intrinsically» backwards (they're «Spanish») while he considers them fruit of the country's bad secular education. Those who theoretically believe in the value of education and the blank slate consider backwardness congenital and even use it as grounds for separation (like Elisabet and *Esquerra*). The right-wing supporters, who have always believed in an immanent human nature, advocate in favour of education. The left and the right exchanging roles. I'm shocked. Or not.

And on the subject of «bad education». I can't believe it! Alm-

62. TN: Grupo Prisa is an important Spanish media conglomerate.

odóvar tells the media that there's been an attempted coup d'état. Where did he get that form? What a sad representative we have out in the world.

We go for a walk along the Rambla Nova. It's a peaceful afternoon and the light is very bright. They've really pruned the trees on the Rambla, now if you look inland from the Balcó the view is incredible. It feels as if you're at the end of a pearl-grey, brick-paved avenue lined with trees that ends in the midst of the mountains. Like a carpet that extends from the Balcó to the peaks.

We could sing as we go along, like in *The Wizard of Oz*, fleeing the tribulations of these last few days.

March 20th

Saturday. There's a sad atmosphere, or at least that's how it feels to me. Maybe because I've just passed by the candles and the withered flowers.

The only thing anyone talks about on the list is March 11th. Anything else would be strange. We're debating the effect of the attack on the elections. One person says:

If the opposition to Spain's participation in the Iraqi war had determined the electoral result, that influence would have been noticeable in the local Madrid elections, after the protests a year ago. And that didn't happen.

That's true too. I hadn't thought of it. I remember perfectly that everyone took for granted that PP would win. Even Cristina Alberdi, who left PSOE in desperation at how badly they were doing things.

Someone makes an important observation:

The emigrants who voted before the attacks gave PP a 13-point advantage over PSOE. On March 7th, four days before the massacre in Madrid, the voting period for absent residents (that is, Spaniards living abroad) closed. After counting these votes, PP obtained 51.14 percent versus 38.41 for PSOE. A thirteen-point difference. In the 2000 elections, PP obtained 42.9 votes from this electorate group, while PSOE obtained 39.94.

Things are not so clear.

March 22nd

Around 12, I bump into my favourite *independentista* on my way out of the hairdressers', Elisabet. Her boutique is very close by and she's popped out for a coffee. She's never seen me with my hair just styled and she says I look great. I disagree and joke that, I'm so dolled up I look like Princess Letizia. And she says no way, and insults her up to the eyeballs. Since she's anti-Borbonic, she doesn't like Letizia either. Although, I don't know what one thing has to do with the other!

I've got my tickets to Buffalo. I spoke to Eudald Carbonell and he told me that they've already signed the agreement and that, in theory, if there are no political changes, in September they'll start building the centre.

March 23rd

I don't have much food in the house. I go to Amparo's to buy something «easy» to make. It's a fishmonger's that's almost got cult status,

the best there is.

You have to go armed with your Visa though, that's also true.

March 24th

Elisabet calls to tell me that she's cancelled her participation in both lists. I hadn't realised, I thought she was really busy and that was why I hadn't seen her write anything for days.

—Why did you do it?

—The day of the attack, a lot of people came out saying that it was ETA.

—And so? I thought it was ETA too until the Thursday. In fact, I still think that it was logical to think that at the time, given our experience with ETA.

—I didn't think so.

—Elisabet, until we heard about the Islamic belt it was the natural thing to think. I even still had my doubts on Friday.

—Look: I was irked by all those people saying the things they were saying because they could already see they were going to lose the elections.

—I don't think that's why they were saying them. Certainly not me and not a lot of people on the list that I know really well.

—There was even one person who called me «stop assassin».

—Bloody hell!

I'm shocked. I had no idea. The truth is that I was so busy that I only skimmed over a lot of the messages.

—Well that sort of thing is intolerable. You know that it's a public list and anyone can say what they think. But without insults. Send me an email and the moderator will take measures.

—I don't want to now. I felt really hurt.

—Damn... I didn't see it. And I don't know the majority of the people who write.

—Well I didn't like it.

—Things come and go: people enter and exit, now, at present and a week later, the predominant voices on the list are far more left-wing than right, to put it in your words.

—I felt too alone.

—Elisabet, please, there's nothing strange there: it's hard to be sceptical and nationalist at the same time. Your perspective will always be a minority on a list like this one. But rude people aside, the list is very politically plural.

—There's no place for me.

—I'd feel the same on the Terricabras⁶³ list, girl. They'd be all over me. I know that.

—Well, I don't like the Terricabras' list either because everyone thinks the same as me. And it's boring.

—Well I'll subscribe and you can give out to me —I say laughing.

—Okay.

I'm left thinking about what I told her, that now there are more «left-wing» people. In reality, we no longer know what it is to be left-wing or right-wing. Fortunately, at night, before I go to bed, someone sends me this phrase from Zapatero telling the journalist Olga Viza the conclusion his ten-year-old daughter reached after a conversation with him:

«So, Dad, being right-wing means thinking more about yourself, and being left-wing means thinking more about others, does it?»

63. Catalan philosophy professor, *independentista*, who also writes a quite popular blog.

What a sweet little girl. And isn't it so easy to be good in this world. All you have to do is be left-wing. Someone said that being left-wing is asking to be judged just for your good intentions.

But, at the very least, one thing is very clear, and it comes from a highly authorised left-wing source: all good people are lefties. The question is: if someone thinks about others and, at the same time votes PP, are they still good?

Uff, too complicated. Let's go to bed.

March 25th

A day full of news and counter-news about the information published by the press in the days following the attack. The depressing sensation is that they are all pulling each other's leg.

I find out that Maragall, on the day of the funeral for the 11M victims, went to offer his support to Aznar for the injustice of having to hear himself called a «murderer» by one of the victims. Right in the middle of the church.

Very well done. But there are many things that he should have done before. Maragall has had multiple occasions to demonstrate that he believes that some of the accusations against PP and Aznar are unfair. For instance, when Piqué and Rato were forced to abandon the 11-M protest on the streets of Barcelona. All that hatred is intolerable and our political class is to blame. This has nothing to do with the theoretical arrogance of the PP-Madrid-Aznar pack. Each to their own responsibilities. What is clear is that nobody should ever need to say the words that Rato said when they whistled and booed at him in the presence of the rest of the political forces (who all turned a blind eye): «Look how much they hate us!».

This is a manufactured, cultivated hatred; it is the product of unforgivable abuse and exploitation by the adversary. This is where a politician such as Maragall should have been courageous (because, as they themselves put things, that would have been true bravery).

I'd like to quote the last paragraph of an article by Francesc de Carreras. It refers to those shameful images we all saw on television regarding the attack against PP representatives in the protest of March 12th and the reflections these led him to make. He says:

We got to the Friday before the elections in this tense atmosphere, still under the shock of the terrible attack on Thursday. During the massive protest against violence and to show solidarity with the victims, a group of protesters insulted, bawled out and attempted to physically attack the Catalan PP representatives taking part in the march. Beside them, the directors of the other Catalan parties remained impervious. The PP people had to flee, protected by the police forces. But something even more serious occurred: no political authority —and they were all present— defended them, none declared their categorical condemnation to the press, none conveyed their solidarity, not in the hours following the event, and not in the following days. They're from PP, they're not ours. I think of Stephen Zweig, I think of a Jew from Vienna, Prague, Berlin or Warsaw in the thirties. Maybe I'm exaggerating, maybe not. We should all reflect a bit. It is not a matter of left or right, it's a matter of rules, of the rules —some unwritten— of democracy. It is these that we are playing with.

What is intolerable is the «imperviousness» (as the columnist says) of the rest of the politicians in the face of the aggression. This converts Maragall's «gesture» during the funeral in mere hypocrisy.

I'd better go clear my mind a bit. All this leaves a bad taste in your mouth. Lucky for me that I have the Rambla right here. The air is

clean and fresh. If I were a dog, like my dead beagle, Blas, I'd open my eyes wide now and happily sniff in all directions, scavenging all the good news off the street.

And in this spirit, I head for the Balcó, along with a considerable crowd of people, strolling along under some very perilous trees, full of the migrating birds that spend spring in them, noisily going about their daily functions —particularly the digestive kind— indifferent to the inhabitants of the world below.

Miraculously intact, I arrive close to the *Bajada del Toro* and I'm struck again by the surreal image of the sea, sky and some boats that seem painted on a vast canvas. Metallic blue, almost silver. A few chubby, white clouds. At eye level, a big floating, red-painted boat sparkling in the sun.

A sight for sore eyes.

March 26th

Going back to Maragall's gesture towards Aznar in the church on the day of the funeral for the victims of March 11th: it is repulsive in that it is incongruous and exceptional. I hate to say this, but it can only be interpreted as the gesture of the victor trying to be condescending. It is a blind left.

I believe in that idea of Spain handed down from the *Cortes de Cádiz*⁶⁴. A Spain that is everyone's, liberal and enlightened. It is ter-

64. The Cádiz Cortes was the first national assembly to claim sovereignty in Spain. It represented the abolition of the old kingdoms. The opening session was held on 24 September 1810, in the building now known as the Real Teatro de las Cortes. It met as one body and its members represented the entire Spanish empire. The sessions of the national legislative body (traditionally known in Spain as the Cortes) met in the safe haven of Cádiz during the French occupation of Spain

rible to me that Maragall, whom I admired so much in the past, is adamantly contributing to its destruction. All this also reminds me of everything we've read about the Civil War and the alliances of the left with the separatists that brought us so much grief. This is not the left that I want.

I want a party with heads like Taradellas, whom Pla once described as:

... a politician like few others I've ever come across in the history we have lived though: a man who is clear, consistent, a good observer, without any hair oil, cautious, astute, intelligent, prudent and courageous, shaped by long and difficult navigating.

I really hope Zapatero doesn't turn out to be like Forrest Gump, which is what some call him.

March 27th

I read in a report that 10% of the French population is of Maghrebi origin. Up to now, that seems to have brought only problems, but in the case of the famous football match between the French and the Algerian team, they all suddenly sat up when they heard the French Maghrebis whistling La Marseillaise.

Apparently, integration has not been very successfully done in France. The majority live in ghettos. In Europe, they haven't taken

during the Napoleonic Wars. The Cádiz Cortes were seen then, and by historians today, as a major step towards liberalism and democracy in the history of Spain. The liberal Cortes passed the Spanish Constitution of 1812, which established a constitutional monarchy and eliminated many basic institutions that privileged some groups over others. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/C%C3%A1diz_Cortes.

the fact that thirteen million Muslims live here very seriously. In France, they don't really know how many there are because surveys asking about race or religion are prohibited. There are people who think that French society is at risk of disintegration because of the unemployment levels of over 10% and the disappearance or weakness of the classic immigrant integration mechanisms (unions, parties, obligatory military service, etc.).

Mosques are said to be breeding grounds of hatred for the outcasts of Arabian origin or Muslim religion. There's an atmosphere of fear and prevention that made a writer like Michel Houellebecq end up before the French courts for stating that «while all religions are idiotic, the most idiotic of all is Islam».

I want a society in which films like *The Last Temptation of Christ* or any others labelled blasphemous can be made without fear of censorship or vengeance. But I want exactly the same for Islam. It should be possible to make *The Last Temptation of Mahoma* without any problems. A democratic society is one in which everyone can laugh at the ideas but never touch the people.

They will be integrated the day it becomes possible to make a film or offer a critical or burlesque view of Islam, when the author's maximum fear will be being labelled «rule-breaking».

March 29th

The day is off to a flying start. Mariona is angry and she calls me.

—All those who rushed to blame ETA for the attacks, and while they were at it pointed to Esquerra as practically accomplices of the terrorism for having talked to Josu Ternera and his people in Perpignan, should apologise.

—I don't believe you.

—It's completely out of order.

—Right, so in the end ETA should take legal action for libel against all those who accused it of perpetrating the massacre in Madrid without sufficient proof.

—Very funny!

—ETA is so good, it only kills us in small doses. We must be mad to have such a bad opinion of it when it could kill two hundred people in one go! Savater and Muñoz Molina should say they're sorry.

—Don't even mention those two to me.

Fine, I don't talk about them. They made the Basque nationalists feel bad and, while they were at it, the nationalists here too. I wouldn't want them to suffer any more, poor things. The Lehendakari⁶⁵ suffers terribly too, I suppose. The same bitter pill poor Medem, the Basque film director, had to suffer. He himself said: «It's been very hard».

Wow, it turns out that now we have to console those who, in the Basque Country, would never be affected by ETA terrorism—they don't attack them, since they're Basque—and reprimand the victims.

The shamelessness of them is just mind-boggling.

I'm going to make lunch. This boy of mine wants broth. So broth he shall have.

I'm in a bad mood, but when he arrives I've already got over it.

Afterwards I go back to the computer. I see that there's no end to the Islam experts, etc., who claim that Islam should not be mistaken for terrorism. That they're completely different things.

Well I don't agree! I believe there's the same link between Islam and Islamist terrorism as there is between nationalism and national-

65. *TN*: The President of the Basque Government.

ist terrorism. And the way to fight it is to break the bonds between those who are non-violent yet «understand» and those who execute the acts of terrorism. And at the same time, dismantle their ideological bases.

It's the same as Savater, for example, might do with terrorism in the Basque Country. Nationalism as a doctrine that subjects the rights of individuals to those of the nation is an identical ideology to Islam, which subjects the individual rights to Shariah. Both are toxic and dangerous doctrines.

Ibarretxe and PNV have their own responsibilities: they have governed for over twenty years with levels of self-government unheard of in the rest of Europe, and yet there is the terrible paradox (which perhaps is not paradoxical at all), that to express opinions contrary to nationalism costs you, at the very least, your personal freedom and, often, your life. And what's most repulsive about these people is that this is not their biggest cause for concern.

One example. In a past interview, Josu Jon Imaz⁶⁶ said to the member of parliament, Rosa Díez, that he regretted the murder of Fernando Buesa⁶⁷ «as if he had been one of ours». I mean it's unbelievable. Can anyone imagine Aznar, for example, saying that he regrets the deaths of the two-hundred people in Madrid in the March 11th attack «as if they had all been members of the PP political par-

66. *TN*: Josu Jon Imaz San Miguel was elected Euro-Deputy to the European Parliament in 1994, a post he held until his appointment on 7 January 1999 as Regional Minister of Industry, Trade and Tourism of the Regional Government of the Basque Country. In January 2004 he was elected chairman of the executive committee of EAJ-PNV. In autumn 2007, he announced his decision not to stand for re-election and ended his career in politics. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Josu_Jon_Imaz.

67. *TN*: Fernando Buesa Blanco (29 May 1946 - 22 February 2000) was a Basque politician assassinated by ETA. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fernando_Buesa.

ty»?

March 30th

Santiago calls. He feels like talking. He's comfortable with me. Deep down, I suspect, he doesn't quite fit with PP. But he's a man of radical decisions.

—You have no idea what the fall of the Soviet Union meant to me. I cried and everything, you know? But then, bit by bit, the reality became clearer and clearer. Damned critical thinking.

—I know what you mean, yes.

—It's terrible to abandon a cause you've believed in for so long. It's like changing your faith, you know? Very painful.

—Well, my son still believes in all that. He's one of those sorts who read *Le Monde diplomatique* and Ignacio Ramonet⁶⁸.

—Ha! Ramonet... I used to read him too. I remember perfectly the day I bought it for the last time. I was flicking through it at the newspaper stand opposite the university, in Plaza Imperial Tarraco. I was skim-reading an article by some whizz explaining the misfortune that all these fruits grown under plastic represented for Almería. And just as I was reading this a giant lorry passed by me, one of those ones that come from El Ejido⁶⁹. And it was like a bombshell for me. Like Saul falling from his horse. I realised what a moron the guy writing the article was. And I handed the newspaper back. That wasn't easy either, the woman running the newspaper stand had a

68. *TN*: Ignacio Ramonet (born 5 May 1943) is a Spanish journalist and writer. He was the editor-in-chief of *Le Monde diplomatique* from 1991 until March 2008. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ignacio_Ramonet.

69. *TN*: El Ejido: a municipality in Almería that is particularly known for its mass production of fruit and vegetables in the region.

father-in-law from the Communist Party...

—And?

—Well, I considered myself duty-bound to explain why I was handing it back to her.

—So, what happened?

—Nothing, she didn't understand it.

—That should have forewarned you about the life you were embarking on, shouldn't it?

—You have no idea. I immediately understood the tough life I had ahead of me. Far tougher than a life of anti-Francoism. At least then I had friends and we all thought we were on the right side. That's very gratifying.

And he starts telling me stories and adventures from after his loss of faith. And how some friends reacted. For instance, one he had met a few days before:

—A very invidious person. He didn't complete his studies. So he couldn't get a degree like me.

—I see.

—He had all the tics of the traditional lefty. And he was very aged, you know? And big-bottomed, with a belly as well. I couldn't help telling him that I'd just gone for a two-hour walk around Tarragona. When he asked me why, I told him I didn't want to «offend the rest of the Christians» when I took my clothes off in the summer.

—You're such a rotter...

—Well, his wife was there too, and she was laughing meanly like a rabbit.

I can see perfectly where he's going with this. Genius and figure. He's a man of over fifty, but tall and in form. And he's quite pleased with his sex appeal. I burst my sides laughing at his tale. We end up talking about male and female friends that now look really aged to

us. Imagine how they must see us. The same.

—I don't look at the women anymore. Now I look at their daughters.

—Their daughters, eh?

Dear, oh dear. And he says it with such conceit. So I say the same goes for me. That if I have an erotic dream, it's always with thirty-year-olds. He doesn't like that so much. I'm glad: that was my intention. All men are the same. They don't expect it. They think women do want what they themselves don't. Men!

I tell him for the first time that I'm writing everything down in a diary and that he'll be in it. He protests and says that at the very least, I need to disguise him. I tell him I'll make him short, ugly and dark-skinned. He doesn't like that either. In any case, he's not afraid of anything. He's always telling me so.

March 31st

I go out for a drink with Elisabet. It's raining cats and dogs. She wants to go to a new café that's opened at the start of the Rambla, beside the Balcó. The opposite end to where we are, since we've met at the monument to the Castellans, or human towers.

We're soaked through when we get there and it's closed.

—I'm going to murder you.

—Crikey...

—Let's go to Leman's, it's right here.

Leman's is where Tarragona's bourgeoisie go. They're also called «the Fascists». Without any bad intentions. Just so they understand each other. The public tends to be elderly, with a very classic appearance. The local gerontocracy. But they don't shout much, the music

is like piped lift music, that you don't notice, playing very low. The sitting area is spacious and comfortable and the people who attend you are professional.

She has a beer and I have a mint tea. When she sees me choosing herbs, she implies that I'm boring. She's told me the same thing before, when I've gone with her to buy a lipstick and confessed that I'm a really poor client of beauty stores.

—I've been using the same perfume for seven years.

—How dull.

Do I give her the impression of being lifeless? Jeez! The ideas I get into my head. Is she cultivating the illusion that I'm conservative and not very curious and that's why I don't support her in her nationalist fantasies? Everyone knows that being a lefty, or voting left-wing, nationalism and such, is typical of people who are open, good-natured... Like her. My former friend Nieves comes to mind. She also wanted to make me out to be a fuddy-duddy. If you don't share their obsessions, it must be because there's something wrong with you.

And Elisabet, of course... is getting used to the novelty and looking at me through this same prism. If I don't think the same as her I must be some sort of fossil, even if I'm an atheist, have an unbaptized son and have been married three times.

Right, I'll try to find out if I've guessed correctly. Although today I am feeling a bit glum and tired. It's good that «she got me out» of the house. But at what risk: she's quicker than me mentally. If I don't wake up, she'll fit me into the stereotype she's set on for me, for sure.

She talks to me about bits and pieces from her life. Of friends we have in common. Bit by bit, our favourite subject peeks its head out and we end up talking about politics:

—It's shameful that Maragall is sucking up to Carod now.

—I don't know what you're talking about.

—An article in the newspaper. The news about Perpignan. It's outrageous.

—Send me the email and I'll read it. And, listen, speaking of Maragall: what a time for Maragall to tell Jose Mari [Aznar] that «it's unfair, it is not your fault» there in the church, at the funerals.

—Why?

—He could have told him before or have given the PP people a hand at the protest. I mean, they almost beat up Piqué and Rato.

—Oh, and Carod too.

—What?

—Yes, yes, the day of the protest, Carod was followed and he had to take refuge in the Ritz.

—What are you saying? I don't believe it.

—It's true.

—If that had been the case, everyone would have heard about it. They wouldn't have let an opportunity like that pass them by. The chance to criticise PP's victimhood when they are being persecuted too.

—Some completely reliable friends confirmed it to me.

—I have no doubt about it, but how come nobody has said anything so far?

—Ah —she says, as if to say «we're not all like you».

I have to find out if it's true. If when I finish this book I still don't know and the reader knows anything about it, I'd really appreciate the information.

I try to pay, but Elisabet is faster. It's true, we're here to celebrate the success of Esquerra. It had been on the agenda for ages. Just think the roles I have to play.

That night she sends me the article on Maragall, but I don't see the

insult to Carod anywhere. Let's see if she can clarify it for me.

April 2nd

I'm going on a trip! We're going to New York. A few days in Manhattan and another few in Buffalo, invited by Paul Kurtz and the Centre for Inquiry.

But in the morning, like always, as I'm drinking my tea I turn on the computer... and look at the blog. They're talking about Maragall's idea of having a national team of Catalonia. Apparently, he's said: «We'll need to find a name for the team from the rest of Spain».

In the blog they're really taking the piss out of the idea: «I'd keep that poetic and just name: Rest of Spain».

It does sound lovely, yes. And while we're at it we can erase this centralist threat. It's so pathetic it's laughable. There's another guy who mocks it even more. He says that, now that PSC has won, it should be called URSEE (Union of Socialist Republics of the Spanish State). I'll explain it to my Pepe on the plane. It will make him laugh.

April 13th

I'm already back from New York.

A friend sent me an article published in January. It says:

At the age of 13, Salvador Ulayar witnessed an ETA terrorist stop in front of his father and shoot him dead with five gunshots. Nobody, not one person from the village, ever went up to him to ask «Salvador, how are

you?», on the contrary, they stood alongside the killer, hanging his photo from the balcony of the town council, sending him money in prison, treating him like a hero when he was released from prison. This terrorist is now his neighbour and lives close to him.

«Those were terrible days», admits Salvador. «My brother José Ignacio met Vicente Nazábal on the Street and he couldn't bear it. He went up to him and called him a blackguard and told him he was shameful. My father's killer, far from showing shame, called my brother a son of a bitch and kicked him in the chest».

Contrary to what you might expect, that scene was just the beginning of a very long and drawn-out agony. That year, 1979, ETA killed 78 people. Salvador consoles himself with the thought that times are changing, and that nobody will suffer like he did when he went to school in Pamplona. When they realised that his father had been killed, somebody wrote on his desk: «More guns for ETA».

It's awful. Savater says that «the fierce» cause fear but awaken a «morbid interest among those bored with the empty words of politicians, and they consider it a character weakness to be concerned about human rights, particularly the human rights of those who are "mistaken"».

It's true, some people are fascinated by those out to get everyone else who have no conscience. They may have a certain moral compunction, but also a feeling of respect for the violent. They would appear to believe that, if someone is capable of committing such an atrocity, it must be for good reason.

There are strong sadomasochistic traits in human —and animal— behaviours, linked to respect, submission and obedience. Ben Goertzel, a sceptical scientist, says that Stalin has an intuitive understanding of the process through which the masses can be made to

feel a terrible attraction to the tyrant who subjects them, and he explains a surprising anecdote:

When somebody asked him why he was so popular, he demonstrated it by grabbing a chicken and pulling out all its feathers. When he released it, rather than fleeing, the chicken huddled between his legs in search of warmth.

It makes your hairs stand on end. And another ethologist colleague explains that one day, accidentally, he stood on the feet of one of the small geese he was raising. He says that, unlike what he had expected, this animal became even more loyal and would never leave his side.

I go to bed with a knot in my stomach. I recognize echoes of these sadomasochistic ambiguities. We are all precariously navigating muddy waters. Ancestral waters, the river of life. We come with a complete pack of reflexes that we try to master as well as we can. Sometimes it's all you can do to admire the fact that we haven't yet all killed each other. Fortunately, reason and innate moral feelings are also pre-programmed. But we need to be vigilant.

It comforts me to cuddle up to Josep, who is sleeping like a baby, dressed all in white, in the kurta he brought back from India.

If it weren't for the fact that, while he's not wearing a pistol, I can tell that he's «happy to see me», I'd say that he looks like an angel.

April 14th

As we're eating I see an ad for a drink called «Más Vital Prebiótico». The thing is to get "bio" in somewhere. They must do it because it

seems «natural» or «pure». And to reinforce their sublime intention, it's accompanied by sacred music.

Another product I won't be buying. Along with the «re-structurer».

At night, I read a cutting comment by a member of the blog who lives in France. He's replying to someone called Mortícia, a girl who has joined us recently and who labels PP supporters all those who consider themselves simply Spaniards and who, though they love their land or region, feel part of the same country.

He's angry with her. He says:

What you call PP supporters, here in France represent 99% of the population, that is, we haven't left a single Basque or Catalan child, we've devoured all of them. Here the only people are French. In Spain, however, the PPs get themselves killed by ETA for trying to defend a constitution (that of the Basque Country) that no other European country can lay claim to in terms of scope and intensity of regional rights.

He might be angry, but he's completely right. What's normal everywhere else surprises us here.

French Constitution

Article 1

France shall be an indivisible, secular, democratic and social Republic. It shall ensure the equality of all citizens before the law, without distinction of origin, race or religion. It shall respect all beliefs. It shall be organised on a decentralised basis.

«Indivisible». It's all impeccable, even «indivisible». It also ensures the rights and duties of the citizens.

Josep has fallen asleep with his arm around my waist. Now how am I going to get untangled from him. It's a lovely idea, but really, truly, honestly, I've never ever been able to sleep in anyone's arms. I wish I could, but...

Alas!

April 15th

Some good news. I read that Mustapha El'M rabet, president of ATIME, the unionist association that brings together Moroccan workers in our country, has reported the imams who control the mosques of Spain.

It's about time. It's really significant that a person like this, a representative of Moroccan employees, has taken this step. Even more so when the majority of the media have never bothered. The most astute policy possible in Europe would be to offer support, precisely, to the secular people who come from Muslim cultures, and there are some who are never taken into account at all. We are so busy being «open» and «tolerant» that we don't see those who are really risking their skin. It's a priority issue.

There are secular Arabians like Ibn Waraq, director of the Center for Inquiry in New York. A book of his that is selling really well has been published in Spain. It's called *Why I am not a Muslim*. In the book, Ibn Waraq complains a lot about the relativism with which the Western intellectuals treat the Islamic values and facts. Not to mention the «understanding» with which they occasionally view its most offensive and violent acts.

Ibn Waraq believes that these intellectuals are as dangerous as the fundamentalists, and he says things like this: «The problem with

the Western liberals and humanists is that they are kind, pathologically and mortally kind» and that «they are so kind that they even invite terrorists to speak at their conferences». Terrorists who want to kill them too. It is not that Waraq doesn't advocate for a liberal and open view of the Westerners, but that sometimes, he goes too far: «Self-criticism is one of the great values of Western civilization. Modern-era self-hatred is one of its great weaknesses», he says, and I can understand what he means.

Going over some papers I was using to help me write this diary, I came across some notes on the politician Pim Fortuyn, a man who was killed two years ago in his country, Holland. He was highly critical of Islam. As critical as Waraq himself. He was killed by a radical ecologist. A westerner who took «self-criticism» to extreme levels. The left demonized Fortuyn as a far-right extremist. And the definition was so successful that it cost him his life. But it is far from being true. Fortuyn was openly homosexual and a left-wing sociology professor who firmly condemned racism. In fact, there were a great many black people among his followers. Why this anathema?

I have the acid test to determine whether someone is extreme right or not. My uncle Pedro is quite far right. He would not be in favour of incarcerating Pinochet, for example. And when they mentioned Fortuyn on television he very clearly said: «He's not right-wing». Homosexual and his second-in-command is a black guy from Cape Verde. Impossible.

Pim Fortuyn had the traits of a sort of new specimen pushing to the surface lately: the individual who is independent of the old left/right clichés. And that's not popular. Especially if, like Pim Fortuyn, you've previously been left-wing. There lies the key to the antagonism. It's the reason behind the hostility towards him and other «traitors». They are all people on the fringes, who have emerged like

peripheral mutants. The most fragile are the ones who receive the hardest blows. A bit like my friend, Santiago, ex-PSOE supporter. There's some excuse in his case, because he's joined PP and has condemned himself all on his own; he's saved the politically correct from having to do it for him. But the true Pim Fortuyns persist, those who create new movements or parties because the old are no longer serviceable and they are exorcised with the terrible sentence: far right.

Pim Fortuyn started a campaign against militant Muslim immigration; he publicly said that Islam was «retrograde» when in Holland some homosexual professors were fired because certain Muslim parents didn't want their children to be taught by gay people. Ibn Waraq would certainly have supported him. He's a man who really does know how to recognise a racist.

No. Pim Fortuyn may well have been populist but he was not far right.

April 16th

Later on, after lunch, when Josep has left and I turn my computer on again, I get an email from «Skeptic», Michael Shermer's list. He's an important essayist and driver of the sceptical movement. This is a fragment of one of his articles in the Toronto Globe and Mail. In the article, Shermer says, among other things, that evil does not explain all acts of terror.

I once had the chance to ask Thomas Keneally, the author of Schindler's Ark, what he thought the difference between Oskar Schindler, the hero who saved so many Jews, and Amon Goeth, the Nazi commander of

the Plaszow concentration camp was. His reply was very revealing: «Not much. If there hadn't been a war, Schindler and Goeth could have been drinking buddies or partners in some business, morally obtuse perhaps, but relatively inoffensive».

What a worrying idea... Sometimes the different paths a person takes in life, lead us to unthinkable situations. This does not free us, obviously, from the moral responsibility of our own actions. Shermer thinks the difference is caused by the war, especially when paths leading to good or evil have to be chosen. A certain number of contingencies and an unsuspected path. As I wrote, on February 13th, Raúl del Pozo claimed that cloning Hitler's cells would not be enough to trigger the Second World War. Far more would be necessary.

Shermer believes that the analysis of man as a moral, decision-making being must flee from the idea of good and evil as platonic, metaphysical essences and seek quantifiable human behaviours that can be scientifically studied, their causes understood and, in the end, modified.

If absolute evil exists, how can a person be accused of being morally guilty? The problem with the myth of good and evil is that it implies that, if evil could be wiped off the face of the earth, good would triumph. And that is not true. Unfortunately, it is all inside man and man cannot be cut in half. To eliminate the Bin Ladens of the world will not put an end to evil. But to dismantle the myth and adopt a more scientific point of view to fully understand good and evil may take us along the path of discerning immorality and move us towards a life in which authentic morality triumphs.

It is a beautiful and intellectually exciting idea ...

April 17th

Repulsive photo in *El País* newspaper. Middle-aged couple; he has a moustache, she's plump. They're sitting, looking backwards, in a good mood, smiling, as if they were glad to see a friend. The caption says: «Francisco José Ramada and his wife, Sagrario Yoldi, accused of kidnapping Aldaia, yesterday, in the Spanish High Court».

These smiley people, these immense bastards, kept the industrialist locked up in a hideout for almost a year. One year. Locked in a hole. The same thing some common delinquents (what's the difference here?) did to the kidnapped pharmacist from Olot. And to think that these people, sometimes, go back to their towns and villages and life goes on as if nothing had happened....

The indifference, that sort of naivety, shown by some people. In the words of Fernando Savater in an interview in the Argentine newspaper, *La Nación*:

I am always surprised when they ask me what it's like to live under threat, when what they should be asking themselves is how they feel about seeing that thousands of people need to live this way. It is not about what we feel, because it is not a psychological mystery limited to those of us who live with escorts, but a society problem, as society sees this happen and considers it something that doesn't concern them, as if it were a folkloric anomaly.

I can feel all the bitterness behind these words and they echo in my mind all day long.

April 18th

We go for a walk along the Larga beach. In Tarragona we have beaches like this one that are quite wild and just ten minutes' drive away. I hope they don't come up with anything too odd in an attempt to «civilize it».

After walking the length of it (one or two kilometres?), we have an aperitif at the beach bar. Marinated anchovies and periwinkles. Quite dietetic, we can't complain. Beer for Josep and water for me, I never know what to order to drink. A bore, as Elisabet would say.

I don two sets of glasses at the same time, one set for the sun and the other for reading, and I read the articles by Amparo Moreno Sardà, professor of Journalism at the Universidad Autònoma de Barcelona and councillor of Tortosa town council, and Montserrat Comas de Argemir, president of the Observatory on Domestic and Gender-based Violence, in *El País* newspaper.

They both talk about domestic violence as if it were a question of cultural roles. A big mistake. Amparo Moreno says:

[attitudes] related to this model of masculinity considered socially superior: a virile archetype that has been traditionally instilled into boys to make them men, with this strong association with positions of power in the domestic spaces and in public scenarios, that today we also need to take on as women entering into these scenarios.

Unfortunately, the foundations of these policies are fundamentally flawed. The archetypes she refers to are not socially instilled archetypes. They are archetypes that form part of human nature. Naturally, education is important but not being able to see the roots of the stereotypes will not help solve the problem.

Mrs. Moreno also speaks of the «primitive lie»: the statement that some human beings are superior to others. According to her, this

«lie» gave rise to the patriarchal society and all of its consequences.

The reality is that a «primitive truth» does exist and that this truth is ugly. In nature, the strongest dominate over the weakest. Steven Pinker claims that if intelligent life were to reach space and see that there's a taller and heavier human male, who is therefore stronger than the female, they would immediately hypothesize about a recent evolutive past based on polygyny, fights between the males for the female and a natural selection of the strongest ... and most violent... male.

Neither men nor women can avoid the matter. The only way is to recognise the problem and find solutions. Both men and women must take full responsibility for our acts, which is why we've come up with a series of laws that serve precisely to prevent the use of force against the weak. Our survival is no longer dependent on the same criteria as a hundred thousand years ago, when practically all of our biological (though not cultural) evolution came to a standstill.

In short, anyone who commits a crime must bear the weight of the law, and we need to stop speculating about «primitive lies» that attempt to blame an incomprehensible and mythical «society» or «roles» that are infinitely more complex than the result of a misguided education.

April 19th

Wow, what a macabre thing to do, what a way to start the week: someone has profaned the grave of the Special Operations Force officer who died in the suicidal explosions in Leganés caused by perpetrators of the March 11th attacks in Madrid.

All this makes me feel awful. I've only ever seen three dead people

in my life: a couple of grandparents and my first husband. And his grave has also come to mind. I hadn't thought about it for a long time. The marble plaque, the family name and the inevitable photo in the oval frame. And, oh God, he's wearing that safari jacket he hated so much.

The people who like to find meanings where there is just coincidence (however cruelly ironic it is), will find a premonition in their dislike of a jacket bought on an impulse, but that he practically never wore. As if it was somehow possible to foretell (it's absolutely not) that it would be used to dress him for the last time and that, on top of that one of the few photos in which he was wearing it would be chosen (not by me) to leave him frozen for ever more in a third-floor, windowless, graveyard niche.

I don't want to think about it, but the memory accompanies me all day long.

They are speculating that the perpetrators were Islamic fundamentalists. On television, the usual talk show panellists suggest the possibility that the profanation might be due to the fact that the suicide bombers have not yet been buried, so many days later, contrary to the Islamic tradition. They say they have committed this crime in indignation and offence.

We are already finding excuses for them. Yesterday I read that Sami Naïr, a Palestinian intellectual who criticises the West while living fabulously well in it, has gone so far as to accuse the Government... of fostering March 11th through its immigration policy! And he's shameless enough to say:

If the immigration system in Spain were different, perhaps the terrorists wouldn't have found people to support them here.

«Perhaps», really?, but I've already said enough. All we needed was this smart-aleck. I can't understand how he has such a following among our intellectuals. He's a sectarian through and through. But, there you go, another thing we are guilty of here. It's all very well to be multicultural and to respect all faiths. It's just that we unwittingly provoke them.

Can't these intellectuals admit that the sole logic behind terrorism responds to the destruction of those it hates. There is nothing more to understand. It's worse to try: it diverts energies and makes room for even more deaths. The causes are important with a view to prevention. Once the crime has been established there is no time to lose.

Everything started to be more tolerable and liveable in the Basque Country for the non-nationalists when they understood that the solution, or at least the initial solution, was police-based. It's as simple as that.

The panellists continue to seek reasons for the crime. The Naïrs will give them ideas. Always ready to speak up for the terrorists.

Deep down, evil fascinates us.

April 21st

After lunch, as Josep and I savour a delicious orange we get to talking about fruit. One of his favourites is the nectarine. I tell him it's a hybrid between a plum and a peach. He already knows. I ask him if he's not afraid of eating genetically modified products. But he's one

of mine: he's sceptical. Which is why he finds the following news in the newspaper *El Periódico* so absurd and outrageous: «50 Greenpeace activists have been forced out of a food factory in Cartagena». The editorial of *El País* also refers to it:

Citizen concern about genetically modified foodstuffs may have no scientific grounds, but it is the direct consequence of the opacity of part of the sector. There is no better defence against the alarm than true and transparent information.

Great. Wonderful. We already know that «it may have no scientific grounds» (it doesn't). But who is to blame? The sector guilty of «opacity», that is, as the text also mentions, «the biotechnology multinationals»? Or those obscurantist organisations like Greenpeace that preach apocalyptic misfortunes and allow themselves the luxury of launching consequence-free attacks on the companies that legally trade with what they condemn?

Scientists distinguish between perceived risk and real risk. To give an example of perceived risk, we could be referring to preservatives and additives, which to date are unknown to have caused any deaths, and real risk, which would represent an inadequately preserved or mis-handled foodstuff, errors that do cause thousands of deaths a year.

But an additive makes for a better newspaper headline.

April 22nd

I go for a drink with Elisabet. We talk about everything: lipsticks, new clothes, bags... She gives out to me for not continuing to study

German. She's right. But I just couldn't do it. At the start of the course I had the best of intentions but afterwards... The conversation turns to men and we confide some former affairs to each other. We open up to each other slightly, you might say. I feel really at ease. Neither she nor I mention politics. Around nine, she accompanies me home. As we near the newspaper stand downstairs from my apartment, I tell her I have to buy the paper. Suddenly, we see Santiago. I'm really happy to see him but she keeps a certain distance. I don't understand why. I make one of my little jokes, as if I were introducing them. I say:

—Here, on my left, Elisabet, and here, Santiago... —winking an eye at him.

They find it slightly amusing. Definitely not a big hit. She is still frozen in place five metres away. Neither Santiago nor I understand it. We imagine her fear of political contamination is too much for her. Until we see what's happening. It's Paquita, the stand-owner's, dog. A good-sized huskie staring at her in absolute indifference.

But she sees evil in her.

—I'd be capable of jumping out a window if a dog that big came near me —she says, in terror.

Bowie is an apparently peaceful dog with two different-coloured eyes. I say apparently because he once jumped at me in a way I didn't like at all. He was probably in a bad mood. Now, Santiago will take advantage to laugh at her, I can just see it coming. I imagine him saying to me in private later: «Apart from being a nationalist, she's a chicken too». Or something along those lines.

But not at all! Who would have thought. He's really understanding. And seems genuine. He starts explaining stories he's heard about people who are afraid of dogs. He says, as kindly as can be, that it's an inevitable terror. He's very caring and, against all the odds, there's

suddenly good vibes between them. I had never seen them like this. One of the two says that I've lost weight. And I say no, that I've put it on. Elisabet says I have a smaller bum than her. I know that already. It couldn't be any other way because she is a bit plump. Not very, but on the healthy side. He says women have to have bums. We both tell him (cutting off our noses to spite our faces, so typical of women) that if a bum is not good and pert, it's better off being small. And he goes and disagrees. That even if it droops a bit it's also attractive.

That's a lot for a man to say, especially one as fastidious as he is. Neither of us admit to any droopiness, but it's a comfortable margin and always appreciated. We say goodbye and she leaves first. I catch him out having a furtive look at her bum.

April 25th

There are various ways of being Spanish, but just one way of being Catalan: the nationalist way.

We, the true Catalans, are essentialists and symbols are of the utmost importance to us: flags, traditional sports, stickers, car plates... All this gives us a sense of belonging to a community, a nation. What grounds do we have for claiming to be a nation? We don't like this question but, if we have to answer, each of us will choose an answer in line with our limits, perhaps our education level.

Language is the easiest answer. Or is it that language does not create a single and non-transferrable way of seeing the world? This is the theory that has been most predominant in the last fifty years (at least). Man receives a language within the community along with the cosmivision deriving from that language. We have a Catalan way

of seeing the world. If you're very well-read, you'll speak of *weltanschauung*, meaning «worldview» in German. Thanks to this view of the world, a Catalan cannot think like a person from Extremadura.

Ah, but science has put paid to that belief. All modern linguistics have abandoned this idea since we now know that language is an instinct and the syntactic structures are universal and innate. There used to be a saying: «Translator, traitor». It was said that certain things were impossible to transfer from one language to another. But the publishing industry has amply proven that there is nothing that can't be translated. Sometimes, there are tricky concepts or emotions. Particularly if the references are subjective and affect emotions or feelings. But what can't be translated in one word can be translated in two, in three or in a long sentence: nothing human is remote to us. If you still haven't heard the news, you can continue to believe in the *weltanschauung* of language. If you read at all, you can't.

You could also say that history or territory is what shapes a nation. Pity Spain has so many centuries of existence and that «they» can say exactly the same thing about the relationship between Catalonia and Spain.

So, what's left then? Well, objectively and rationally, nothing. That's why more than ever we turn to the subjective and the irrational: feelings. And we use them proudly. «I feel invaded» or «I feel different» are a must right now: they're in.

I read this by a very nationalist colleague on the blog:

And I'd like to add that I'm beginning to feel a tad fed up of being told your historical premises are false if you say you feel a tad more Catalan or a tad more Basque.

But, what do natural feelings of affection for the place you were

born, its traditions, or its landscape, have to do with feeling «different» as an excuse for cutting ties with people who are also your people? Why should anyone «feel themselves» to be Catalan or Galician? People *are* Catalan or Galician. I am Catalan, but I don't go around telling everyone that «I feel» Catalan, in the same way that I don't go around telling everyone that «I feel like» a woman. There is no need for me to justify something so elemental.

Well, there are people who do, who make «feeling a virtue», even a moral virtue. And it's not just a good joke. As the evolutionary psychologist, Judith Rich Harris says:

Exclusion and religious fanaticism arise from tribalism, they believe in innate superiority and the special category of those who belong to the group.

We live in an increasingly fluid world. Those who are up can always come down and those we have laughed at may, one day, turn the tables on us.

Valencia is fantastic not to mention Zaragoza. Watch what you say.

April 26th

I'm engaged in a perpetual battle with the pigeons. They're all set to build their nest right here. Last spring was a constant siege. I've already found two eggs in my bedroom window-box. The truth is that they're beautiful. I've confiscated them, obviously, and I don't feel remotely guilty. But I don't want to throw them away. I find them fascinating.

I get back to work. I read the blog. Justo Serna, a history professor

of the Universidad de Valencia who often contributes, has a strong tendency to suggest that reality is something that depends on each individual's point of view. Rather than one reality existing, what we have are different people who fabricate it according to their beliefs or their history.

Today he wrote a lovely text in which he ended up saying that when Marco Polo saw a rhinoceros for the first time on one of his journeys, he thought it was a unicorn. And he concludes: «I believe we see what we know».

That is somehow true. We have evolved by developing organs and skills to capture the reality of everything we need to survive. The bees know of the existence of x-rays through their senses. We discovered them recently. We didn't naturally capture them because they weren't vital. Since we've known of their existence and how to use them, we've opened up a whole new world of knowledge and uses.

But Justo is not the kind to talk about evolutionary psychology. It doesn't seem to form part of his baggage. He disagrees with the very fact of a reality «existing». And that touches on one of my most sensitive emotional fibres: the reality of reality.

Marco Polo saw what he knew, and what he knew was mythical. It's very poetic, but not remotely useful to interpret the world. It didn't take long for another explorer (in a broader sense of the word) to understand the type of beast he had in front of him. Now we know that it wasn't a unicorn. The reality is that it wasn't one. Science and reason are the best tools to get to know the world. In Marco Polo's times, they were still very incipient. But knowledge developed very quickly. Fortunately. We take an encyclopaedia and, apart from verifying that it was not a unicorn, we also discover things about the rhinoceros that make us marvel even more than Marco Polo. What we read will be almost incredible. And the beauty of it all is that,

on top of everything, it has been demonstrated. Who knows if we'll ever know it all, even about the rhinoceros. But this path is richer than mythology because it is open and still progressing. The other is closed and final.

And false.

April 27th

Fernando sends me a very mysterious file. It's a PowerPoint. When I click on it, the screen goes black and the image of the magician, David Copperfield, appears. He says:

I can see your thoughts through your mind. There are 6 cards in front of you. Think of one. Just think. Don't touch or click on it. I can see this card in your mind. Think for a moment. Now stare intently into my eyes and concentrate on your card. I don't know you, I can't see the card you chose. But I know exactly which card you have in mind. Look the card is no longer there!

Surprised? See you soon!

You have 7 days of life left after seeing it... or you can send this message to all those who still don't believe in me.

Gee whizz! He's made mine disappear. The truth be told it is initially quite impressive. Plus, the baddie hints at the «7 days of life» you have left... But I look again and I see the trick. And I start sending it to my friends. Especially the ones who believe in all things esoteric. I write: «What do you think? Guess which card he made disappear... Mine! Go figure!».

The problem is that since they know what I think, they distrust

me on the spot. I think Mariona even gets annoyed and everything. She replies: «I imagine it's just more nonsense. How are you? Let's see if we can get together for lunch one day». But she doesn't say moo about whether she figured out the trick or not. She probably binned it straight away. Then Elisabet's reply arrives:

Ha! He's changed ALL OF THEM!

Girlie, *c'est la vie* and nobody questions the reason for what they have around them. If you think about it, it's good to feel surprised by certain facts and enjoy an excitement that I (and others) almost never have.

Let them be full of happiness... and you even happier!

She's way too clever. She got it straight away. She might be blind when it comes to nationalism, but not anything else. And she's a nice woman. Today we're making affection not war.

April 28th

Today though, we are both geared up for a battle, Elisabet and I. We have a coffee and talk about nationalism. She says that Carod «has advocated a unique model in Catalonia». I say:

—I'm sorry, I don't follow Carod the way you do, that's why I was asking. What is this unique model? What does «unique» mean?

—Well unique, not in the same way as other Spanish autonomous regions. We have all the right in the world to have a *different* model.

—Why does it have to be «different»? If there's a model that works here, why can't it work somewhere else?

—It has to be a financing model for Catalonia. Unique.

—But, why unique? —I insist—. Why must it be unique?

—It has to have certain characteristics that make it «singular».

—But why does it have to be «singular»? Theoretically a left-wing person, who believes in universal rights, should want everyone to enjoy what they enjoy. A left-wing person should never demand historical rights (the *droit du seigneur* is also a historical right). This is right-wing reasoning, but apart from being right-wing, it's so reactionary that no right-wing in their right mind would suggest it nowadays.

—I don't know what you're saying about the right.

—Well, theoretically the left should show solidarity, shouldn't it?

—This has nothing to do with solidarity.

—But you can't be left-wing if you're not consistent. Does it reflect solidarity to ask for advantages for some and not for others?

—Look, we could talk about other rights, including one that's primordial: the right to independence, a fundamental right that protects all nations.

—Honey! Whoever said that it's a fundamental right? Don't tell me you're referring to the United Nations Charter that was drawn up with the nations subjected to colonization in mind. They have repeated a thousand times over that it's not applicable in democracy.

—Really...

—Plus, what is a nation? What characteristics does it need to have? Who chooses them? If they wanted self-determination for language reasons... would the Valle de Aran, for instance, have this right? If a zone or area of Catalonia wanted self-determination because it didn't feel Catalan, could it have it? Why can a nation have self-determination, but not an individual?

—I'm not following you. You're cross and I'm very tired.

—No, no, I'm not cross, you're the only intelligent person I know who's nationalist...

—No bloody way!

—Yes, and the person I can talk about these and many other things with. That's why you're my friend.

—Right...

Quote from Boadella:

To use a differential fact as a basis to claim a certain administrative system is to politicise feelings, and that seems like a very dangerous policy to me. I'm in favour of politics based on reason. But the politicians unduly usurp the feelings of the Catalan people, we all have them, and that's a fraud.

Yes, a fraud. One day nationalism will fall down in the same way as the Berlin wall. And everyone will claim innocence and say that it wasn't them.

April 29th

It's evening, and I have a mini-sandwich before I go to the gym. Meanwhile, I turn on the television. Ana Rosa Quintana's talk show is on. I don't know what they're talking about, but they all agree, especially Jimmy Giménez Arnau, that «the Catalans are more cultured».

I should be content, but all these clichés actually annoy me. Plus, everything comes at a cost. Even clichés. Nothing is free.

April 30th

In the afternoon I tell Elisabet that I'm not feeling too good (I've had

cystitis since yesterday) and she insists on bringing me an antibiotic. I don't let her, poor thing; I'm not that sick. She's a very decent woman. My friend.

That night, the two of us go to a concert in the Auditorio de Tarragona, but each of us separately. I go with Pep and she goes with a friend. It's the choir of Ciutat de Tarragona. They're quite good.

Since it hasn't started yet, I go to say hello to her. She's in the third row and I'm a bit further back. She says she was looking for me but didn't see me. I point out where I'm sitting and she can't help herself from coming out with: «Ah, I imagined you'd be more over towards the right».

Very funny, the super lefty. She's with an elderly woman. A woman of around ninety. She introduces her to me: very polite, Spanish-speaking and in pink. One hell of a coat. This must be the sort of Spanish speaker that Elisabet frequents. My little leftie!

May 1st

Shere Hite thinks that domestic violence will no longer exist when «the traditional family values disappear and other different male hero models are popularised». She is also one of those people who think that human nature doesn't exist, not to mention innate male and female characteristics. They are all «roles» that are gradually interiorised, including violence and aggressiveness which, in her opinion, are essentially masculine. For example, when she talks about the boys who fight in the school playgrounds, she says there's a need to correct the model of «the most cocky, the ones who make the lives of other smaller children impossible».

Unfortunately, (because it would be easier to resolve), these are

not exclusively male patterns, a sad aspect of machismo that needs to be eradicated. In the school playgrounds the girls also make other girls suffer. We all remember not being too good in our dealings with the weakest girls when we were small.

In an illustrative book on ethology (*A Primate's Memoir*, by R. M. Sapolsky), about a group of baboons and the most vulnerable member of the group, the author writes:

Predictably, all males in the troop who needed a scapegoat (and Lia and Deborah occasionally too) tortured, chased, harassed, beat, wounded, clawed and terrorised him. The newly arrived males in the troop, small squirts at the height of adolescence, were surprised and delighted to find that there was at least one other person inferior to them in their new troop.

Of course, Shere Hite might argue that the girls do this because they «interiorise» the violent values of the patriarchal society. In other words, they imitate the men. That's not true. We reproduce ancestral behaviours; we behave like hominids and not like people:

The first thing a baboon does when things turn ugly is to find someone to pay for it. When a male is beaten in a fight he looks to the left and the right and starts to chase some youth who, in turn, when he's sick to the teeth of it, takes it out on a young female who, in turn, slaps an adolescent who, in turn, throws a child to the ground. All in the space of 15 seconds. It's what's known as «displaced aggressiveness».

Do these bad examples sound familiar? This attitude is also known as «the pecking order». Fowl for instance, roosters and hens, have a strict hierarchy. The clearest expression of this is that whoever is at the top pecks whoever is beneath him, but nobody pecks him. The

second can be pecked by the first, but then he pecks everyone underneath. And so on and so forth to the bottom of the line, who is pecked by everyone and cannot peck anyone in return. Not surprisingly, he is the most frustrated and depressed.

It sounds like a caricature, but it should make us reflect. We are made of a certain stuff, with the good and the bad. We need to admit that there are points of view that are no longer valid. If we turn our back on who we are and where we come from, we will never move forward. The solution will not come from promoting a sort of sanctification of the woman, or inventing angelical female virtues. Women are definitely different to men, they have different predispositions and innate priorities. But they can be just as evil as men.

That is not the problem. The myth of the cooperative woman versus the competitive man is not true either. They are outmoded feminist slogans. And this can be counterproductive, among other things, because it is not true. It has nothing to do with the nature of men and women. And, worst of all, it causes us to enter a vicious cycle of victimising the woman and demonising the man. The human condition is far more complex. The victimisation could lead to excessive protectionism that undermines the woman's responsibility and creates resentment.

It may delay our true independence.

We're going to spend the night at my parents' house.

May 2nd

We get up and go for a wander in the park. I don't know if I've already said this, but my parents have the enormous privilege of living in one of the loveliest parts of El Vallès. They're just in front of the park, Parque Metropolitano de Cerdanyola. From the terrace you can see a small chapel, some olive groves, trees and the Collserola nature reserve in the distance. Hidden by the woods, a stream runs below, given away at night by the singing of the frogs. Quite a clean one too.

We wander among the walkers, kids on bicycles, frenzied dogs and people sitting on benches reading the newspapers. My eyes are drawn to a headline I read as we pass by «Mas says that Catalonia feels “frustrated” by the admittance of small countries into the EU».

Catalonia? I'm assuming he means «some Catalans», right? This fixation with personifying an abstraction and making it feel things humans feel such as «frustration»... The obsession with the figure of speech, this fixation with taking a part as meaning the whole. He's the part and, perhaps, those close to him too. And Catalonia is the whole, and I'm a citizen of Catalonia. And there's an error. It cannot be true that Catalonia feels «frustration», because I am Catalan and I don't feel at all frustrated. Not in the least. I am tremendously glad not to be a «small country». Come on! I have another look: «If Spain had evolved like Yugoslavia, we would be independent».

What is this man saying? Like Yugoslavia? That's what he would wish on us? Has he never been there? Because Yugoslavia is precisely one of the most misfortunate countries in the world. War, misery and poisonous relations with its neighbours. What a sad joke. I don't know how anyone can still vote for them.

May 3rd

I call Santiago and we spend a good while talking politics. He seems to be completely recovered and at peace with the world. He has already got used to the idea that they have lost and he's writing, making plans and taking advantage of this new desert crossing to strengthen certain values and strategies. I find him in great form.

He also asks after Elisabet. I'm shocked. What's going on with this man lately? Is he inventing new ways to provoke her?

Good, fantastic, I tell him. The other day we went to a concert at the Palacio de Congresos. I ask whether he likes music. He says he's a big fan, but he has a good system at home and that, unless it's a remarkable concert, he's happy with his LPs.

But he's stuck on the subject of Elisabet and doesn't want to let go. He says again:

—She has a terrible fear of dogs, doesn't she? Poor thing...

—What?

—Elisabet, I mean.

—Ah, yes... There are people who are afraid of them, yes...

It all sounds a bit off to me and I don't know why. I mean, he said all this without a trace of humour.

There's been a scandal in Madrid the last few days over a play called *Me Cago en Dios* (I Shit on God). There was a bit of a racket and the odd punch thrown. Since I'm not a believer, these sorts of works make no difference to me; they don't affect my feelings. But what I find hard to stomach is that those who stage them tend to be the very ones who claim to be liberals and mould-breakers. We all know, nowadays, that there is no danger in slandering the Catholic church or the Christian religion in general. But I wonder if any smart-aleck

would be brave enough to put on a play called *I Shit on Allah*. Or one called *I Shit on ETA*... Didn't we want to be more mould-breaking than anyone?

I talk about it with Josep, and he agrees vehemently. As an artist who knows exactly what the score is, he can't stand «these know-it-alls», he says.

May 4th

Hebe de Bonafini, one of the founders of the Association of the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo in Argentina, but rejected by true mothers, is among the most unpleasant and repulsive creatures you could come across. She is intolerance, rabble-rousing and fanaticism personified (not to mention abusing the feelings of others and sponging off them to live). Her exclamations of joy when the Al Qaeda terrorists destroyed the Twin Towers are unforgettable. The woman has even expressed her sympathies for ETA more than once, coming out with things like:

We «mothers» express our solidarity with the fight of the brave Basque people against a criminal and murderous State, Spain.

This alone should be sufficient to banish her forever from here. But no, now it would seem that the government of the Principality of Asturias, demonstrating its own foolishness, is offering 180,000 euros for a so-called University of the Mothers. The regions' socialist president, Vicente Álvarez Areces, had the idea. And what a name, «the Mothers». It would be a resounding success in Mexico. Perhaps,

like Xirinchas⁷⁰, he believes there are «styles». I read some lines by this great patriot:

According to the Europa Press agency, two years ago Xirinacs has said that «in addition, there are styles, because since ETA is at war, it kills but it doesn't pull out nails. I've been in prison with ETA prisoners whose nails had been pulled out. ETA kills but it doesn't torture. Yet, Lasa and Zabala died tortured. When ETA throws a bomb in a place where civilians or people unrelated to the oppressors might get hurt, they give a warning. Do you know how hard it is to steal the dynamite, pay for it, transport it and place it to then, when everything is all set up, give a warning and see the artefact defused??».

Poor things. What a hard job. And such noble spirits:

Shortly afterwards, he explained: «Why does it do this? It does it because it still retains some nobility in the style of Geneva, and it retains it because the others haven't rotted it more. Because the people of ETA lead dog's lives, hideaways, sewer-rats, persecuted. They can't have girlfriends, they can't have children, they can't go to the cinema, they can't have anything and if they sometimes harm someone innocent, it is not their will. People don't know that in the attack on the Hipercor in Barcelona they gave a warning, and it was the police or Hipercor itself that kept it quiet...».

A sinister couple, Bonafini and Xirinacs. Tarradellas had him figured out perfectly. He used to turn up to meet him dressed as a leftie

70. *TN*: Lluís Maria Xirinacs i Damians (6 August 1932 - 11 August 2007) was a Catalan politician, writer, religious Catholic and advocate for the independence of Catalonia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Llu%C3%ADs_Maria_Xirinacs.

with his leather pouch and all, and the president would say to him: «What is it Father, out for the day?». He knew he was a novice. He wasn't to be fooled.

May 7th

Political storm in Catalonia over the Generalitat's report complimenting the radio station Cadena SER and the newspapers *El País* and *El Periódico*. The media that the authors of the report like best is the public regional station, TV3 «which must convey a Catalan way of viewing the world», which is why it's essential to «foster its leadership».

This «storm» is the result of a leaked report by the secretary of Communication, Miquel Sellarès, planning press manipulation. What a shower.

It's all pathetic. Even the part about the Catalan way of viewing the world, which is shocking. As if we were a swarm of bees, all identical. Moreover, what does it mean? That as a nation, Catalonia has its own view of the world? False. Catalonia is a social entity lacking the mental faculties to think; worldviews exist in the minds of individuals. Is it possible that Catalonia stamps character on its inhabitants and, therefore, confers a Catalan cosmivision on them? It's a possibility based on an unsustainable ethnic fundamentalism. Do the majority of Catalans have the same worldview which, moreover, coincides with the official one? False, but if it were true it would be an attack on the plurality of thought and beliefs. Don't those who do not share this predominant cosmivision also have the right have their view of the world considered as Catalan as any other?

In any case, this theoretically different Catalan worldview versus

that of other Spaniards of like beliefs, education or knowledge, will always just be the tip of the iceberg, the smallest part. The rest, the hidden 95%, is the common part, what we share.

Also the best and most important part.

May 8th

I'm going to Marta's first communion. She's my first cousin Adela's daughter. The beautiful words, the staging, the good intentions expressed, the community feeling of the moment, always greatly move me. I have a mixed-up relationship with anything liturgical. I'm an atheist, but I don't deny the emotional and symbolical weight of the rituals or the tradition.

I remember that the independent theatre company, Els Joglars, admirers of the author, Josep Pla, went to visit his tomb in Llofriu. They were as full of feeling as they were incapable of expressing it. Their agnostic campaigning prevented them from «the simple act of prayer», to quote Boadella. But they didn't know what to do instead. In the end, one of them came up with the idea of placing his hand on the tombstone and, immediately, the rest did the same. Boadella says that once outside the cemetery, that «primitive gesture» had just sent them back two-hundred years in time.

We had leaped back to a cycle in which man was still capable of finding a more complex way of expressing his feelings. The act bore witness to a generational catastrophe, as we couldn't find an outlet to express ourselves in an Our Father, and what was even worse was that in our case we were theatre professionals. The basics of «progression», with its compulsive rejection of tradition, had caused us to regress to remote eras of humanity,

just as the visual arts had been demonstrating.

I find it funny, although I don't know how ironic it intends to be. I don't think the solution lies in recovering tradition, exactly. I suspect it's more likely to be based on knowledge and acknowledgement of the two-dimensional side of human nature: reason and passion. Not only do the mindless who act without thought fail. Life doesn't treat the sick human beings who are incapable of expressing their emotions well either.

Secular humanism will provide an alternative as a complete life philosophy when it succeeds in integrating these needs engraved so deeply on the human psyche.

May 9th

Sunday. We go for a walk along the Larga beach and meet the usual walkers. Here comes Dolors, our neighbour Cisco's sister. Ready to win the bronze. She's far slimmer. She must have always been beautiful. She's an optimistic and cheerful person. You can tell. We say hello.

The beach is packed. Sometimes, depending on the day and the time, from the road you can see a line of people snaking up and down along the water's edge. Today is one of those days.

May 10th

At dusk, I go to meet Josep at his workshop to go for our official stroll. We walk, like always, along the Rambla towards the sea, auto-

matically intending to «touch iron».

We walk along the right-hand side. I like to be surprised by my favourite corner. As soon as we get to Giorgio's ice-cream parlour I see the sea hanging in front of me. The line of the horizon is clear and, slightly lower down I see an enormous, orange-coloured boat lit up by the setting sun.

I have to stop to breathe. It's almost golden. Like red gold. Hyperrealist. Raw. Completely impossible. It reminds me of Truman's Show.

We always complain that we've forgotten the camera.

May 11th

I usually read the first news of the day online in my nightdress. Before showering. While Windows warms up, I go out onto the back terrace, look at the plants, frighten a pigeon away... There's a white trellis but the neighbours can still see me. Like a ghost, the fabric hanging down to my feet, long sleeves. Thin cotton. My dressmaker makes them for me because I can't find models like this in the shops.

These days, the big news in the press is the Abu Ghraib prison, where American soldiers and officials treated the prisoners under their guard abominably. And, on the other hand, we also have horrific images of the misfortunate hostages beheaded by the Islamic fundamentalists. I honestly hope the Abu Ghraib sadists receive their just desserts. But I would have been more reassured to see an equally indignant reaction to these snuff movie decapitation scenes in our press. The fact that scenes of humiliation are more alarming than scenes of murder is beyond my conception. I cannot forget that poor American journalist Daniel Pearl and all the others.

Like Marc, my friend who supports *Convergència i Unió*, said:

Apparently, the torture of some crazed imbeciles justifies everything: as I heard on a radio debate programme yesterday: «And then they have the gall to complain about S-11». Obviously, we need to demand more from democratic countries than those that are not democratic, but we demand nothing from some and everything from others.

I keep recommending Revel and *Anti Americanism* to put everything in perspective and help us understand what's happening.

Yes, I completely agree with him. It's outrageous.

In the evening I go to the gym. Walking along the Rambla, as I'm coming to the Centenario fountain I glance at a couple coming towards me. A man well into his fifties and a woman of around thirty. They are casually dressed, she's wearing trousers and a strappy top—it's hot today. They look like immigrants, like Maghrebis.

All of this goes through my mind in a question of seconds, almost subconsciously. I'm glad that she's wearing a strappy top and not a veil. I can't help it, I'm afraid of symbols of religious belonging, especially Islamic ones. A strappy top is also a statement of principles. Of good vibes.

Strangely enough, a half a second later somebody calls me. It's them. I can't say for sure that they're Maghrebis, but I do know they're foreign because of their accent. He says something to me like «lady, the sip». Like that, with an "s". What? Ah, now I see: my gym bag is open. He's referring to the zip of the compartment underneath, that I pay no attention to because I never carry anything

in it. It's not important.

But I need to thank them wholeheartedly. And not for the bag; not at all. It's because they don't give the impression of walking around with the Koran and a sabre in hand. I am grateful to them for not being hostile to me. Or they don't seem to be. And, I would swear, really I'd swear, that they spoke to me for the same reason. It's a really strong sensation. I'm sure that they're saying to me: «look, we're just workers, we're not interested in veils or differences. We spoke to you for something as simple as this because it gave us the opportunity to communicate this to you».

All of this within the space of a few seconds and a few metres. Just as I get to the Centenario fountain. Just for a moment. Maybe it all happened in my imagination. Or maybe not.

May 12th

I die laughing at a discussion they're having on the «Skepticos» list. The things they come up with! But they do often get it right. Now they're talking about ancient civilisations, aliens and UFOs. A very juicy theme.

Udo: Whenever someone comes out with exotic inter-planetary civilisations of UFOs and their like visiting us and creating humanities, I ask them the following questions: What civilization can allow itself the luxury of financing a journey through space? What nation could afford such squandering? Who would pay for the Star Trek ships? And the Death Star? Who the fuck can finance such technological extravagance? There is no Empire capable of it, ladies and gentlemen!!! Even our modest attempt to go to Mars costs millions!!!

Exactly! Sometimes these simple questions unmask the great farce propagated by peddlers in illusions. Men have always been men, and the economy, the economy.

May 13th

For the entertainment of those *magufos* who still waste their time with this sort of news. We have UFOs again. Now in Mexico, according to the article in the newspaper, *El Mundo*:

The Mexican Air Force has recorded a video in which 16 circular, luminous objects flying at high speed and veering sharply as they ride the skies over the state of Campeche are visible. The images were broadcast on television. The media highlight the fact that this is the first UFO recording that the armed forces have delivered to a media channel to make public and that the Ministry for Defence claims to have no explanation for the occurrences.

Naturally, since they don't have an «explanation», it's perfectly alright to assume that they are alien spaceships. This idea that crazy theories become sensible when there's no other explanation is incomprehensible. The City Police Force also claims that there are occasionally unexplained accidents. This means that no clues have been left, that there were no witnesses, etc. But not that it's been caused by ghosts or aliens just because they don't have an explanation.

May 14th

I went to the Ministry for Culture to run some errands. I whiled away the time I was waiting, looking at the typical decoration of a civil servant's office, particularly in the Culture department: posters of paintings or famous sculptures; family photos, or snapshots of children, travels, thumbtacked to the wall. A lot of mocking photos too. Of Aznar and Bush, of course. People who can't do any harm, who are very far away. There are no jokes about the mayor, for instance. There was one with the caption: «Three on an ass». And it showed Aznar with a 3 on his face atop an ass. And loads of the Princess Elena. She is a regular scapegoat, poor thing.

What will they do now that Aznar isn't there anymore? Will we see photos of Zapatero or is it that power is only repulsive according to who's in charge?

When I get home I read a comment by someone else on the blog:

Maragall lost his use of reason a while back. Exactly 4 years ago, when he lost the elections after obtaining a handful of votes more than CiU. I won't go hungry again, he said.

I got a fit of laughing. Very witty I think.

Over lunch, with our hairs standing on end and a feeling of depression, we watch the news of the Abu Ghraib prison torture. And Josep says to me:

—We've betrayed the left.

He uses the «we've» part out of sympathy for me. He's willing to let me drag him into the abyss. He loves me. If I'm going down, he's coming with me. Moving, but that's all I need. Since when has he

considered himself left or right? He's constantly mocking politics and politicians alike! But it would appear that Abu Ghraib is our fault. He must be feeling terrible to say something like that. What's wrong with him?

Hmmm... I know what he means. That if we hadn't strayed from the comfortable path of general anti-Americanism, if we hadn't dared to criticize PSC, if we'd behaved like good Catalans who blame PP for everything, then we wouldn't be forced to swallow these horrendous scenes without being able to say «these American bastards!», and we would feel we were on the bright side of political correctness. We have removed ourselves from the protection provided by the umbrella of those who are good without having to prove it.

But he's over it now. It's the stress of the despicable images of torture. They are so intolerable that we're tempted to join in with those who say that «they're all as bad as each other». But that's going too far; there are still classes. Despite the abomination committed now by these imbecile Americans.

May 15th

Oh, for God's sake, they're talking about «feeling oneself» to be from a place on the blog again. Another member, Mercutio, brings it up, saying this about a Galician friend of his:

I don't think he considers himself better (in any sense of the word) than a Catalan, someone from Madrid or a local of Murcia. But he believes himself to be different. At least as different as I, a Spaniard, feel compared to a Frenchman or an Englishman. And I really do feel somewhat different.

What a fixation about feeling different. Of course, all human beings are different. I imagine that this man means to say that he, as a Galician, is different to the Catalans, people from Madrid, etc.; in short, to the Spanish. But then he's also different to the other Galicians. Although there are degrees of difference. Though as my friend Fernando would put it, the ontological fact of the matter is that the category of «being Galician», is in the same class as «being Spanish» or «being European».

There's an experiment you can do about the degrees: a strange, also ontological, chain can be established. We depart from one that is very, very natural at a ground level: we are individuals of the human species. Then we can start to build increasingly dispersed, artificial categories, that are more the result of social and cultural conventions: son of..., resident of..., nationality..., supra-nationality...

In Steven Pinker's book *The Language Instinct*, there's a list of attitudes, customs and feelings that anthropologists and other academics believe are shared by the majority of humanity. It is a highly revealing book and anyone interested in humanities should read it.

The «differences» between the Galician or the «Catalan way of seeing the world» have their origins in the history of peculiarities unique to each context. But everyone on the planet has the same ability to «understand» the reality once the necessary scientific and rational tools to do so have been acquired (relating to educational development). These facts and the means to verify them are the only way to agreement.

There is no Catalan way of creating an antibiotic, an AIDS drug, a combustion engine, a book of logic, a sales agreement, a bicycle, a road or a double mortal jump on a trapeze. There may be incidental details. But what's real, what's objective is based on the facts, it has no nationality. What really matters doesn't have one.

May 16th

If today is Sunday, this must be... the Larga!

My goodness. I realise that we always do the same things: on weekdays we walk as far as the Balcó and we go as far as the beach on Sundays. In the end, Elisabet will turn out to be right, we are dull and conservative. But we haven't tired of it yet. It's full of possibilities. The Larga is the other Rambla in Tarragona, and we meet all the regular walkers of Sunday noon: Dolors Duch, Montse Martí, Ramon Cornadó...

Walking along we come to above Waikiki. Waikiki is one of the nudist coves along the coast... There, that's something I haven't mentioned yet. And it's really worthy of mention. There are few places as serene as this one. We sit above the path. Josep has the camera with him. He wants to take photos of the water. While he takes them I become hypnotised by the sea. He takes photos of me too. Quite lovely actually. Ah, but then he starts to get paranoid thinking that maybe someone down on the nudist beach thinks he's taking photos of them.

Such originality. Who would want to take photos of a few guys in the nude nowadays?

But Josep has a highly developed sense of guilt. He already proved it yesterday watching the Abu Ghraib images. It works in my favour, mostly. Having a husband who tends to think he's to blame for everything is fantastic. But he's getting tiresome now. That's put paid to the photo session.

Elisabet has sent me an email! The subject says: «ABUSE IN IRAQ».

It's a photo and, given her use of the upper case, it must be heavy artillery. What's worse, it claims the abusers (legionnaires!) are Spanish. What on earth has the woman found! I look at the photo and it turns out that yes, they are Spanish. There's a soldier with the look of someone who's having a laugh, giving the thumbs up alongside a couple of teenagers, almost children really. They're in a playground or something like that. The boys, looking really pleased with themselves, are holding up a bit of cardboard with the following written on it: «My brother and I are dickheads and we support Real Madrid».

God almighty... Are these the «abuses» committed by the Spanish legionnaires? Okay, Elisabet: they were pulling their legs. But, damn it, does this merit an email entitled «ABUSE IN IRAQ»?

You almost gave me a heart attack.

May 17th

When facts like those that took place in the Abu Ghraib prison come to pass, the Western media react with all the deep-seated anti-Americanism they are so proud of. Which is why it's hygienically necessary to put the facts firmly in their context and highlight a series of basic truths.

Firstly: the abuse was revealed by the American army itself (what other institution could do so?), not by CNN or CBS or any other media channel. It was the army itself. It would be interesting to see what other army in the world would do such a thing.

Secondly: when the facts became known, the necessary mechanisms to judge and punish the culprits were set in motion. Even the president has admitted the abuse and publicly apologised to the

Iraqi people, to their astonishment, because they have certainly seen abuse (to put it mildly) in Saddam's prisons, and it would have been unthinkable not only for their president to apologise, but for them to find out about it. And that goes for all the countries in the area, except Israel. No Arab or Muslim leader has done anything of the sort since the mutilation, assault and public cremation of four North American soldiers. Not a whisper of an apology, not even a slight condemnation by any representative of the Islamic countries —the self-same advocates of a «religion based on peace»— for the beheading of the North American citizen Nick Berg.

Despite these abominable acts, I still have no doubts that I live in a part of the world where superior moral standards are defended as opposed to those of these murderers. But my friend won't understand that as, apart from being anti-Spanish, she's also anti-American.

The first thing I do this morning, after my tea, the terrace and observing the scorching sun, is to counterattack. There's no forgiving the part about «Spanish abuses».

I send her an entire press summary. That'll keep her busy for a while. Let's see what she has to say this afternoon, when we go together to a talk at the Metropol theatre organized by the Amigos de la Ópera. She's not a member, but we'll go with our common friend, Àngela. Josep won't come as he's not feeling well.

Sunset

During and after the conference (magnificent, by the way, given by Rota, a musicologist in our group), Elisabet is ironically reserved.

She has something up her sleeve and I don't know what.

Once the talk ends, she accompanies me home and when I mention the articles I sent her, she says, looking at me out of the corner of her eye:

—Where did you get it from?

—What?

—One of them.

She doesn't say whether it was interesting or not, or appropriate or not. That's all she says: where did you get it from? Crikey, I just realised where she's coming from. There was one article from *Liber-tad Digital*, a right-wing, online newspaper. And her expression is so accusatory that it almost takes strips off me.

Now I get it: it's the curse of contamination. If you dare quote an article from a right-wing newspaper, 1) the article is of no value since it's right-wing, and 2) you lose value too, as you become tinted with suspicion. You can buy *El País*⁷¹ every day of your life, like I do, but if you just once find the opinion of a non-left newspaper worthwhile and on top of that you are foolish enough to send it to someone else, you've put your foot in it. Doubts have been cast on you. So, I try to tell her that things may or may not be interesting, worthwhile or not, according to their intrinsic value, and not according to which newspaper they're published in. But it is one of those things she's never going to want to understand.

We're at Font del Centenari and we're still talking about the mysteries of the right and the left and, since she's in a good mood (she's a bit smug about the whole *Diario Digital* article), she tells me that she's a bit miffed with a friend of hers who's told her that, in reality,

71. TN: *El País* aspires to be a refined, high-quality newspaper with sophisticated opinions and well-written and researched articles. It is considered to be more left-leaning.

she's right-wing.

—No way, she's brave! Why, may I ask? —I say laughing.

—She says it's because of the life I lead, my friends and all that.

—You do certainly live well, you rant about whatever you consider seedy, which is nearly everything, you hang around with the *crème de la crème*... What do you expect! It doesn't fit much with the standard liberal —I dare to reply.

But she doesn't get cross. Deep down she likes it. Taking advantage of her good mood, I ask her:

—Do you really think that photo of the boys in Iraq and the Spanish soldier is a sign of abuse?

And she doesn't answer me. She prevaricates. Laughs. I suspect that she sent it to me in one of her usual fits of indignation. I bet it was a big hit with her friends. She also thought it would undermine my Catalan-Spanish feelings. «My brother and I are dickheads and we support Real Madrid». Honey, please...

It's late when I get home and Josep has a cold and is sad. Now I do feel guilty.

May 20th

Going back to being a Fascist. I'm flicking through a lovely magazine. It's one of those decoration glossies, with lordly houses in them. There's an article about a decorator, a Mr. Parladé. He's passing himself off as an aristocrat, which, undoubtedly is a big help when he's selling his services. Especially to the *nouveau riche* and the insecure.

He really blows his own trumpet a lot, he says his grandmother was the Countess of Pries and that he's decorated the houses of all the high society people, like Koplowitz, the March family, the Abelló's

and all the rest. To insist that it's in his blood, he claims the atmosphere in the Pries household (his mother's) was charming, «with daily conversations, a love of all things antique, art, gastronomy...». And that his father's «branch» of the family was «also known for its refinement and artistic interests». And the gentleman, who is full of himself, concludes by saying: «Living the good life is in my genes».

Ah, good manners... class... In theory, the formal rituals of «politeness» or «good manners» have their distant roots in the same genetic code. The basic gestures are innate and universal, and are related to coupling, hierarchical submission, appeasement of the strong, caution in the face of a stranger, etc.

All of which has left us a legacy of expressions that each culture has adapted according to its needs. It is not only a formal and cultural matter; it is adaptative and elemental for social relations and the survival of the primates and their ancestors. It is impossible to live without them but, in principle, they do not denote any moral values or anybody's sensitivity (though they do denote intelligence or a brain that works well).

On the other hand, politeness also exists as a Culture, with a capital C, as a social and human action, and that does denote sensitivity, education or the experience of the person who chooses certain gestures while discarding others.

It also exists as a code of exclusion, of course, and that is the case of this *Parladé*. Naturally, all societies have their own exclusion codes. On the one hand, the gangs of skinheads have them, so do the trendy, the religious sects, the visual artists and all those who wish to attribute themselves a moral or intellectual superiority over those susceptible to belittlement (given that this is what it's about, defining whom to belittle). On the other hand, there are groups in which these codes work to discriminate against people according to

«lineages» or religious values that are absolute and only passed down through family. The difference between the former and the latter is that the former are, to a certain extent, democratic (given that access tends to be gained following an initiation process that tends to be the same for everyone).

Fernando Savater says the only peculiarity of a left-wing person, which has defined the left versus the right since the fall of socialism, is the profound conviction that all people are born free and equal. Differences do exist, as they should, but resulting from subsequent personal merit, that must be rewarded if society as a whole is to benefit. I don't know if Savater is right. At this stage, it's obvious that I tend to believe he is always right. But it is a definition that I would adopt.

This does not mean I consider good manners less worthy. I'm not one of those people who sees them as mere relics of the past that serve no purpose, or the gestures of «other classes». Good manners should be fostered, in my opinion, courtesy as a cultural «essence», as much the people's heritage as the Roman city of Tarragona or ham from Jabugo.

Exclusion codes are reprehensible because they separate human beings into categories based on the place or family they grew up in, and they have no way of changing this. And to insult or belittle someone for something they cannot avoid, is the essence of racism. And it is a classist, ignorant, irrational and fascist argument.

I think a good general rule to follow (and I'm not saying I always remember it) is to distrust all those statements or convictions that show us in an excessively positive light. It will also save you from looking ridiculous.

Ramón Barbat, another Friend of the Opera, wants to know who my ancestors were. My mother thinks it's unnecessary. I share half

my genes with each of my parents. A fourth (though in theory this is not exactly the case) with my grandparents. An eighth with the mother of the aunts. Maybe this Barbat is even closer to them than I am. «Blood» also spreads horizontally.

May 21st

And those who belong to the same «classes» seek each other out. What do you think of the Catalan-Basque federation? A good way to start Friday. The newspaper says «Mas holds talks with Ibarretxe and now claims that if he was Basque he'd support its plan». That's all we needed. I'll pounce on the next person I come across who tells me that CiU are sensible. To think that I even voted for them...

I speak to Arcadi. He's really worried and disenchanted with the political situation. He thinks this insanity will bring us a lot of trouble. He's come up with the idea of organising monthly dinners with a group of friends of his to try and find solutions. And he's thought to invite me. There's no need to say how chuffed I feel. He even tells me to start thinking about who I'd like to invite too. I think I'll tell Francesc de Carreras about it. I'd really like to invite Victoria Camps, but I don't think she'd be interested.

Tonight I told Josep about it and he thinks it's a good idea, but he warned me: «If you get involved in politics, I'll have to divorce you».
Jeez.

May 22nd

They fall back on clichés again at the Universal Forum of Cultures in

Barcelona. What a headline:

«The origin of the accumulation of wealth and the introduction of private property began with the Neolithic revolution», recalls the scientific director Miquel Molist, blaming this great moment in human development for so much trouble and misfortune.

He might just as well have complained about the discovery of fire, which has caused so many accidents and so much heartache. The great fire of Nero's Rome for instance. How obvious can you get. It's further proof of the «lame thinking» throughout the Forum. There was once a golden age and then everything was ruined by man's insistence on leaving the Arcadia of ignorance and the Age of Innocence behind. The Neolithic revolution was one of the first symptoms of the capitalist society lacking in any «real» values that would eventually prevail. Plastic turkeys and all that.

It's so pathetic it's laughable.

May 23rd

Why is it necessary to hold a Forum of Cultures that presents societies that oppress women or kill non-believers and democratic societies that proclaim equal rights for all citizens or freedom of conscience on an equal footing? Why a Forum that attributes the same dignity to myth as it does to science and critical thinking? Why does it only seem to bother so few of us?

I talk to my good friend, Fernando Peregrín, my favourite person from Madrid. I tell him that sometimes I'm afraid of being like my father rather than a product of my own circumstances. That I'm

afraid the reason I'm a sceptic is because I'm like him, distrustful of everything people say, analytical and critical.

—So in your case it's genetic? —he laughs.

—In a manner of speaking, yes. Maybe it's his critical nature, his circumstances in life, his education or maybe my own daughter's prejudice, but I only see it as distrust and conservatism.

—We all end up discovering what makes us our parents' children. Me too. For better and for worse.

I tell him I see the mark of my father on me, the same way you see the red thread in embroidery, like that marrow strand the Japanese remove from the prawns when they make sushi. I don't know why I thought of prawns...

And a simple comment like that takes us to restaurant talk, and then cities and he ends up remembering what Barcelona was like when he was young and used to come more often. And he gives me a whole spiel about “the degradation of cosmopolitanism” that he's observed here in the last twenty-four years.

Of course, it's not possible to have «cosmopolitanism» and at the same time enjoy nationalism. It's not good business. Or it's unnecessary. Julián Marías says:

Not everyone who belongs to a nation suffers nationalism, in the same way that not everyone with an appendix suffers appendicitis.

So witty. I have one too. And it's all mine: “Nationalism is like a drug: one drop cures but two will kill. And the best thing is to avoid taking any at all.”

I love it.

May 25th

In the afternoon I go to the presentation of the *Basta Ya* book. At the table: Albert Boadella, Francesc de Carreras, Félix de Azúa, Paco Caja, Arcadi Espada and Carlos Martínez Gorriarán. Boadella reads an extremely clever letter.

May 26th

Someone writes on the blog: «I heard on the radio that the ERC guys are referring to ETA as freedom-fighters».

They can't be serious. Savater says that in Catalonia, the concept of «progressiveness» is in the hands of people who are «particularly petulant». The reason he says this is because there has been a lot of suffering in the Basque Country. The victims of terrorism have suffered, but so have those with a relative in prison. What he means is that in the Basque Country people know what it is to suffer and he's aware of how difficult everything is. Here, in Catalonia, it's all for nothing. He says it's the «nationalist Disneyland», that here we consider ourselves better than everyone else: more civilised than the Basques, more European and wiser.

This explains Carod's behaviour: these Basques are very rough, but now I'm going to Perpignan and I'll tell them how things work... I hope Elisabet doesn't think the same, even if she is pro-Esquerra. But I don't know, I don't know...

When we were making dinner tonight, Antoni Rivera, a peculiar

neighbour came down to see us. He's a retired engineer and has myriad interests: he paints, plays the piano, composes... Today he brought down a CD he's recorded with some of his pieces and he asked us to listen to it. He's an extraordinarily educated and warm man. We are happy to tell him we'll listen to it with pleasure.

We invite him in and we get talking. We talk about one thing and another and, in the end, about my book. He says he really enjoyed it because he is an advocate of science and reason. But he ends up talking about a friend of his, sadly recently deceased, with a scientific background but... a dowser. Dowsers are people who believe that they can find certain things, frequently water, with a divining rod. There is no scientific basis to support this, so I'm surprised when he defines his deceased friend as having been one. He says that he saw surprising things with him. Including that one day, the car of a friend of theirs was stolen and the dowser, with a pendulum and a map, divined that the car was in Seville and gave a whole description of the street it was on. That's how they found it and he witnessed it. He claims this skill is due to the «telluric currents». Right, I hope he'll explain them to me one day.

Over a post-dinner drink (not something we do too often, but today the «listening» invites it) we put on the CD. We are pleasantly surprised. We have an incredibly romantic and passionate neighbour.

May 28th

Finally! Good news!: «Scotland Yard arrests the Imam who praises Bin Laden and applauds S-11 on the streets of London».

The United States demand the extradition of Abu Hamzai and

announce that he could be sentenced to death. This idiot, who claims to have lost both hands and an eye fighting the Russians in Afghanistan, whom the popular press refers to as “Captain Hook”, publicly lauds Bin Laden, S-11, the Madrid massacre of March 11th and preaches holy war. In 2003, Blair’s government managed to remove him from the Finsbury Park mosque, renowned for its Islamic militancy and closed since July of the same year. But they had never arrested him before.

My feeling is that it’s «too late». In France’s secular schools they want separate tables for boys and girls, meat from animals slaughtered in specific ways, they want to play truant on Fridays, they don’t want the circumcised to have to undress in front of the non-circumcised, they don’t want to hear any mention of the pre-Islamic religions of Egypt or to study how cathedrals were built, the students even forbid the teachers from touching the Koran, and they don’t want to hear any fragments from the Bible.

There’s one thing I’ve never understood: why didn’t the British government expel all the Imams who defended Salman Rushdie’s death sentence? Why are they allowed to continue living in these countries (and preaching) terrorist propaganda like this? Apparently, we’ll have to wait until the deaths pile up.

May 29th

It is sunny and warm.

I tell Elisabet that Albert Boadella was at the *Basta Ya* book presentation, and that he read a really funny letter. It drives her mad when I talk to her about Boadella; he really gets to her. I imagine she doesn’t understand anything. She says:

—We don't know what side he's on any more.
—Come on, we don't all have to be nationalists.
—Everything he does is to make a profit.
—I'd be interested to hear what profit!
—I mean to say... profits... «away from here».
—Away from here? Where?
—Away.

Ah... now I get it. The same profit that theoretically Savater, Juaristi and company make. Positions here and there, the books they publish.

Bodyguards?

May 30th

We go to the beach with my son. It's still hot and sunny. The shore is full of dead jellyfish transformed into giant dried out jellies. But nobody seems to care: there are loads of people in the water.

June 1st

Today in the Barcelona Forum of Cultures section of *El País*, there's an article about the mayor of the Israeli-Arab city of Shafa-Amer, Ossir Yassin:

We are Israelis, Arabs but Israelis [...] Each individual's religious beliefs end in the church, synagogue or mosque. It is individual. Whereas, coexistence is always collective [...] We accept the rules of Israel, but we'd like there to be two neighbourly states and an Arab world at peace [...] In fact,

today I am leaving Barcelona sooner than I intended because on Tuesday the Israeli Health Minister is paying us a visit to present new hospitals for the region [...]

The people who consider Israel's policy «brutal» or «merciless» should think about how merciless it is to lynch suspected «collaborators» for the mere fact of thinking that is what they are, as the Palestinian Authority does with its citizens. It is merciless to send some poor moron to indiscriminately massacre people eating in a restaurant in exchange for seventy virgins in Paradise while the leaders comfortably enjoy money donated by charity. It is merciless to condemn one's own people to misery and backwardness based solely on a hatred of Israel and a refusal to renounce violence to obtain their state.

This Ossir Yassin seems intelligent and he must know this. He must know it because he is one of the million and a half Israeli Arabs that no Arab from Pan-Arabia can rival in terms of rights and standards of living. Those who live in the fertile lands of the «territories» have never emerged from misery, even though they receive donations from Europe and the United Nations which, calculated according to the number of individuals, provide a per capita income of over a thousand dollars a month that are pocketed by the mafias. No other Arab country is willing to receive them and some, like Jordan and the Lebanon, have massacred them.

The only place they find jobs and studies is in Israel and yet many of the fools still dream of occupying Haifa and Tel Aviv to enjoy this standard of living while practising Islam and destroying anyone who professes any other religion.

Sometimes, a worthy life only seems possible in the Great Satan.

June 2nd

We go out for a walk on the Rambla Nova. I'm embarrassed to say it: it sounds like there's nowhere else to walk in Tarragona. But that's not true. It's just that since we live next to it, we have no choice but to walk along it. And because we love it. Especially today. The sky is perfectly blue and everything seems light with the transparency of the air. It makes you want to stroll calmly along hand in hand with someone you love. Someone like my Pepe, for instance.

The political party posters for the European Parliament elections are up. And almost all the PP posters have been torn down. Naturally.

June 3rd

Yesterday I had dinner with Arcadi's friends. We were Xavier Pericay, Ferran Toutain, Basilio Baltasar, Félix de Azúa, Iván Tubau, Albert Boadella, Francesc de Carreras, Arcadi and I.

I don't know what's going to come out of this, but it was a really enjoyable encounter. The next one will be after summer.

June 7th

In *El País*, Alejandro Rojas-Marcos says: «The Basque, Galician and Catalan nationalisms don't want us in their club». And that: «The other day the CiU representative claimed his party were first-division nationalists. Therein lies the problem. First-division nations and second-division nations».

And what did you expect? You're from Andalusia, for God's sake!

Later on, while I'm having breakfast, I watch an interview programme on channel 5. The programme is moderated by Montse Domínguez and people like José Oneto take part. Today's theme is President Reagan, who passed away yesterday. On the television they remember him with the most complete disdain, not a shred of respect. The presenter portrays him as a «second-rate actor» and a person «lacking in intelligence». And everyone agrees with her, of course.

But I think: if a guy goes from being a window-washer to an actor, then a state governor, then the president of the United States and finally he brings down the communist dictatorship is a moron, then what are we? Completely mentally handicapped?

But nobody thinks of it. The Americans vote for idiot presidents because the United States is the only place in the world where things like this happen. Unthinkable in Europe, of course, where we're all so clever.

June 10th

I got up earlier today. I had pigeons in my window boxes making such a racket that they woke me up. It's the soundtrack of Tarragona. And nothing like «coo-coo...». No. This is like a cat's strangled screeching.

I'm having a look at a report in the *Magazine* supplement of *La Vanguardia* newspaper from last Sunday. I've found a conveniently multi-cultural article on Varanasi. It's called «*Holidays for the soul*». It sounds like a travel agency ad. Among other elevated matters, the journalist Ima Sanchís mentions the «holy men» of India and other

professionals of the spirit. She says Varanasi is full of priests, many of whom are professional frauds. And that it's hard to distinguish them from the «authentic» ones because «it's hard to distinguish the fine line between spirituality, fear and superstition».

It certainly is. Very hard work. Arduous in fact. Nothing easy about it whatsoever. Actually, it's impossible. This is the same problem the journalists or presenters of TV programmes based on esoteric sensationalism have when they regret the difficulty of distinguishing between «real» and «fake» psychics. The fundamental error lies in considering that there is anything authentic to differentiate between. A big, fat zero. The most you can hope to find are slightly more honest people than others selling the same fantasies, or slightly less merciless when it comes to exploiting the believer. But there is nothing more. And, occasionally, for some it's the difference between holidays and catastrophe.

June 13th

I read on the newspaper the statements of some IU representatives saying that «we need a project that excites us». That must be a bit like the saying Juan Manuel Serrat came up with, that «Utopia is still possible». Neither of them will ever tell you what they mean by an exciting project or which Utopia they're referring to. When it's coming from the IU, I think I can imagine what sort of «project» it is. Any version of the same old, same old: that which has failed dramatically and brought misery everywhere it has triumphed. And I'm not talking about Pol Pot or Stalin. I'm talking about Cuba. And what Serrat says must be vaguely similar but with an anarchistic, Rousseau touch, that assumes man is innately good and that it's

society that corrupts us.

The way I see it, an exciting project in the current situation would have its feet firmly on the ground; it would have no greater ambition than to solve society's practical and real problems (ambition enough in itself). Nothing that excites them also excites me because I already know that I'll end up paying for their dreams. There are already a load of exciting projects that are also down to earth: take critical thinking and secularism into the public arena, and take the standard of living and education enjoyed by «Western» societies to the biggest possible number of people on the planet. Find the way for a new humanism to interweave the rational and emotional aspects of all humanity. That would be an exciting project to serve the people rather than the interests of political parties. When I was learning to drive, my Dad used always say to me: «Look ahead». He meant to see things in advance, not to get distracted by the objects closest to me. Especially on the road, which is so dangerous.

Let's be forward-thinking, let's think of our children and not call old formulae or self-serving politicians' pettiness «exciting projects».

June 15th

I read in the newspaper:

The president of the EBB (the executive committee of the Basque National Party, PNV), Íñigo Urkullu, was explaining the appointment of the former ETA leader, Josu Ternera, as the representative of the Basque Human Rights Committee, in the following terms: «It is promising to see that a person formerly associated with the negative side of human rights can now participate and accept the opinion of the majorities».

Hold on a second, did I mis-read this? Can someone formerly «associated» with the «negative side of human rights» be a representative on a human rights commission? In other words, since he has been a murderer, since he has caused horror in so many families and has contributed to making life hell for many in the Basque Country... this gives him an extra merit when it comes to being on this commission and getting paid with public money.

Has this man lost his mind? Is he saying that having had something to do with the «negative» side counts towards earning a privileged work position? In line with this sad logic, would a practising and unrepentant paedophile make the best pre-school director? Or an active wife-beater who had killed his wife be the best candidate for a Commission on Domestic Violence? It would be comical if it weren't so utterly insulting and sad. Asterix used to say: «These Romans are crazy». I haven't a clue what some Basques are like. Or even some people from here. Better to keep them far away just in case.

I've often had to stand up to people who got offended because ETA was linked to Batasuna. What were they, ignorant or cynical?

June 16th

I go to Elisabet's house and she gives me a book by Jon Sistiago because it was my birthday recently. She's read it and really liked it. So sweet. She always remembers the details. I have to find out when hers is.

June 17th

In the afternoon I go to the opening of the «Atapuerca» exhibition in the Tinglado 1 gallery in the port. The first person I see is Josep Fèlix Ballesteros, leader of the opposition with PSC in Tarragona. He recognises me straight away and kisses me hello. He has a Kennedy air about him. Very good image for a political career. When my other half and he were young they went to school together and would go on excursions. Josep says that when they were fourteen, they went to Boí. Typical of the time. With thin shoes in the snow and sleeping in barns. They were both boys from poor families. Now one is about to touch the sky and the other has managed to do well in spite of starting out in very adverse conditions. My Pepe earns a reasonable living and can still allow himself the luxury of dreaming of art and spending the weekends painting.

But power is power and life has put a lot of distance between them.

June 18th

We go for a good walk around the old quarter and afterwards along the Rambla carpeted with crunchy, yellow flowers: it looks like confetti. So lovely. Golden sparks have blossomed on the trees and are falling among the pedestrians as if they were brides and grooms. This scene transforms an ordinary, working day into a happy and festive one. The temperature is perfect too and we almost decide to have dinner at one of the outdoor restaurants. But in the end, we head for the nest.

June 19th

I swallow my tea with a brow furrowed in disgust as I read that Maragall went to lick up to despicable Ibarretxe. And he didn't stop there but came out saying that «he didn't support the form», but did «the content» of the *Plan Ibarretxe*. So basically using Maragallian-speak, his own personal way of beating around the bush and saying things like «Sadie» after having said «I said».

He's beyond comprehension...

June 20th

Yesterday I went to the Metropol theatre of Tarragona to pick up a music festival programme. I think the ticket clerk must have taken me for a tourist as she convinced me to go and see a work called *La Pasión de San Fructuoso*⁷², that was playing in the Roman amphitheatre last night. A traditional play in the style of *La Pasión de Esparraguera*⁷³, she said, but with the persecution and agony of the Christian community of the third century *Tárraco*⁷⁴. I was expecting

72. TN: The Passion of Saint Fructuosus of Tarragona. Fructuosus was a bishop martyred with Augurius and Eulogius in Tarragona, Spain. Fructuosus was the bishop of Tarragona, and Augurius and Eulogius were deacons. Arrested in 259 by the Roman governor Emilian, they were burned at the stake in the local arena. St. Augustine wrote in praise of these martyrs.

73. TN: The Esparraguera Passion Play is a performance of the Passion Play in Esparraguera, Catalonia, Spain. The play has over three hundred actors and live music, and is performed in twelve performances, staged every Sunday from March to May. Along with the *Olesa Passion*, it is one of the most important Passion Plays in Catalonia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Esparraguera_Passion_Play.

74. TN: Tarraco is the ancient name of the current city of Tarragona (Catalonia, Spain). It was the oldest Roman settlement on the Iberian Peninsula and became capital of the Roman province of Hispania Citerior, and of Hispania Tarraconensis during the Roman Empire. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tarraco>.

a sort of *auto sacramental*⁷⁵ and since I'm new here and full of good will, I said yes.

In reality, it turned out to be less weighty and more homely; a parochial play, more like a nativity than anything else.

But it did have a certain charm: homely, familiar, simple and with all the living eminences of Tarragona: the archbishop, the mayor... All very nice. It lost a lot in the anachronistic, holier-than-thou and forum-like tone used in the dialogues, a fatal effect of the «lame thinking» my friend Fernando condemns so strongly. Things like «Roman oppression put an end to multi-culturalism, the source of diversity», or «the intolerance of the consul». Quite literal, right? The worst part was when a majestic, Christian aristocrat confessed to a friend that «she was trying to play down the importance» of what was happening to their community (among other quibbles, the lions were eating them).

That was just the chronicle of an infrequent spectator of fancy passions futilely attempting to find a comfortable position on the very knobby stands. The important part is what comes next. Before the play, someone related to the clergy gave a brief introduction. He explained the story of the martyr and addressed the uncomfortably seated «believers», telling them that what they were going to see that night was a testimony of faith, of the history of the Church, etc. But,

75. *TN*: *Auto Sacramental*: “sacramental act”, Spanish dramatic genre that reached its height in the 17th century. Performed outdoors as part of the Corpus Christi feast day celebrations, autos were short allegorical plays in verse dealing with some aspect of the mystery of the Holy Eucharist, which the feast of Corpus Christi solemnly celebrated. Originally derived from tableaux they were ultimately detached from the Eucharistic procession to form one of their own. Mounted on carts, they were pulled to selected places in the municipality, and the actors presented their autos, one after another. <https://www.britannica.com/art/auto-sacramental>.

to my surprise, he also addressed the «non-believers» who might be seated among the public because the story was also to do with them as it spoke of peace, love, justice and all the rest of it.

And the reason I say I was surprised was that the only non-believers among the crowd (almost exclusively made up of people from the parishes of all the Catalan and Spanish towns known or yet to be discovered bearing the same name as the saint, and apparently there are dozens of them, Sant Fructuoso del Bages, Sant Fruitós of this, San Fructuoso of that, an Italian city... Even Sant Cugat del Vallès, though God knows why), the only non-believers, I imagine, must have been my husband and I, and the odd clueless person the mesmerizing ticket-clerk had also managed to convince.

I found it very thoughtful. A veritable detail on his part given that it was entirely unnecessary. I imagine that to him it seemed like a demonstration of Christian tolerance and good intentions, but what I did realise, once again, is that I live in a society in which not only does nobody persecute me for not being a believer but that it is considered polite and good manners to take me into consideration and offer me whatever we can share. That I am still one of them, and them, one of mine.

I know this has not always been the way. And I know that it could go back to being the way it was. But this, here and now, is a civilised world in which universal values that go beyond religion and other beliefs have taken root.

I am a militant sceptic, I'm an atheist, but in principle I am not anti-clerical. I consider myself lucky that we don't have a president like the one in the United States who mentions God to support any project on his agenda —to mention just one of many thorny issues.

But in the face of the truly greater evil of religious and ideological fanaticism that challenges and attacks us —an evil worthy of a capi-

tal E, whatever its axis—, all previous considerations are secondary. I think the worst thing that can happen to a society is not recognising the hierarchy of the threats it faces. Unlike the Christian aristocrat in the passion play, I will not try to «play down its importance».

The lions have to be tackled first: clearly marked and looking them in the eye.

June 21st

Going back to the Forum. The other day the Nobel prize winner, John Hume, gave a conference in an outdoor space. The subject: «Europe or States or a Europe of nations?». But it started to rain and they had to shelter the speakers and the public in the Convention Centre. Unfortunately, there were no headphones for the simultaneous translation in there. Since people don't speak English, they decided to gradually translate what the Nobel laureate was saying. The presenter asked if there was anyone in the public who didn't speak Catalan. A few hands went up, and she said she would translate into Spanish then. People started to boo and there was a mini revolt. The catcallers won, obviously («we're at home here»). Some polite protests were heard while Hume spoke of «respecting difference». A couple got up and left, saying: «We want to unite Europe and the only thing we do is move away from each other». A girl from the Canaries asked Hume if he believed the differences had been respected in the issue with the translations. Hume didn't know which way to look and tried to calm the mood. The girl from the Canary Islands said she doesn't speak Catalan and someone stood up to her and said: «Well, learn it!». This is what they say to a tourist who has come to spend the weekend in Barcelona: she should learn that we

will act as if we don't speak Spanish.

The way nationalism is set up must be a bit like the way drugs bosses operate. A few individuals who belong to nationalist parties manage to get their hands on power, business or handsomely paid posts thanks to this whole shebang. And, since it works, they continue to cultivate nationalism. How could they not since it's their product and their source of income? Twenty-five years ago, people were not nearly as nationalist and independence was barely ever mentioned. What's happened? After years and years of going on and on, through indoctrination at schools or on television, radio, the newspapers, theatre, etc., people now think life is inconceivable without the nation being the number one topic. It's impossible to imagine being governed by a non-nationalist party, it's impossible not to pay constant homage to the fathers of the homeland. We are the only country in the Western world with these obsessions. You don't see them in any other developed country. Not France or Germany. The people there are sensible, they worry about life's very real issues: immigration, unemployment, education... Here, however, our traffickers have made addicts of us. This is not «country-building».

I wish there were a political party that never mentioned either the nation or any other similar metaphysics. I wish there were a secular, lay party that set concrete and measurable goals that it could account for. Nothing more. I don't think our dinners can create this. The only ones who speak of this possibility are Arcadi and I. The others either laugh or take fright.

June 24th

We're going to Bologna and Verona with the Friends of the Tarrag-

ona Opera.

June 29th

We go to the Larga beach. We've decided to go down to it every day and to bring lunch. Except Sundays. Josep is allergic to summer Sundays on the beach. But today we're going to the beach bar. Sardines and salad.

While we're waiting for them to prepare it, we go for a swim. As usual, Josep goes through all sorts of contortions. You could write a book on the positions he adopts getting into the water. Until the very last minute, he moves forward with his arms lifted high above his head in an attempt to put distance between the water (always «icy», if you ask him) and himself. Prolonging the agony, is what I tell him he's doing. And it's not cold at all: it's as fresh and calm as a pond.

After lunch we go for a walk along the shore as we lick our ice-lollies. It's exquisite. We get as far as the hill called the Bosque de la Marquesa. The sky wears a gossamer film of clouds that tinge the water a subtle colour, like an ink stain spreading out.

The line of the horizon seems to have been drawn on with a thick-tipped, purple marker. It reminds me of the Caribbean beaches. All of a sudden, the sea turns quicksilver blending with the wavy brown stains. They are sandbanks. There are a lot of them this year. Some dunes protected with fences by some ecological organisation have disappeared. Now they seem to have moved a dozen metres out to sea, creating little pools. Josep adores them because the water in them is soupy warm.

I don't like that consommé-like temperature, but I do love the

transparency and the play of light.

June 30th

I go for a coffee with Elisabet who's been away with her rich friends in Naples and Capri. She's brought me back a really pretty, coloured-glass bead bracelet. I was afraid she'd bring me something; I'm starting to get to know her. All I brought back from Italy was pasta and spicy sauces, and I don't intend to give her any of those: she looks plumper than ever.

But she did think of me. She's a good friend. I say to her:

—It's a pity you stopped subscribing to «Politikastra». There are a load of liberals on it now.

And I make a mocking comment about the liberals. Then I suddenly realise she might take it personally. I apologise. She says that on «Politikastra» they kept insisting that nationalism was a right-wing movement. And naturally, she didn't want to hear that. Nobody wants to leave the idyllic oasis beyond any reproach of declaring oneself to be left-wing.

—At the very least you'll see that not all left-wing people think the same about language and the whole idea that Catalan causes us to see the world in a certain way.

I've brought her a clipping from the Catalonia section of yesterday's *El País*. Xavier Marcé, director of the ICIC (Catalan Institute of Cultural Industries), an organisation dependent on the Department of Culture, quite serenely stated (it was the headline of the news):

The main fault of CiU's cultural policy is having created a certain degree

of cultural secession from Spain that has distanced us from our natural market and spread an erroneous image. The Catalans don't have a different conceptual or aesthetic philosophy to Spain; what we do have, however, is a language of our own.

—Look what I've brought you from yesterday's Culture section of the newspaper, according to the Catalan government, the Catalan language was not based on a different philosophy to that of Spain. What do you say to that?

She sighs and, after giving it a bit of thought, answers me:

—It's not about the language or whatever else. The problem is that there are people in Catalonia who aspire to a different future, do you understand? I'm not talking about nationalisms, or homelands, or dogmas, I'm talking about a future based on independence, self-management, moving out of our parents' home for once and for all. We've grown, we're adults and since I earn my own salary I'll spend it too.

And I'm speechless. Because she is so certain and passionate about what she says.

—Elisabet, do you think a metaphor like «moving out of your parents' house» is valid? As if it were as simple as packing your bags?

—It should be.

—But, if you're an adult you should already know that there's a difference between what is and what should be. How could an independent Catalan state join the European Union? With what political weight? And what about the balance of trade? Foreign trade with the European Union is clearly loss-making. Ours is the Spanish market. In a separation, the captive markets are just that precisely because of an important emotional component that can be termed «patriotic consumption». What would we do?

Apart from the sad matter of separating people who are siblings, there are a great many other questions that a sceptic would ask: the energy market, the national health system debt... Crikey, they're endless.

To my way of thinking, scepticism is not a concept but a process. The same way a scientist will tell you that there is no science without scientific method, a rationalist must say the same. And the questions a scientist asks him or herself (how do we know this?, is there any better alternative?, where has it been experimented and how has it worked?) are the self-same questions an individual should ask him/herself, not to mention any responsible politician.

A nationalist should be asked: what do we want it for?; in what material aspects will people notice an improvement if we gain it? (and no replies like «the people have been demanding it since time immemorial»); what are the difficulties this will bring and to what extent will the advantages (if there are any) be worth it?; which countries have taken this step and what pleasant surprises have they encountered? With questions like these, we will expose the fact that the only ones to gain from the adventure are the politicians.

She doesn't give me any answer, but then neither does any pro-independence nationalist. I think they talk just for the sake of it. Or is it that in reality nobody wants independence? That it's just an excuse to constantly complain and remain in power?

July 1st

Coral is a woman who goes to the same gym as me. She's around forty, strong, who lifts weights like you wouldn't believe. My stereotypes tell me she's probably Basque, but I bet she isn't; I never get it

right. She's open and natural. In the beginning I thought she couldn't stand me. But it's the way she is when she doesn't know people. In reality, she's very open and friendly. And she's good-humoured. Yesterday she explained some story that made her die laughing and she slapped me on the back so hard that she nearly flattened me between the glute press.

We're putting in time before going downstairs to the basement where we'll do body pump. Meanwhile we watch the TV screen in the equipment room. They're always practically on mute. We can barely hear what they're saying. Now Saddam Hussein comes up on the screen. They talk about his trial in Iraq. Coral and I comment on how thin he looks. She says he's mad, but not any more than us. And she says that he and Bush «are the same as each other».

Here we go, another one. The same as each other? I tell her I don't think that Bush has gassed thousands of Kurds or the opposition to death. And there's talk of Saddam having «liquidated» his own sons-in-law, just to mention some of the accusations against the dictator.

She's surprised. I disconcert her: since I write I should be a typical lefty. I have a feeling it's not the first time I answer her unexpectedly. There's no way around this issue. And I'm not the only one. One of the blog members writes:

I'm a liberal, I mean, I'm not a socialist, that is, I'm a fascist. And when it comes to political debates the first one to call the other a Fascist wins.

When asked, I answer directly «I'm a baddie», placing my cards on the table.

I hope I won't have to go quite that far.

July 2nd

Maragall: «There must be some difference between the regions that have their own language and very robust traditions and those that don't».

Right, that the former are first-division and the latter are second-division. We already know. Lucky me that I'm Catalan. I congratulate myself. It is well known that there are regions without their own language and the one they use is a sort of loan. And their traditions are on the lame side. Poofy, so to say.

A blog colleague speaks of the differences between the Spanish regions, but inversely. She explains the story of a person from Andalusia who is surprised by the things he sees here:

In the memoirs of Juan Belmonte (masterfully written by Manuel Chaves Nogales) he describes what he saw the first time he came to bullfight in Barcelona. One of those discoveries was that the Catalans only took out cigarettes for themselves without offering them around. On his return, in Triana, he told people this and they didn't believe him.

My father tells another one. Being from Aragon, he experienced this alienation, this foreignness that one feels when in a surprising country. He often describes one of the first times he went to eat in the house of a real Catalan. My uncle Narcís, husband of my mother's sister, is from Santa Coloma. But he's one of the purest natives. His maternal grandfather, grandad Font, was mayor of the town. Anyway, one fine day the uncle's father, Mr. Enric, had the kind idea of inviting us to lunch in his house with other family members. My brother and I were still little. They made a good rice dish and, when it was time to go home, telling him that it was the custom around

here, he gave my father the bill for the part we had eaten. My father was so shocked that he still tells the story every second Sunday.

This man had an olive stand in the market. My cousin, Adela, his granddaughter, says that he never, ever let her take even a “tiny olive”. Adela, by the way, is also now married to a man of the tight-fisted variety. And she says that to change anything, even a meagre pair of curtains, she has to beg repeatedly. Worse than her grandfather.

And he’s from Aragon.

July 8th

Mid-day, beach, sun and breeze.

July 9th

Gwyneth Paltrow’s back is full of marks because she gets some Chinese therapy that applies hot, glass cups to the traditional acupuncture points. Apparently, it works well for «clogged up lymphatic glands, that are the nuclei of the body’s energy». And she doesn’t consume caffeine, sugar, dairy products, meat or practically any alcohol. In other words, the girl lives off pasta and the very odd time has a drink to cure her depression.

The most important studies conducted by the medical insurance companies on acupuncture have given a sensational result: sticking needles in a person has a real effect, but it makes absolutely no difference where they’re stuck. And, of course, they raise the question of whether the success of Chinese medicine might not all be in the mind.

Patients were separated into three groups: those assigned to the first group were treated with the original Chinese procedure; the second only received, though they didn't know this, fictitious acupuncture sessions; and the third group of patients, conventional medicine. The findings, presented at the Orthopaedic Congress in Berlin, have disconcerted both the sceptics and the firm believers equally: acupuncture is effective, far more even than official medicine (if we're talking about chronic pain, ok?), but the fictitious acupuncture is just as effective as the original Chinese version.

There is speculation that better patient attention by the acupuncture doctor or the tendency to value a therapy you pay for more might provide some of the answers. Or the conviction that «invasive» therapies imply an intimacy and a sort of «sacrifice» that gives very good results, especially in pain therapies. In fact, there are experiments indicating that, in general, the results of fictitious injections against pain are better than fictitious pills.

Alternative medicines take advantage of the psychological and physical interactions of the human body. No objections there. What is objectionable is to claim something has been scientifically proven when it hasn't.

July 10th

Alex and his girlfriend Alba visit us in the afternoon. They're really happy and a bit provocative: they've been undergoing «alternative» treatments: mud baths and an acupuncture session. They look at me out of the corner of their eye. Alba says it has worked for her on lots of occasions. Just like Gwyneth Paltrow: they're both artists.

I think it's great that they spend their money on whatever they

want. The problem arises when they state that the effects of these practices have been scientifically proven. The only thing acupuncture has proven is that it acts as a mild painkiller. But these «energy channels» can be neither observed nor measured. Which is why they are not recognised by the institutions or by what some people like to call «official science» (as if there could be any other, like the «official» identification document or the «official» child). We demand the institutions control the medications sold in pharmacies yet, on the other hand, we don't understand why they don't give the green light to alternative medicines and, even, uncontrolled substances like Bio-bac. There is ignorance of how science works, of what is and is not scientific. The lack of clear criteria is a danger.

Later

We go to La Caleta for dinner, a restaurant magnificently managed by our friend, Avelina. It's Fireworks night. This week an annual competition is taking place in Tarragona and participants come from all over the world. We like to go to dinner in this restaurant during the show because it's very close to where the rockets are lit and they explode practically over our heads.

They start while we're on the second course. Avelina gives us the keys to a building she owns opposite her restaurant, so we can climb up to the rooftop. When I say «over our heads» I mean it literally: we are covered in ash. I look at my son and Alba out of the corner of my eye. They're watching the rockets and their artistic explosions in a very tender embrace. I've never felt jealous of any of the girlfriends I've met. Maybe that's strange, him being an only child. What I

experience is a huge surge of affection and gratitude that they love him, even if that does sound totally mushy.

July 13th

Unbelievable. I just saw it on television. As I was having a snack. Holiday camps in Gaza where they train teenagers to be terrorists. Examples of the leisure activities include: how to kidnap a Jewish settler, how to prepare terrorist attacks... They are children and they're already teaching them how to kill. And the journalist even seems to justify it and everything, as if she thought this was what the Jewish people deserved.

Coincidentally, today they destroyed the plaque of the monument to the Holocaust victims in Montjuic. It's the third time in three years.

July 15th

According to a report by the National Intelligence Centre, Carod-Rovira held talks with Arnaldo Otegi⁷⁶ the day before the general elections to ensure these would take place «as abnormally as possi-

76. *TN*: Arnaldo Otegi (born 6 July 1958) is a Basque Spanish politician, who, in February 2013, was elected as Secretary General of the Basque separatist party, Sortu. He has been a member of the Basque Parliament for both Herri Batasuna and Euskal Herritarrok. These two parties and Batasuna were banned in 2003 for having links to ETA, which is proscribed as a terrorist group. Before joining politics he had been convicted of being an ETA member and taking part in several actions, including the kidnapping of the Basque entrepreneur Luis Abaitúa. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arnaldo_Otegi.

ble». «Abnormally», it says. It's exact.

Caught out. The leader of ERC has admitted that he spoke to Otegi but clarifies, to normalise the conversation, that so did «a lot of people from other parties». Miffed because they discovered him, he tries to turn the tables and says that the news shouldn't be this base act he committed, but the fact that they bugged his phone. And he takes advantage to criticise, with all his virtue, «poisonous journalism».

What else is there to say.

July 19th

I'm spending a few days in Madrid with my friends from here. I hadn't seen them for a while and I was really looking forward to it. The girl in the hotel reception speaks to me directly in Catalan, I don't know whether it's because she read my details or what. It's a kind gesture. Maybe they hire people from Catalonia for the reception desk for this purpose. Do they also have someone who speaks Galician or Basque? It's a nice sensation, it gives a feeling of good vibes.

I go down for breakfast. Not many customers: a couple of others apart from me who turn out to be from Catalonia too. The waiter is in a chatty mood and so are they. After giving them various recommendations for visits and unmissable shows, he also, paternalistically, gives them some safety warnings:

—Watch out for those Romany gypsies who read your palm, they're thieves. They'll steal your bag.

And this starts a lively conversation about whether they believe in *magufery* or not. In the beginning, they all seem sceptical but after a

while they clarify. The Catalan says:

—I believe what suits me. Once, one of them got my future right.

It's funny that when they don't get it right, it's a sign that this poppycock is false. But when they get it right, they are all willing to believe. I'm sure that without turning to any paranormal powers, even I would be capable of getting more things right than these gypsy women

I remember once I was in Granada with Josep, on the way to Morocco, when some gypsies came up to me to give me good luck, naturally in exchange for my purchase of some aromatic bouquet (that didn't actually seem very aromatic) that they had in a basket. As usual I said no. But they insisted, and became increasingly aggressive. When they saw that I refused to give in, they threatened me with the bad luck I'd suffer if I didn't accept the dusty, bloody, bouquet.

I found it evil and I got cheesed off. I decided to cheese them off too. I started to say no problem, that it was great, that I loved bad luck, that they should douse me in it. They were so surprised that they couldn't believe it. It was maybe the first time in their lives that not only was somebody not interested in luck in exchange for money, but who was willing to expose themselves so explicitly to bad fortune. Josep was also staring at me dumbfounded.

They didn't do it. They were the ones who ended up terrified. Too much for them. They walked off down the street turning their heads and looking at me every few steps for a good while. Maybe they thought I was some demon or who knows what. I earned myself some unexpected respect. It was an inspired trip because once we were in Morocco, in a crafts shop in the style of «Moroccan-themed week in Harrods», a funny incident happened thanks to a half tamed chameleon they put on my hand. A disgusting little thing who pissed on me. I can't remember now if its wee was lucky or unlucky. But in

any case, I decided to repeat the trick from the day of the gypsies. Since we were in Marrakech and the salesperson seemed cosmopolitan, I thought he'd laugh along with the joke more «mundanely». But not at all. He was a highly respected lucky chameleon. In the end, Josep had to drag me out of there because they really got angry. I wasn't expecting it.

In the Retiro park: blazing sun alternating with gigantic clouds. Light as white as lime. Towering, admirable chestnut and plane trees.

I have lunch with Arcadi, Miguel Ángel Sabadell, Jesús Hernández (a very shy maths teacher who's a friend of Fernando Peregrín), Fernando, and... ta-dah!, I know another Fernando. His surname is García Alonso. I know of him from Arcadi's blog. What a surprise. I had imagined him as an executive in a suit, a very serious expression and a competent air about him, like he looked in the photo for an interview Arcadi did for *El País* when he was director of the Spanish Drug Agency.

Well, well... He's well into his forties but he looks good for his age. He's wearing leather trousers and jacket: he's come from Valladolid by motorbike. A tad far, I think. I don't know if he's pulling my leg or what. He's also wearing a t-shirt. That's less likely to suit a forty-year-old man and he's no exception.

I'm surprised that he keeps using the expression "macho". Since I'm so very Catalan, I find it all terribly typical of Madrid. He's an intriguing man. Childish in ways, but I am perfectly aware of his intellectual level. Not only is he a reputed professional but he also writes beautifully.

There appears to be great complicity between him, Fernando Per-

egrín and Arcadi. Complicity between men in its most time-honoured form: wines, good food... women. They have a ball. I end up with the curious role of the female comrade. Occasionally they glance at me like bold children. I must be like the serious sister who reprimands them. I pretend to be just one more member «of the gang», but I can't help looking at them the way a woman always looks at men bragging among themselves: with a certain degree of pity. Yes, they do seem happy for me to think they're a bunch of rogues. The oldest game in the world. They talk about their female friends and it would appear that they're all gorgeous. One of them drives a Jaguar and everything: a tremendously erotic combination.

Arcadi is also inspired. I mean, inspired in complete harmony with the rest, in the macho tradition, in this case the Hispanic macho. So Hispanic indeed that he exclaims: «Madrid, in August, Baden-Baden». And the male camaraderie at the table laughs in satisfaction. All of a sudden, there's an Alfredo Landa touch to everything. It's not accidental: they're too clever to be unaware of this effect. I'm not saying it's deliberate. No. It's authentic. Just accepted and vindicated.

And since it's accepted and we're all Darwinians, we end up talking about the polygamous male. The human animal plays between monogamy and polygyny. I've already said that an alien landing on our planet for the first time, seeing the difference in size and weight between the two sexes would already imagine this. My friends are very clever and very well-read and they've interiorised it. What I'm not so sure they've interiorised is another consequence of this difference between the sexes. Men are more interested in sex (or more of it) than women, and proof of this lies in the contacts pages of magazines and prostitution in general. They constitute the large part of the demand while we cover the offer. That is, women take our

adaptative advantage by whoring a lot or a little according to the circumstances. And that drives them mad. When it comes to women, it turns out that they're not quite so Darwinian.

My grand-aunts come to mind: girls so poor that, apparently, they couldn't allow themselves the luxury of being honourable. And this is a story that my mother, an upright woman, does not wish to spread around. But she'll have to forgive me. Now I can't resist. It's a tale that combines ethology (the science of animal behaviour) and ethics. Too fascinating for an amateur anthropologist such as myself. The aunts decided (in reality, it was their mother who decided) to draw attention to the most attractive characteristic they had to offer: a striking physique. Because apparently, they were real beauties.

And so they became *chanteuse*. The concept of *chanteuse*, from what I've been able to deduct, was a blurry one that apart from singing and dancing, also encompassed becoming friends with the most well-off gentlemen possible. It's also true that in their case, it was with their sights set on an ultimate redemption in the shape of marriage. And since they were very beautiful, that ending came quickly: by twenty-five they were married. One to a dim-witted heir who didn't take long to squander his fortune. The other to a pharmacy student, son of a good family from Terrassa which, as society dictates, immediately disinherited him. In the end, the second daughter's strategy (thinking more mid than short term) turned out to be the best: she became the wife of a respected pharmacist, they made a lot of money and ended up «saving» the sister and brother-in-law.

Of all the family stories, the one of my aunts is not the one my mother would like to tell the world. But, firstly, this is not Tele Cinco (how many people will actually read this book, publisher?); secondly, it is exemplary proof of the overwhelming logic that the means serve to an end. Ancestral means and ends. I'm not sure if my friend

Barbat will appreciate this “Barbatic” saga for all its worth. But he should know that all the Barbats are here thanks to our ancestors doing what they had to do to leave a feasible progeny.

And these friends of mine eating in this restaurant in Madrid will act the rogue, but the likelihood of them being males who are protective of their families and «their own» are high. Just like any other group, intellectual or not. The slate is not blank. One of them refers to his wife as the «saint», and every time he does (every opportunity he gets) he does so with great respect and without irony. She must be a classy lady. None of the others, whether married or with partners, say anything about theirs if they can avoid it.

Primates. They know it and they know that I know it. Nobody is deceiving anybody. But, just to match their level and put an uncomfortably modest spoke in the works, I go and refer to my husband as my saint too.

That way I’m just one more of them.

July 20th

I’m back from Madrid.

Can anyone imagine an important figure being appointed by PP and this figure, in their presentation speech, enthusiastically defending a currently active dictator? Or just any dictator? Pinochet, for instance. Well, the current director of the national library, Rosa Regàs, is a fervent defender of Castro. Fortunately for her, Rosa Regàs is a lefty and the lefties can get away with anything.

They’ve also decided to dig up old wounds from the Civil War again. There’s a lot of that in the news lately. They call it the *Historical Memory*. As if there were any memory that weren’t historical.

July 21st

In the evening there's a performance set up really well next to the Balcó del Mediterráneo, it looks like an aerobic exhibition of some gym. But it's a group of young Christians from a French religious association. They look like that group *Viva la Gente* that was so popular in the seventies. There's quite a big audience. After dancing, a girl takes the microphone and talks about how she discovered God, while a girl from Catalonia translates. All exuding feeling.

The truth is that religious people really have a knack when it comes to mobilising feelings and emotions, a major part of human nature. It's what us humanists lack, achieving some sort of synthesis between reason and emotion within the programme. We've been so afraid of the irrational for so many years that we've ended up not factoring it in at all. But it is the other side of the coin and we must learn to use it. The group here today are young people who must be staying at some student residence. They're wearing shorts and t-shirts. The girls are very pretty. After dark, from my terrace at home I see them pass in front of Paquita's newspaper stand. She's still packing up her wares for the day. A (slightly dirty) old man who usually helps her out, goes up to them and makes some remark. They laugh and run away. If he could transform into a wolf, he'd run after these fine young things. You can see his teeth.

July 22nd

My friend Fernando tells me that 80% of *magufo* product consumers are women. He's very sceptical, but he's also an out and out male chauvinist. I know a load of men who believe in esotericism and I

contradict him. But he doesn't even let me protest or say a word, reminding me that one of my own favourite phrases is: «An anecdote is not the same as a statistic».

Fine. But the issue is to define what the *magufo* field encompasses. If we extend this field, perhaps there will be as many male *magufos* as there are women. It's just that men think magnetic bracelets are a load of codswallop. Today, for instance, regarding whether there were suicide terrorists on the trains in Madrid or not, Arcadi wrote in his blog:

On Tuesday a forensic scientist stated that an autopsy will not discard the existence of the terrorist. Therefore, the terrorist exists. Phantoms are exempt from the burden of proof.

This forensic scientist has come under pressure from some journalist who doesn't want to discard the Islamic suicide theory. Since this was one of the ungrounded statements *El País* newspaper issued during the March 11th attacks, they don't want to look bad. And, of course, the forensic scientist can't deny that there was no suicide bomber. It is a logical impossibility to prove a negation, I already said so a few pages back in relation to Carod and "a single human life".

No, no it is not possible to deny that something did not happen, in the same way that nobody can prove that this person is not a murderer.

To my mind, it seems like a *magufo* news that implies a load of men who are willing to believe that the suicide bomber is still a likely hypothesis because there is no proof of his inexistence. And this idea, the possible existence of what cannot be denied, forms the basis of *magufery*. The *magufery* of the psychics, the magnetic bracelets

and the Islamic suicide bombers.

At sunset I go to a conference in *La Caixa* by Ramón Lobo, a war correspondent and journalist for *El País*, and Gervasio Sánchez, a war photographer.

The subject they propose is the determination of real facts in an event of any kind and how journalists can verify these. The conference circles around the issue of how the media distorts truth for economic or political purposes. Predictably, bearing in mind the leanings of the two journalists in question, the criticism focuses on the American media. This will not prevent them from protesting afterwards that the only interesting news are the ones about the citizens and presidents of this country. They themselves will say that what happens in other places «is not newsworthy».

It's surprising to see how the public gives itself over to these journalists. It must be their frame of mind, their good vibes. They've come to talk about the way we're manipulated, the urgent need to defend critical thinking, the importance of questioning things... and the people in the room react by turning over their hearts and almost their wallets to them.

It's shocking. They have absolute trust in what they're saying. They even suggest creating a newspaper, one that «they can believe», as one member of the public puts it. The need human beings have to save themselves work, to find shortcuts that economise on neurones, must be the key to why we are so easy to fool.

Us create a newspaper? The speakers get alarmed at the thought. They don't want to go that far, they're not up for it. They claim they'd be disastrous at the accounts and all that. It's a dilemma: if

others do it, it will be economically feasible but manipulated; if they do it, it will be completely truthful but economically unfeasible. Resignation.

They assure the public that the media channels are all «transmitters of ideologies». And that it's only the media, because they are apparently guilt-free. In reality, they never try to hide at what end of the political spectrum they stand: they proffer quite a lot of sarcastic remarks about the medal awarded to Aznar in the United States. But they forget about the one that Bono⁷⁷ awarded himself a month after becoming minister. What a slip-up.

Since they do not subscribe to any particular ideology, they lash out against all the American presidents. I say all because they don't leave any of them untouched: not even the democrats are safe. All morons. For instance, they refer to the Clintons as «that pair of nitwits» and they rage against them for earning twenty million dollars for each of the books they have written. Books that, in reality and according to them, only talk about the famous semen stain and Lewinsky.

It's possible that the Clintons earn a living, that they even get rich writing and giving conferences now that they're no longer in power. If they had stolen enough, like Menem, or if they were ultra-mega-millionaires like Castro or Arafat thanks to the misery of their people, maybe they wouldn't need to do anything else. That must be the reason they are «nitwits». But it's not the sort of idea that occurs to this pair of «impartial observers».

77. *TN*: José Bono Martínez (born December 14, 1950) is a Spanish politician, born in Salobre, Albacete. A member of the Spanish Socialist Workers' Party (PSOE), he was the President of the Congress of Deputies during the 9th Legislature. Before that, he was the Minister of Defence of Spain from 2004 to 2006, in the Government chaired by José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jos%C3%A9_Bono_Mart%C3%ADnez.

Mid-way through the conference, a girl and another person with her get up to leave. She makes an apologetic gesture towards the stage and Lobo responds with a very deferential and affable good-bye. Josep, who doesn't recognise her, is slightly intrigued. When I explain to him that it was Princess Cristina afterwards, he's flabbergasted. He finds it strange that the liberals are such ass-lickers. He is decidedly anti-monarchical.

He is also sometimes quite naive.

July 23rd

I tell Ellen I'm planning to go to Israel and she gives me general information and the phone number of a Catalan girl who lives partially in Jerusalem and partially in Barcelona. Esther.

I'll call her.

At night I go with Elisabet to Salou. We've decided to go for a stroll and have an ice-cream. I choose cheese and peach. Mmmm. There aren't too many tourists yet and the night isn't too hot. It's pleasant to walk along the shore. It's a marvellous promenade and we walk aimlessly, chatting away as we go. The subject of our debate, between licks, is Aznar's medal, an issue that's been in the news for days. She is very mocking about everything and, for me, the sweetness of the night and the cheese with peach ice-cream has made me at peace with the world without any wish for pretence. Risking her calling me a fascist, I open my «extreme-right and reactionary» heart to her. She deserves it for all her patience with me. I say to her:

—The funniest thing of all, if the situation really went like this, is that Aznar didn't need any medals for having been a good president of the government.

—What are you saying? —she answers in alarm.

—Let me explain: apart from the overly risky issue of hopping on the Bush bandwagon in Iraq, he and his team did a good job, and they left on their own initiative, without any corruption scandals pushing them out. But that's not why I say he was a «good president».

—Well you'll have to explain why, because you have me worried —she says somewhat cattily.

—This is why: for his brilliant results in the fight against terrorism.

—PSOE and PNV took part too.

—PNV? Are you serious? All they did was stick spokes in the works. Each to their own. Their management, the fact that people can breathe easier in the Basque Country is the reason why I'm so grateful (and they did it without GAL⁷⁸, just like Felipe!) and for which, basically, I risk saying things that might make the religious lefties like you, my dear friend Elisabet, say that not only «am I right-wing», but a Fascist directly.

—I'll never call you such a thing.

—Sorry, I know.

But I don't know what she thinks. And since Arcadi joked on his blog today saying «nationists» instead of «nationalists», I share the new word with Elisabet. And she says:

—What a bastard!

78. *TN*: GAL (an acronym for Grupos Antiterroristas de Liberación, “Anti-terrorist Liberation Groups”) were death squads established illegally by officials of the Spanish government to fight ETA, the principal Basque separatist militant group. They were active from 1983 until 1987, under Spanish Socialist Workers Party (PSOE)-led governments. It was proven at trial that they were financed by important officials within the Spanish Interior Ministry. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/GAL_\(paramilitary_group\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/GAL_(paramilitary_group)).

I don't know whether it really bothers her or not. Just for clarification (it doesn't), I tell her that they're the ones «who get off on the nation».

I'm evil.

July 24th

Josep didn't like my honesty with Elisabet yesterday at all. On our way to Cerdanyola in the afternoon, he gives me a right lecture about it in the car. He says I'm kamikaze! That there's no need for me to «mean» so much and why can't I be like «everyone else». That it's all very well for me to write it, but I shouldn't say what I think in public and especially not in a place like *La Caixa* (the reason he says this is some question or other that I asked the journalists the other day). He says I have everything to lose (it's true). That I don't gain anything from it (true too). That all politicians are the same (not all of them). That they'll think I'm pro-PP (definitely). That he also believes the whole story about Aznar's medal is just a manipulation, but that they're all the same and that I shouldn't forget the times of GAL, when PP set on the socialists.

I bow my head and he almost convinces me. Only almost. If PP used firmer politics against terrorism and less ambiguity in the face of separatism, I have to say so. Each to their own. When it comes to stubbornness, there's no beating me.

July 25th

I've arranged to meet with Vicente and his wife, Guadalupe. He's a

Mexican friend that Àlex made about five years ago when he was in Zacatecas. He went there for six months to give economics classes in the university through a sort of studying professors exchange programme. Vicente came here later, to Barcelona, where he spent four years with his wife and three daughters on a grant from his country to study some famous 17th century Spanish sculptor. We became friends and shared some good excursions in the mountains. They left last year, but since the older daughter stayed behind to study philosophy here, they've come to visit her.

We're at my parents' house as they know them too. So much to talk about! Sitting in the shade in the garden with cold drinks, we go over the last year they've been away and their plans for the future. Holidays, for example. I tell them we want to go to Israel, that we already have the tickets and that we bought them to be back in time for my parents' golden wedding anniversary celebrations.

They congratulate us, but disapprove of our trip. Not only do they not consider it a normal tourist destination, it alarms them hugely. We jokingly tell them not to worry, that the Palestinians are really busy now killing each other because of the internal conflicts between the factions.

—That's exactly what the Israelis want —says Vicente.

Here we go again, another one. Another thing Israel is responsible for. And I keep my mouth shut because Josep gave out to me yesterday. And he's watching me. Vicente is certifiably left-wing. Mexico is one of the many South American countries that are hostages of layers of bloodsucking State bureaucrats and syndicalists. A doctor friend of mine used to say that the National Health Service employees in Mexico retire at the age of 52 with the highest salary of their careers. In a poor country!

Vicente is a Visual Arts professor at a Mexican university and

his wife is a psychologist in a public organisation. They spent four years in Spain on a scholarship to write his doctorate thesis. With three children, in an apartment rented for 600 euros a month and a brand-new people carrier they bought as soon as they arrived, at a low estimate, the couple must have cost the Mexican State four million pesetas (roughly 6000 euros) a year. They were here for four years to write the thesis and they didn't finish it. They didn't have time, they said. They had time for everything else: concerts, bicycle excursions, trips away...

But they didn't seem worried. The Mexican state must be in desperate need of Vicente's thesis —on which he apparently intends to work his entire life— and her dissertation if it's spent, for the moment, sixteen million pesetas or 60,000 euros on it. Not bad for a second-world country. I'm not surprised that they're so anti-American and anti-Israeli. They'd have a hard time of it in countries that are workaholic, where the civil servants like them are asked for accountability. And I say it with all the love in the world.

Or maybe it's envy. I should be so lucky.

That night I call Esther to meet up.

July 27th

Oh dear, oh dear: Elisabet sent me an email. I see that she signs off with «kind regards». This is going to be a lecture:

Teresa,

I would NEVER call you a fascist (not you or any of my true friends) because I find it sad and offensive for a normal person, and because I understand that nobody is in possession of the truth.

I accept that you think Aznar's government was good. Nobody questions that economically speaking he yielded some good results. He was also lucky with the cycle he governed in. But let's talk about matters like the hydrological plan, about Gescartera⁷⁹, the disaster on the Galician coast, the AVE, the lies on March 11th of this year, the religious fundamentalists, that are on the increase, the obstacles to scientific advancement in the area of cloning, stem cells, fertility treatments... And why not mention the possibility of a new family model, from the single-parent module to the same-sex parents? About new families which, furthermore, should be able to adopt babies, receive pensions, inherit, etc.? And what about euthanasia?

Is this supposed to be progress?

Kind regards,

Elisabet

July 28th

Mulling over what Elisabet said yesterday. I believe in acknowledging and thanking anyone's achievements, whatever their political stance. I'm glad she's not calling me a fascist. She's not calling me one because I'm a «true friend». If anyone else had said what I did, maybe she would have insulted them.

According to Thomas Sowell, an American political scientist who interests me, «fascist» is what a lefty «fossil» (his words) calls the opponent when he's in a tricky position during a debate. Anyone who

79. *TN*: The *Caso Gescartera* was a financial scandal that took place in Spain in 2001, in which 20 billion pesetas (over 120 million euros) disappeared and over 2000 entities were involved, including public companies, foundations, NGOs, religious congregations and public companies.

uses the spell knows its effect, but is almost always ignorant of what they're saying.

July 30th

It's sunset and we're out walking towards the Balcó in a strange atmosphere. Crepuscular. Is the day getting shorter? No, no; it's that we've left the house later. We're twenty metres from the rail and we see the lead blue sky and a flamboyant, mauve-coloured full moon hanging over the sea. Dreamlike. It's impossible.

Bit by bit, the sky turns a darker blue and becomes more leaden, but the moon turns orange. It's all full of contrasts; as if the outlines had been drawn over in black charcoal. We can't take our eyes off it. A show that Josep, who's a painter, should describe, not me.

We've become so entranced by the moon that we forgot we had tickets to go and see Julius Caesar in the Campo de Marte auditorium. Even though just yesterday as we were taking this exact same walk, we remembered it. Not to mention all the posters advertising it. But then on a night like this, who can look at anything but the moon.

It is the moon's fault, the blue, the lead, the pink and the orange. Perhaps what was on offer in the auditorium couldn't hold a candle to what the Balcó can offer on certain extraordinary days of the year anyway. Maybe not even Shakespeare.

July 31st

I read this letter by a Basque journalist that has been posted on Ar-

cadi's blog. It's the letter from the daughter of a Republican who is sick of the demagoguery of recent times:

THE CIVIL WAR ENDED IN 1939

(Letter to José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero from M^a Isabel Castaño González, published on March 1st, 2004 on the website of the foundation for freedom, *Fundación para la Libertad* (www.paralalibertad.org))

Dear José Luis:

Reading the report about you on the newspaper supplement *El País Semanal* I found a brief reference to Miguel Castaño, my grandfather, shot to death by the nationalist troops on November 21st of 1936. You claim your first political act was to take a rose to his grave along with some other socialist colleagues.

As you know, apart from being the mayor of León at the outset of the war, my grandfather was also a journalist and the owner of a newspaper called *La Democracia*; his death—at only nineteen years of age—brought desolation and sorrow to my father's family, and as so frequently happens, financial straits. The newspaper was confiscated, and in its offices the press of the *Movimiento*⁸⁰ began to be printed. When democracy returned, and your party was in power, all the region's newspapers were privatized, and although my father and brothers tried hard they didn't manage to have their rights acknowledged and never received any compensation whatsoever: nonetheless, to the best of my knowledge, they didn't take the matter to court and more or less let sleeping dogs lie. Each of my grandfather's six

80. *TN*: The *Movimiento Nacional* (National Movement) was the name given to the nationalist inspired mechanism during Francoist rule in Spain, which purported to be the only channel of participation in Spanish public life. It responded to a doctrine of corporatism in which only so-called "natural entities" could express themselves: families, municipalities and unions. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Movimiento_Nacional.

children, in his own, way, built a life for themselves and endeavoured to be happy, despite being marked always by the absence of their father —how else could it be?—, by the injustice of his death and by the horror of a war between brothers. My father, who is no longer with us, only once told me what the hours leading up to his father's execution had been like; a horror that I cannot think about without tears of pure compassion for all of them; as a result of that horror and irrationality my father was left with a terrible fear of anything happening to us, to his loved ones. And 45 years later, on the night of February 23rd, he spoke to me as if he were reliving a nightmare. And he told me not to leave the house, to be very careful. The fear of confrontation was still there, it accompanied him throughout his life.

In my family right now, five people bear my grandfather's name, Miguel, four grandchildren and one great-grandson, my oldest nephew, who is 22 years old. They all know why they are called Miguel and they are all proud of their name.

Why am I writing this letter? To ask you, from granddaughter to grandson of losers —which, however, we are not— to help, from the privileged position you now hold, to banish the idea of confrontation for once and for all, telling the Spaniards who live now in a democracy that this is nothing like a dictatorship and that there is freedom for everyone (except in the Basque Country) and that Francoism has disappeared. And that the Civil War ended in 1939 with far more losers than they initially calculated.

And do not allow anyone from your party to speak of dramas, to make threatening references to '36, to sow doubt among the young about whether or not we live in a democracy. Encourage them to exert their freedom without resentment and to value what they have, and to have a great deal of respect for the rules that we all accepted in freedom.

And then, only then, give PP all the «hell» you like, and of course ask them for their vote. At the end of the day that's your duty.

This attitude is only to be expected from responsible politicians, and I

hope you are one.

You owe it to the memory of your grandfather. And mine.

Yours sincerely,

M^a Isabel Castaño Glez.

I find it so lovely, I am so grateful to the author for her exhortations not to dig up any more old conflicts and resentment, to not return to the wounds of the Civil War and to not allow the memory of the Spanish people to be manipulated by opportunistic politicians, that I send my thanks to the person who has posted it on the blog so that they can convey them to her.

I tell them that this letter should be «framed».

August 1st

And María Isabel replies to me! Her words make me very happy: «Thank you. I wrote the letter. I sent it to the newspaper *El País* too, but they didn't publish it».

It turns out that she's a woman who also writes on the blog occasionally; I had already read some of her comments before. The truth is that it's a blog that makes you feel you're in good company: there are decent people on it. With common sense!, that least common of all the senses, the one that knows it's better to foster sharing rather than dwelling on differences, a skill that we Catalans are specialists in right now and that brings us so few friends from anywhere. This common sense that neither politicians nor the media use, lying freely, like they did in the month of March when Savater came to Tarragona, an issue that has been niggling me again lately.

I showed Josep the letter tonight and the reply from María Isabel,

and he is moved by it too and it cheers him up. He says if everyone were that generous and free, the politicians would be less likely to pull our legs so much.

He's right.

August 2nd

I'm giving shape to the notes I took over the days of the Spanish Language Writers' Encounter, the ones I took part in, the ones that Savater couldn't take part in. I've been thinking about it for days.

I can't understand how this writer could say one thing and then the press and the authorities here (the mayor, for example) another. I had wanted to clear it up back then, but I think the distress of March 11th buried it in my memory. It's true that some time has passed since then, but I've decided to write to Fernando Savater himself and ask him his opinion.

I send a copy to Fernando Peregrín, whom he's friends with and he'll introduce me too:

Dear Fernando:

My name is Teresa Giménez Barbat (friend of Fernando Peregrín and Arcadi Espada). I'm writing something that includes the story of the famous Writer's Encounters in Tarragona that you couldn't take part in. I'd like to hear your opinion of what the local press said. Specifically, about what the newspaper *Diario de Tarragona* wrote:

«This newspaper contacted the local government offices yesterday, which denied any knowledge of the matter [the threats of a boycott] whatsoever. In fact, so unaware were they that they didn't know posters had been put up about it. The Regional Government of Barcelona was not

aware of the possibility of incidents either before, after or during Savater's conference. Indeed, there were none. The seminar took place in complete normality in the Faculty of Law, yesterday.»

In this same article, the mayor of Tarragona made the following statement:

«Savater has used the University and Tarragona for his own ends brilliantly.»

I'm writing an account of those days. Could you help me?

Many thanks.

August 3rd

Dear Teresa: following the instructions of Fernando Peregrín, I am happy to tell you what I know of this sad and laughable matter. My lecture was supposed to take place on Monday morning. On Friday I received a call from a friend at the Association for Tolerance (the same organisation that had forewarned me months before about the lock-in at the Universidad Central during which I was attacked by a group of nationalist fascists, who injured one of the bodyguards accompanying me): my friend warned me that they were planning something similar and that the same people were involved. Pamphlets had been handed out and posters put up calling on everyone to stop me from entering the University. She told me that the police had alerted the Government Office and gave me the phone number of the secretary of the Government delegate in case I wanted more details. I called and the extreme measures I mentioned above were confirmed. Both the secretary and the delegate, with whom I spoke straight after, very kindly told me that the same thing that had happened in the Central University was highly likely to happen again here. They also told me that it wasn't easy to guarantee normality at acts like these in University centres, unless they

made use of an exaggerated police deployment. Obviously, I told them I had no interest in causing incidents and I certainly had no intention of entering a faculty flanked by the special forces, given that I've spent half my life demanding police withdrawal from all Universities... So, I spoke to the professor organising the encounters (who also confirmed the existence of pamphlets, posters and threats), I apologised for waiving the pleasure of being attacked a second time around and I sent him a short text explaining my absence to the rest of the course participants, for him to read when it came to the time of my lecture. If I'm not mistaken, other scheduled speakers, such as Jon Juaristi or Gustavo Bueno, also chose not to attend, in order for the acts to take place «in complete normality».

The following Tuesday, on Luis del Olmo's programme, I heard the mayor of Tarragona heehawing and proffering nonsense about the issue, which I promptly responded to *in situ*. And I can't tell you anything more. I don't know why they lied (the Government Office, to be exact and you can write it in full), but people have a tendency to lie, especially when in positions of power and when they're afraid: we have had three, sad examples recently with worse outcomes than what happened in the Rovira University. That's all from me... Until next time.

Yours sincerely,
Fernando Savater

I know exactly who to believe. Thank you, Fernando, and I'm sorry they treated you this way.

We are not all the same.

August 5th

I go for an ice-cream with Santiago. We've arranged to meet to talk

about this diary. I want to ask him a few questions of a «historical» nature. We meet after the gym, at seven-thirty, at the Balcó. It's a beautiful evening and there are loads of people out walking. It's hard to find a free space and even harder in the ice-cream parlour we want to go to, next to the Bajada del Toro. There's more of a breeze in this one and a better view. But we have to settle for one further away.

Once we've got the subjects we wanted to talk about out of the way, he asks me about Elisabet: if I see her, what she talks about, etc. He's got himself a bit of an obsession.

August 6th

A day of meetings. I have lunch with Félix Ovejero, who will also be added to my list of «conspirator» friends. It looks like we will be a very varied group. He defines himself as a Marxist, and that always shocks me in a rationalist. That really must be «transversal»: I'm also thinking of inviting Horacio Vázquez Rial. That way, those of us who are more centre will be in the centre. We swap books and as usual I come out on top. In number and everything. We have a good time together; we'll have to do it again.

I meet Esther, the Jewish girl who works in Jerusalem. We meet in the Farggi ice-cream parlour on Paseo de Gracia. She's around forty, dressed classically, strong and with magnificent hair and eyelashes. She's open and affectionate. The conversation is very spontaneous and, as the time flies by we end up practically telling each other our life stories. That doesn't usually happen to me.

We seem to hit it off really well. We're together until quite late. I tell her I'm going to wait until Josep gets here at eight-thirty, by train; but she says she has to leave. She wants to be home before

it gets dark to «light the candles». I look at her in surprise and she explains it to me: she is a practicing Jew and, today, Friday, when the sun goes down the Sabbath begins. It's her tradition. She occasionally glances up to see how the light is fading. I'm intrigued and touched by this need of hers. To go home to light some candles is so impractical it's poetic.

August 8th

Magufo weekend with two heavyweights from PSOE.

First, Felipe González. It turns out that now he makes jewellery. The earrings that Zapatero's wife was wearing at the prince's wedding were made by him. He makes them using «ethnic» stones he buys from some Hindus who, in his own words, know nothing about VAT and all that. Naturally. An enviable argument that will be a good example. Many small and not so small businessmen will follow suit.

Without the slightest discomfort, he declares that he makes jewellery for yuppy *gauchistes* and says that some pieces are worth as much as 6000 euros. He makes people as mega-ultracool as Elena Benarroch or “el Barnatán” his agents, *habituées* of what were once called the beautiful people. Clinton, the «nitwit», writes books to make a living. Our ex-president does handcrafts. An unpretentious business to while the time away. Maybe he's not so much in need of an extra income.

But that's the least of it. What shocks me is that a lefty guy, who's theoretically a rationalist, believes such rubbish. This is a fragment of the interview in *El País* this weekend:

P. Is there energy in stone?

R. The chakras! There is a huge and fascinating volume of literature on this: cultural areas that are very different from each other, like the Tuaregs or the Chiapatecas, all attribute the same properties to the same stones.

Does he really believe in the energies? And what do the chakras have to do with the stones? According to Vedic philosophy, chakras are energy points located around the body. As inexistent as the energies, clearly.

But Bono, our defence minister is even more *magufo*. They've all conspired to make the weekend look like a paranormal bazaar. This interview in the newspaper, *El Mundo*:

P. Have you ever asked a psychic for help?

R. No, though I have given them my hand to read a couple of times, because it's an elegant way of doing them a favour without it looking like a handout.

P. Rappel, Octavio Acebes, Lola the witch, Aramís Fuster... are they frauds?

R.- Let's be indulgent. It's always necessary to distinguish between the psychological or parapsychological sciences and witchcraft and the occult.

Hadn't we established that the left represented Reason and Enlightenment? Does Minister Bono really believe that psychology and parapsychology are similar? Or that parapsychology is... a science?

Rappel and that whole gang are tricksters out to get people's money off them pitilessly. Many people have been ruined by nasty specimens like them. And we have to sit and listen to this sort of nonsense from the people in power. I'm not surprised that people believe a psychic can help them re-find their husband's love, or that

an exorcist can free them of theoretical noises or bad vibes in their house.

It's happened in the best of families. I've seen it. My first husband died tragically. We were already separated and he was living outside Catalonia. Not even two years had passed since his death when I moved out of the apartment we had shared and went to live with the person who would go on to be my second husband, with my ten-year-old son. Our very dramatic separation and the circumstances surrounding his death were a source of rumour and speculation. But I wasn't aware of it. I've never been partial to gossip and never would have suspected that my life was of interest to anybody.

By the time I realised, we were already a legend. More or less a year after our departure, I put the apartment up for sale. A couple with a seven or eight-year-old daughter moved into it. A few months later, my sister-in-law felt obliged to tell me certain rumours that were all over the neighbourhood. The family living in my former apartment was terrified. Their daughter claimed that there was a man in the house who spoke to her when she was alone, telling her he had lived there, that he had also had a child and that he had loved him terribly.

Doesn't it sound like a horror film?

August 9th

If Bono says that parapsychology is a science, he endows it with an undeserved merit because he is an authority figure. This week I was sent a photo of a poster hanging from the door of a block of apartments. The text says: «It is completely prohibited to carry out any esoteric practices or witchcraft in any part of the building. The

management.».

What can you think of that? Obviously, they send it to me with a tongue-in-cheek message saying «Spain is different», as if it were an *Álex de la Iglesia* film in a village community of madmen. The problem is that the poster was probably hung because these absurd practices really were carried out and bothered or scared the neighbours.

There's a public for this drivel. And it's not only people from the «sleeper» cities or the most ignorant sectors of society. I have lived in an apartment that a year of two after my departure also bore witness to a hired exorcist to free it of a theoretical ghost. Because of the girl who spoke to a man when she was alone at home. All of this disconcerted the new tenants to the point that they paid for the services of one of these psychics who are so successful in certain working-class, and indeed less working-class, neighbourhoods. Apparently the «cleansing» performed was effective enough to evict the spirit of my former husband—the new tenants didn't have the slightest doubt that it was him—and return it to wherever it had come out of.

A ridiculous situation and an implicit reproach of those of us who left. It's so easy to give in to hysteria! The fact that two icons of socialism have been shown to be gullible believers this weekend is certainly not a good example.

August 10th

I've already booked my tickets and made my hotel reservations for Israel. It wasn't an easy decision and my Dad is still annoyed with me for having chosen such a destination.

But we are feeling more and more excited about it.

August 11th

I read in the press:

During the courses at the Universidad Menéndez Pelayo, the Hispanics scholar, Jean-Frédéric Schaub, professor at the School of Advanced Social Studies of Paris, confessed «the surprise he felt as a foreign historian to discover that in Spain the concept of Spain has become such a difficult one to handle», with this term «Spanish State, that has been invented to replace it» thus, «making it impossible to awaken any sort of sentimental adhesion».

It was about time. They have to come from abroad to tell us what we are: dickheads. This doesn't happen in France or Germany. No other self-respecting country would consider shattering the bond that unites its people, preferring to watch it amusingly disintegrate. They look at us as if we were from another planet. They know full well that this will only benefit the major countries. Like them. It suits them down to the ground.

Precisely for this reason, President Chirac won't say anything about it. Neighbours are always competitors and rivals. It's hard to break away from historical inertia. In private, they must be saying «*ces espagnols sont des cons*⁸¹». So, listen up: it's your choice. But Mr. Schaub isn't a politician, he's a guest, here in good faith, and he's speaking as a friend.

And he shakes his head.

August 13th

81. TN: The Spaniards are idiots.

There are many reasons for which I might enter a church. For my cousin's wedding. If I want to see a work of art. For a concert. If it rains. And nobody thinks I'm Catholic or a believer for doing so.

The same should apply to politics. Parties should be voted for without any feeling of belonging or identification with the members. There's no need to find them nice, as my friend Marc used to complain, my pro-Convergència friend. We should vote for whoever appears to reflect some of our personal or social concerns at a given moment in time. We should vote with our hearts, not our faith and feelings.

The disturbances in the Basque Country have started up again, just like old times. There have been some incidents and acts by the *kale borroka*⁸² taking advantage of the holidays and the arrival of tourists. They'll soon be using it as a "hard-line" tourism slogan.

Mercutio, a Basque guy on the blog, says that a series of banners have appeared saying:

NO TO APARTHEID. Surprised? But it's a well-known fact that in the Basque Country there's an unsustainable apartheid situation that prevents

82. *TN*: Kale borroka refers to urban guerrilla actions carried out by Basque nationalist youth who are integrated into the *abertzale* left. Their most common actions include: attacking offices of political parties, especially the Spanish Socialist Workers' Party and People's Party, but also other parties such as Basque Nationalist Party and Navarrese People's Union; attacking the property of people linked to these groups (burning cars, attacking housing); attacking and destroying ATMs, bank offices, public transport; and rioting using molotov cocktails, burning trash containers and even private vehicles in demonstrations, etc. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kale_borroka.

the poor Basque national-socialists from happily enjoying their own, self-same selfhood by screwing the rest of us. One would almost think that, since the arrest of the last batch, they're offering summer courses to train new litters. The poor things feel uncomfortable with the Spanish State (which is you and me, let's not forget!) that oppresses and suppresses them. The things they could do if they were only given their freedom!

A more twisted version might lead one to think that the recent spate of 'I'll scratch your back if you scratch mine' between socialists and nationalists has led the Basque national-socialists to shake the apple tree (which in this case is an oak). They wouldn't want anyone to forget them. I suppose that when the holidays end there'll be a whole crop of bodyguards again.

This «crop of bodyguards» is very graphic. It gives strength to my fears. But the Minister for Home Security is not worried and plays down the upsurge in violence on the street, saying: «I don't see a rebound of *kale borroka*, what I see is a vandalistic (and disagreeable) form of having fun».

All that hard work gone to waste. These sorts of comments undermine the firm and intelligent efforts of the last eight years. There's an abyss between the sadly remembered great Basque weeks of the nineties to the peaceful festivities of the last two or three years. The measures taken by the last government achieved a reduction of violence on the Basque Country streets of 52% between 2001 and 2002, and 86% from 2002 to 2003. Does it still surprise you that I have so little sympathy for nationalisms, Elisabet? «There'll be a whole crop of bodyguards» and here we talk about a «political issue».

August 15th

The newspapers say: «The Presidency abolishes grants to Catholic groups and prioritises patriotic organisations». There is money enough for «the biggest flag in the world»: 12,000 euros go to the *Asociación Catalana pro Senyera más Grande del Mundo*⁸³, an entity that wants to fly a Catalan flag that's so big it will be included in the Guinness Book of Records at the next Joan Gamper Cup, according to its activists. In his election campaign, Pasqual Maragall, said that if he formed a government «he wouldn't make the flag any bigger», in reference to a gigantic Catalan flag that appears in the CiU advertisement.

There you have it.

August 16th

I call my friend Fernando in the evening. We're organizing a party and he's to be the host. But in my house. We've invented the Feast of the *Diada*⁸⁴. We'll invent our own Catalan celebrations and decree who can come and who can't, just like the ERC does when they decide who's good enough to attend the acts to celebrate the *Diada* and who isn't.

August 17th

Snap! Joan Puigcercós in his arrogance, dares to «warn» the PPC leader, Josep Piqué, that «if he doesn't want to come» to the traditional Catalan political parties' floral tribute at the Rafael Casanova

83. TN: Catalan Association for the Largest *Senyera* Flag in the World.

84. TN: Catalan National Day (11th September).

monument on the day of the *Diada*, «that he needn't bother». And he adds, snidely: «The PP already has October 12th⁸⁵ as a date to commemorate».

Like I said yesterday, this guy dishes out permits to be Catalan, and decides who gets to go to the stupid, bloody tribute and who doesn't. It would make you sick. And he goes even further: «What we really want to know about Piqué is what is his proposal for the amendment of the Statute or the financing system».

The fucking amendment. That's what the only «real» Catalans are interested in.

August 18th

Travel preparations: we leave for Israel tomorrow.

August 19th

Travelling.

I thought there'd be strict controls in the airport but it's the same as always. We pass the time detecting the «cultural differences» between us and the other people waiting to board.

We especially notice a thirty-something-year-old couple, maybe more «thirty-old» than they look, with a baby of around six months. The mother breastfeeds the child, but that's the only moment in which the father doesn't hold him. An amazing Dad. He plays with

85. *TN*: October 12th is celebrated as the National Day of Spain. It commemorates the anniversary of Christopher Columbus's first arrival in the Americas.

him, comforts him when he cries, is thrilled to bits when anyone praises him and chats to everyone about the baby. On the plane he walks him up and down the aisle to get him to sleep. He even gets tedious he's so solicitous. He has long hair tied back with an elastic, and one of those bands that cover part of the forehead and the head. He looks just the part of the herbal doctor who works in a nature shop. Since Pep and I are a bit like that, we immediately dislike him and decide that the whole scene with the baby is a sort of narcissistic display to make himself look good.

The flight is completely smooth: nothing moves and just as the captain announced, it's a marvellous day.

From above, Tel Aviv looks like a coastal city with a promenade similar to Barcelona's *Villa Olímpica*. Israel is a small country, similar in size to Catalonia, with 22,145 square kilometres that contain nothing. It is a land that has practically just sea and desert.

When we get to immigration, we start to see all sorts of skullcaps and religious symbols from other communities. We have a pair of extremely impertinent orthodox priests just behind us.

An agent asks us what we're going to do in Israel and what the relationship between us is. Since I'm the only one who speaks English, from that point on, I get all the say in everything. Oh, how my Josep hates me being in charge. He's just as macho as all the rest. But he'll just have to grin and bear it, poor thing. I tell the cop that we're married. Then why do we have different names on our passports, he asks. They mustn't see many Spanish tourists here: Spain is one of the few countries in which the woman keeps her surname when she marries.

Arrival in Jerusalem. Steep motorway with very high borders and white stone buildings (due to a law from over 60 years ago) that glow pink in the light of the setting sun. The hotel is also all white.

Very central, on King David Avenue, the main city artery. As soon as we enter, we're hit by the biggest culture shock of all. KIDS!!!! This is a kindergarten. If there's one thing that will surprise a European more than a religious omnipresence, it's the presence of children everywhere. Hordes of them.

Ours is an expensive hotel that I managed to get on offer for a hundred dollars a night if we stayed three nights. The clientele level is upper-middle, and the majority are faithful. Skullcaps, black hats, those fringes that hang down, the tzitzits. And all the men behave like our «naturalist» from the plane! It wasn't just him being eccentric. All the fathers are up and down looking after the children, the buggies and all the rest of it.

After settling into our room, we go out for a walk somewhat warily. Terrified because of where we are, remembering so many news bulletins, we glance furtively around us. As if the most innocent object were about to blow up any minute: whether a parked car or a bicycle.

After all our wariness and fear, in the end we go to Yehuda, a very popular area where the streets are fenced in because there's a market. A market! The Israeli travel manual says to avoid buses and markets at all costs. Our sensible approach didn't last long! Not even an hour.

But what can you do? It really draws us to it. It's so lively... and there's so much security: they check our bags and make us go through a metal detector. In the end, sociable creatures that we must be, we join the masses.

And the fact is that we haven't an ounce of sense.

August 20th

Teresa, when you're travelling through Israel, take a look at this story; and compare between the Israel of Mark Twain's time and what it's become now. You don't even need to travel so far back in time: barely 80 years ago, the central part of the country was an infectious swamp.

Safe journey, hugs, Ellen.

I do, dearest Ellen. I read the fragment of *Innocents Abroad* that you sent me as we travel by minibus with other tourists from the hotels of Tel Aviv:

Of all the lands there are for dismal scenery, I think Palestine must be the prince. The hills are barren, they are dull of color, they are unpicturesque in shape. The valleys are unsightly deserts fringed with a feeble vegetation that has an expression about it of being sorrowful and despondent.

Good God. What a description. Luckily I read it after I'd arrived; it certainly doesn't make you want to visit. I imagine he's right. Everything he says flashes before my eyes as we travel towards the Dead Sea and the Masada fortress. And it is accurate. Jerusalem is located 700 metres above sea level. But where we're going, we'll be 400 metres below. Travelling up and down to and from Jerusalem is like going on a slide.

The Dead Sea is the lowest point on the planet. The path to it is just as arid as the writer describes. But I'm travelling in an air-conditioned car that slides along like a sled on the magnificent slope of the motorway, with very decent places to stop for refreshments. And the road is in good condition with attractive cafés that are the antithesis of hell. It is true that if you take away the civilisation, Twain will be back.

Israel has nothing. I already said so before. 62% is like Spain's Monegros desert but dryer. Monegros is also an «unsightly desert»,

if we look at it objectively. Yet to my father's eye it's the most beautiful landscape there is, as it's where he's from. They say the colour of home is the colour of one's childhood.

The guide explains the history and geography to us while Josep has a nap, passing up on my translation. She's a woman of over sixty years old, but very lively. She suddenly points out some Bedouin villages to us. I elbow Josep in the ribs. That's all that was missing, he says, Bedouins too. They have all sorts. There are 45,000 of them.

There are very few tourists on the bus, around ten. Later on, we'll discover that the only ones who aren't Jewish are us and an elderly gentleman from South Africa.

And Twain talks again:

The Dead Sea and the Sea of Galilee sleep in the midst of a vast stretch of hill and plain wherein the eye rests upon no pleasant tint, no striking object, no soft picture dreaming in a purple haze or mottled with the shadows of the clouds.

Hey, stop. I disagree. As we move closer to the Dead Sea, this land has transformed beneath my eyes. Twain's description is desolately beautiful, but now we're in the Masada fortress and I'm in what could be called a trance. And it's not due to a lack of oxygen because we must still be beneath sea level in spite of having travelled up on a spectacular cable car.

What views! The haze is purple and there isn't a cloud in the sky, but this has all the look of a mythical and hallucinogenic dream. Towards the horizon, a still, blue sea and lands «in all the shades of toast», as Carod-Rovira would say, spread out. Carod, God almighty, I can't even forget him when I'm on holidays! Pathetic.

Back to the point. This landscape evokes some science-fiction sto-

ry I've read. It looks as if we were on an arid and exotic planet. Maybe I'm thinking of Dune. It's stunning. And the physical material that holds it up fits perfectly with the historical tale of the facts that occurred in Masada: the siege of the Jewish kingdom by the Romans and the brave fight and self-immolation of its people after falling into their pitiless hands.

Subliminally, the guide creatively links the story to the Holocaust. In her eyes (and according to the official perspective), Masada is the symbol of the Jewish people's determination to die rather than be humiliated and oppressed again. That's what these people are like. They pretend otherwise, but the Holocaust is a generator of energy, the essence of their will. They will have to be dragged out of this country in coffins. That's for sure. And, feeling sufficiently exhilarated and under the effects of a very cruel sun on a hatless head, I crumble emotionally and secretly give way to a bout of tears. God, what a knot in my throat... Almost all the tourists are Jews, but the one who cries most is someone who has received a first communion. And they see how I blow my nose and they can't understand it at all. Poor things.

Purple haze, not a cloud in the sky and an uncontrollable sense of primitive tragedy. This is what grips my heart. If they leave me up here for a couple of days, I'll be convinced I'm Salome. There is no atheist more sensitive to poetic symbolism and myth than me.

Twain:

Every outline is harsh, every feature is distinct, there is no perspective —distance works no enchantment here. It is a hopeless, dreary, heart-broken land.

And it's what the Israelis reaped. These words describe the land, but with these people and this history in it, it's a tonic, invigorating and exuding what Twain thought it lacked: hope.

When we come down from Masada, we go to one of the many beach spas of the Dead Sea. The building is simple and frills-free. We see all classes of people, but a modest, middle, Jewish class (at least judging by their appearance) predominates.

Like in the majority of spas, there's one area for men and another for women, with their dressing-rooms and small thermal pools. I change into my bikini. There are only Bedouin women in one of the pools. I don't know if that's because they're very fat and fill it on their own, or because the «Western» public prefers less folkloric company and bathes alone. Maybe they're on their own because that's how they prefer it and they make it very clear to everyone else. They behave as if «multi-cultural» subjects such as myself, didn't exist. The concept of «multi-cultural» must not be one that enraptures them.

They bathe in panties and bra. There's one who doesn't wear a bra. She has immense boobs that float in front of her like buoys. Next to me, sitting in front of the ticket booths, two others are engaged in a lively chat. I have no idea what they're saying, but the tone of voice is that of two relatives bad-mouthing a sister-in-law behind her back. They could be very close friends if it weren't for the curious tattoos they have on their foreheads, the long hair, the shining gold «ethnic» jewels and a pair of knickers that must be particularly popular because they're all wearing them; they're very big and an aubergine, tomato-red or very unattractive pumpkin colour. They must have money, these Bedouins though: the spa is not cheap.

We head down to the beach, about a hundred metres away, on a special, little train. There are a lot of warnings of the precautions to be taken to avoid swallowing water or getting it into your eyes. They're quite alarming. The first thing the South African retiree who has come down with us does, is to go into the water, slip and fall in head-first. Josep is looking for a place to sit and doesn't see him. I

have to take care of the situation on my own. I help him out with great difficulty (he's a very tall man, minimum 1 metre 90, and a big body) and pour a good squirt of sweet water over him with a hose lying there.

Bathing here is fantastic. As soon as you tip your head back, your feet shoot forward. The problem is that if you tip your head forward, the opposite occurs. And then you really do swallow everything down. If you follow the instructions you float as if you were sitting on a chair. Cool. I say hello to Josep, who has no intention of getting in. He says he finds it repulsive, slimy.

The man is unbelievable. Before the South African, who is of Italian origin even if he does look Swedish, called him a «sissy». It must mean the same in Italian as it does in Spanish. Josep pretended not to hear him, but I doubt he'll save him if he falls into the sea again. He didn't like the name one little bit.

I wave again raising my arms up high. Great fun, but when I do the same with my feet and opening my legs I notice a stream that flows in towards a place that the warning signs outside never mention. I don't know if I should be worried.

Bah... ultra-concentrated saline solution. I bet it's disinfectant and everything. I can't be bothered thinking about it. If it hasn't fallen off tomorrow, it's not a problem.

We leave the spa at the same time as the Bedouins, and the cultural difference becomes blatant when one of the women majestically spits in the very entrance to the building. Everyone acts as if they hadn't seen anything. It doesn't seem deliberately offensive or aimed at anyone in particular.

Just autistic.

August 21st

Shabbat Shalom. Sabbath.

When we finish breakfast, we go to get the lift to our room. We're in luck because one opens its doors immediately. We get in and press the button. Nothing happens. The doors stay open. We insist but still nothing. Until a girl dressed without a scarf or any other sign of being Jewish, with a couple of small children, tells us in English that this lift is reserved for «very religious» people. It works automatically and stops for a while on each floor so that the «very religious» don't have to make the effort of pressing the button. She says if we want to go faster, we should get a different lift. All with a smile and as if it were the most natural thing in the world.

Because it is over here.

Saturday, blessed Saturday... Apparently, sex is on Saturdays here. They call it «the Jewish holiday». So Esther told me. Making children is not work.

We go on an exploratory tour of the old quarter. But the real goal is more social than artistic or monumental. Almost anthropological. Esther told us that today would be the best day to wander around Mea Sharim, the ultra-orthodox neighbourhood: today is the day the inhabitants come out in their best wears. We go on foot. Half an hour from the hotel.

We arrive. The streets are cut off with mobile fences to stop anyone inclined to drive. It must be a temptation that not everyone resists, otherwise they wouldn't put up physical obstacles.

Walking around Mea Sharim is like taking a trip back in time. They're dressed like in Little House on the Prairie, but in central European Jewish style. It reminds us of the Amish films we've seen but with Jehovah. They all have the curls, the hats or the shiny black

or white gabardines, depending on how many generations they've been in Jerusalem for. Chagall, the Shtetls, Albert Cohen. All that comes to mind.

Millions of children running around having fun. The women with their heads piously covered. «Women who are not modestly dressed are prohibited from walking on this street», says a sign in English. I am, modestly dressed. Very. Almost saintly. I'm wearing a long-sleeved shirt and a skirt to my ankles. I brought them on purpose: you can't wear trousers either. But I don't feel like walking on a street with such discriminatory warnings. A slight upsurge of rebelliousness. I've tired of all this folklore.

Esther has told us she won't be able to see us, she doesn't feel well. Just the two of us have dinner in the YMCA hotel restaurant.

August 22nd

We get up at five to go on another day trip. So early! I find it really hard. Now we're the ones who have to pick people up in Tel Aviv. And between the time it takes us to get there (it's an hour away), the traffic jams and waiting for them, it's almost nine.

I hate getting up early. It doesn't agree with me. And now my brain is soggy. Migraine. It's already ten by the time we get to the Roman ruins of Caesarea and I drag myself along under the rock-splitting sun like a dying worm. Here everything is blue and white; it's no longer mythically purple-hazed. Blue sea, blue sky; white statues, white ruins. White and blue everywhere, good God. I can't stand it: hyper-realism in two colours. Too much.

There are people from the other day. Newbies: a Jewish girl from Paris who is tall and robust (fat). We also have a Serbian guy though

we don't know if he's Jewish. Apart from us, the rest are of course.

Rosh Hanikra: a cable car to grottoes not worth the trip, but located on the Lebanese border. Since we're idiots, we'll enjoy the morbid pleasure of this excitement. It's one of those places that one fine day reading the newspaper you'll discover something has blown up in, killing a whole load of stupid tourists. So, in line with the general idiocy, I have my photo taken with an Israeli border soldier (a very dark and smiley guy) and afterwards it doesn't even come out.

Later on, we go to visit Acre. It oozes medieval literature. The knights of the crusade, the fortress. At the entrance to the historic zone, there's a square like the one in front of the church of Santa María del Pi in Barcelona with some ficus trees that are taller than the centenary plane trees in the river park in Cerdanyola where my parents live. And for the record, those are listed plane trees. It feels like we're entering a vast cave, what beautiful trees. Later on, I'll discover they grow in lots of parts of Israel and that they are always splendid. When they're planted in a city, it helps it lose the air of having all just been built: they contribute a sense of the past to it.

A past like Arce's. There are a great many trees. It reminds me of Essaouira. Muslim cities that are never fully mixed-race.

We have lunch in an awful restaurant that puts Josep, who's very sensitive to these transnational horrors, in a bad mood. We sit with a French Jewish couple. They say that after escaping at the end of the sixties from Tunisia, they settled in France. When people talk about the Palestinians and their «right to return», nobody thinks of how the Jews have had to leave and continue to have to leave so many African and Middle Eastern countries. Like these ones. Apparently, it hasn't gone very well. Now they say that if the antisemitism in France continues, they'll move to Israel.

Unbelievable. A survey commissioned by the European Commis-

sion among 7515 citizens considered Israel a bigger threat to world peace than Iran, North Korea, the United States, Iraq or Afghanistan. I'm not surprised. For years the media has been bombarding us with such anti-Semitic propaganda that there are people capable of believing things like the Twin Towers were really destroyed by the Jews (if not the Americans themselves).

No, there are never any Jews behind the bombs and the attacks. But in spite of the Islamic-Arabic evidence, there's always someone willing to see the same old Jewish-American complot as always. How can we have become such cretins? For Europe, the site of the two most horrifying wars of the twentieth century and home of the most repulsive ideologies, to come out with something like that...

Our table companions are called Cohen, and I feel sorry for what they are telling us. But they are elderly now and tired. I doubt they will emigrate again, although I can understand why they look to Israel with longing.

After lunch, we go to Haifa: clean, modern and industrial. A city for work. Only one spiritual reference is evident at the entrance: a large temple built by the Bahá'is (a curious, mystical and vaguely Islamic sect, that is peaceful just for a change), that descends between classic temples and leafy-green gardens like a carpet from the top of the mountain. They must have money. Lots of money.

The driver talks to us about his country. He sympathises with Sharon, whom he says was his boss in the army. I suppose he's talking about the Yom Kippur war. He seems to have a lot of respect for him. He was eight years old during the first war the one in '48. He still remembers the Arab siege of Jerusalem, when Palestine participation and the creation of the state of Israel was refused, and the terrible hunger they suffered. He says that if Israel were destroyed, he «would have no place to go». It's a fearful phrase that we will hear

over and over again from the working people here.

That night we have dinner with Esther, who has recovered. She enlightens us about various religious branches of Judaism. A very diverse world. I suppose there are also different groups among Catholics. But the differences must not be so folkloric. We laugh for a while about the people we saw in the Mea Sharim district, about the Hassidic, who sing and dance on the street in such a way that they look like Hare Krishnas.

Her religious beliefs are somewhat diffused and New-Age. She talks like a relativist, but like everyone else here, she knows exactly how she has to defend her country. The Israelis have no doubts whatsoever when it comes to this issue, whether they are religious or not. This must be why they are still here: because they are realistic, in spite of the Hassidic and other such happy movements.

Apart from believing in God, she also believes in the Nation. The Catalan nation, I mean. She supports Esquerra Republicana. Her too, can you believe it? I draw them like bees to honey. She says she joined because her ex-husband (Catholic) was very nationalist.

We didn't know it was a venereal disease and we get a fit of silly and slightly alcoholic giggles. Israeli wines are very good.

August 23rd

We get up at five again. We have to pick up the people from Tel Aviv yet again. What did we do to deserve this?

When they're all aboard, we see some of the same people from the previous days. There's the strong and robust (fat, really) girl. She's wearing shorts and a sleeveless t-shirt. A veritable flesh festival. They won't let her into any of the sacred places, and today our tour really

could be called the Day of the Holy Place: we go over half the New Testament on the minibus. I'm going to have to lend her a shawl I have in my bag so she can cover herself up when we go into the temples. A young black sheep. They really would dress her up in our hotel.

First of all, we go to Nazareth, to the temple of the Annunciation. It's a church from the sixties with decorations typical of the period. Twenty years ago I would have been horrified. Now that the sixties are making a come-back... very trendy.

I find it strange to see other Christians. A group of guys and girls are singing songs like «kumbaya, my Lord», with a priest who is actually dressed like a priest. They're wearing shorts and casual clothes. In the synagogues and the mosques not even the tips of their noses would get in the door with all that leg on display. What am I saying!: in some Arab countries they would be imprisoned directly for dressing like that. The Catholic God must be far more tolerant nowadays. Or maybe the magma pressure of the irrational underworld has driven the Christians towards less deathly spaces. Worthy of celebration.

Like our older guide on the first day, today's is an elderly gentleman, and is simply and happily ignorant of the most basic notions of Christianity. What difference does it make since almost all his clients are Jewish... He says the temple is built on the site where the Angel announced to Mary that she was carrying the son of God in her womb. All good so far. But then he divaricates, saying that there are «far more annunciations» throughout the world. Like that of Pilar, for example. We haven't finished fully reacting to this statement when he asks us where the Pilar is. We tell him that it's in Zaragoza but that it's not an annunciation. But since the good man does not wish to lose authority in the eyes of his flock, he repeats that it most certainly is and that in Spain there are many more. The

one in Montserrat, the Rocío... We try to tell him that they were appearances and not annunciations. But he pays no attention to us.

We don't argue; we're not sufficiently motivated Catholic tourists, and we have no wish to convince a good-for-nothing guide about anything. In the end, I appear to understand that there are at least nine Catholic churches in the world that claim to have the relic of the baby Jesus's foreskin, and nobody is writing a doctoral thesis on this. The child was multi-phallic. Who cares.

We're back on the road. We're going along a road that crosses Galilee. We drive through Arab towns. Better not to break down. The chauffeur says there's no problem, but not everyone is friendly towards the Jews inside Israel. That makes it more exciting. We shove our noses against the windows as if we were in the Riolen Safari Park in Tarragona. But there's nothing particularly worth seeing. Just Israeli Arabs. We look especially closely at their houses and see that they're of a good quality size that's just as good as the houses here. My Josep, who loves his homeland and always has a point of reference to compare to says «they're not this good in a lot of villages in Lerida».

He's right, the Arab-Israeli standard of living is incomparably higher than in any other Arab country. Their language is official; there are signposts and information in Arabic, Hebrew and English on the roads and all over the place. They have equal rights and representation in the Parliament. They do have the reputation for not being very hard-working. But of course, compared to the Jews, who are among the most hard-working people in the world, it's easy to seem less hard-working. Any statistics on the situation of the Arab Israelis demonstrate that they are (relatively) worse off than the general population. This means that they are (infinitely) better off than any (other) country in the Middle East. But it is not politically cor-

rect to say so. Let's pretend I haven't said anything.

We continue our journey through the Biblical lands, New Testament section. We reach Capernaum, location of the church where Christ performed the miracle of the loaves and fishes. Our Jewish travel companions look at us; theoretically this should move us. But we can't avoid feeling a huge indifference about it all and about the extremely dull church where it's commemorated, without any beauty. They expect more excitement and we are disappointing them. They are open-minded, cosmopolitan people and they are happy to have infidels among them for a change. But no; the subject doesn't fascinate us and it's too hot to feign importance. We do not live up to the expectations. Sad occasion.

On the way out, the guide, who wants to continue to demonstrate that Christianity holds no secrets for him, points out the statue of Saint Peter that's outside, in the courtyard, and he pompously states that for the Christians, he is the «second saint» after Christ. And he's as pleased as punch with himself. We don't even protest. Like I said, it's too hot. Although back on the bus and on the way to the next milestone on our itinerary, I ask myself if my son Àlex, not baptized and educated in a secular school, would have identified the errors in the guide's discourse.

I'll ask him.

Next stops: Lake Tiberias first, and then the river Jordan, in the spot they claim Jesus was baptised (in spite of the fact, according to the guide himself, that the scriptures clearly indicate a different place, but what difference does it make).

It's so hot that I'd love to swim in the river Jordan. It would sanctify and refresh me enormously. It's a shady, clean spot and the river is a very Green colour thanks to the numerous trees that reach over it. I have a swimsuit on, but it's a bikini and I don't know... I see a lot

of nuns around here. Plus, we can see a lot of fish and other very big beasts with moustaches that stick their heads out from time to time. They look like catfish, those gigantic animals that have colonised the Ebro, the river that passes in front of the Cathedral of Pilar in Zaragoza, where they also announced the good news to the Virgin (they left her the message all over the place).

Back on the bus it becomes obvious that the driver is not overly religious, he starts to take a very funny dig at the Ultra-orthodox. There are a lot of secular people in Israel who consider people like those who live in Mea Sharim a sort of parasite that they have to put up with because they are their parasites. Like when you have a somewhat backwards relative. Fondness and patience.

He also tells us a story about the Tel Aviv police. He says they gave them some magnificent sites to build their new installations on. In the very centre of Tel Aviv. Truly excellent. But they didn't want them because they had been a former Arab cemetery. They were derided wholeheartedly: brave enough to arrest terrorists and endanger their lives but then they don't want to live in a cemetery.

That night, when we have dinner, I tell Esther the story. She says that many of the policemen are called Cohen, which means priest, and that traditionally the priests were forbidden from having anything to do with the dead. To be honest I find the story a bit forced. Not at all convincing. I remember the Cohens we met yesterday. I don't think he was a policeman. But Esther has even more surprises up her sleeve: not only is she quite a strong believer, she's also *magufo*. Yep, it turns out she has powers, she can see the future. She says it as if it were the most normal thing in the world. She says that when she told her Mendelsohn aunts (on her mother's side) they weren't remotely surprised, because they have powers too and they took it for a family thing. That fits with one of my best theories: that when

you believe one irrational thing, you'll believe any other too.

When we leave the restaurant and walk towards the hotel, Joseph and I are amazed to see four curly-haired guys, with long coats and black hats partying on the street. As if they were drunk. And it doesn't go with their look at all. Like a Christ with two guns. Esther solves the mystery for us saying that «they're going out whoring». The Jews, whether religious or not, sin; just like everyone else in the world. And the religious preferably do it with ladies who have lives just like their own. That is, with scarf, long skirt and a demure air. That's the way they like them.

Can you believe them, these ultra-orthodox guys? I can't take my eyes off them. They're cool.

August 24th

We go back to the old quarter. We have a coffee in the Jewish district sitting outside on the street. The seats are scattered around some trees growing in a wide stone base about sixty centimetres high. A young, breast-feeding girl is resting on one of them. Her husband, tall and handsome, is looking after a girl of about two. They look young and trendy. The mother, white and blond, with a very straight back, leaning slightly against the tree, exudes queenly serenity. She and the baby are so immersed in their own world that it's as if they were encapsulated in a magic bubble. I can almost see an aura around them. A sculptural pose as carnal as it is sacred.

This young family is in the middle of the bar terrace, but they are not consuming anything. They don't look poor, but they just mustn't want to spend money. The couple have a purpose and everything is geared towards it. They look ahead; they must know where.

I leave there with the sensation of having seen a very authentic element of Israel. I perceive the hope of these young people. When we buy t-shirts in the market later, I'm surprised not to see anything that fits with the image I still have in my mind of them. Or maybe I do: the irony of the fact that an Arab owns the business which, like all the rest, is selling Intifada t-shirts alongside Israeli army ones. No problem. There's hope here too at the end of the day. Maybe this is the link I was looking for.

We eat in an Italian restaurant where nearly everything on the menu is written in a mumbo-jumbo Italian. It says *vendura*, instead of *verdura* (vegetables), *lasanga* instead of lasagne and other strange things. But the food is excellent, like it has been everywhere else except that restaurant in Acre. I order pasta and the tomato sauce is home-made and exquisite. Maybe, because of the fact that everything has to be kosher, it's made with more care. The olives are delicious too. And the wine.

Today we change hotels and city: in the afternoon we take a taxi to Tel Aviv. The driver is a man who speaks Ladino. We've come across a few of them. He says something about a «*mancebo*⁸⁶» who was driving another taxi. I imagine the immigration official's surprise if he were to come to Spain and talk like that, calling him a «*mancebo*».

We've been to Tel Aviv a few times, but today is the first day we travel on this motorway. There are fewer cars. It's all more fluid. The driver says it's faster. Why didn't we take it any of the other days? We suddenly see a number of young soldiers, girls and guys. They're in an area of shrubs, where something is still burning. The cars slow down. We ask the driver what's happening, and he says it's nothing. That something has caught fire. But we're cautious now: the entire

86. *TN*: *Mancebo*: Archaic term meaning young man, assistant, bachelor or assistant.

line of our hard shoulder is closed off with barbed wire.

Mmm... Maybe it is faster. Maybe because you're better off not hanging around.

We get to the city at rush hour. The traffic is really slow. The hotel is costing us an arm and a leg, but it's right on the beach. The Carlton. It's not mega-luxury but it costs as much as if it were. There are fewer skullcaps on display, and the men wearing them are happily accompanied by women in fitted dresses, without any scarves and dyed blond hair.

This is something else entirely. But the children are the same, and the fathers just as good as the other fathers. There's a tremendous coming and going of fathers to and from the lift with bottles or in the dining-room while the mother must be spending time with the younger ones in the bedroom. They look after the children so well that Josep can't resist exclaiming: «Poofters». As a joke though. He loves to joke. But I can't help noticing a very masculine hint of outrage.

We go down to the beach for a swim in the sea. We've been so hot that we cannot wait. It's jammed. We get wet and then go do what we like best: to be nosey-parkers. We walk along the shore avoiding obstacles. People are incredibly dirty: they leave glass bottles, papers... Even babies' nappies everywhere. There must be something eastern to them, we say, with all our prejudice. But it really does stand out.

We stroll with difficulty among gentlemen with spades digging so aggressively we're afraid we're going to be blinded by one of them. Afterwards we'll read in the guidebook that they're the plague of the beach. An internationally lesser known problem than terrorism but worth mentioning here nonetheless.

Among the crowds of people, we spot a man in a shirt, tie, shoes

and black trousers under a beach umbrella. He must have brought the children and he, even if he's not wearing the hat, must be a religious person who doesn't bathe. We decide all this ourselves, without any objective reason whatsoever. But it's just that the man there is incomprehensible, in this heat, with all his clothes on, red as a pepper and about to have a fit, he can't be there purely for pleasure purposes. But who knows: each to their own.

Further on, the first (and only) topless we see on the beach. The men walk around her with their eyes fixed straight ahead, telling themselves they haven't seen what they've seen. You can see the effort they're making. We die laughing with a hint of smugness. A couple of cosmopolitan *parvenus* is what we are. Our grandparents travelled by mule and never took their undershirts off, and now look at us.

A girl in a soldier's uniform with a rifle and everything sits on the sand, accompanying her boyfriend who's having a swim. What's she doing dressed? She must be on call, or something.

All the while a military plane flies over and back and over and back. The beach is a festival, but there's an eye up there watching over everything. And it's not God's.

August 25th

We go for a walk in Tel Aviv. Like a tour guide would say, «it's a city of contrasts». Ultra-modern buildings mixed with others from all eras of the 20th century. The Bauhaus ones are particularly lovely.

The shop assistant in a neighbourhood we've stopped to shop in and that's becoming trendy, a sort of equivalent to Barcelona's Born district, apologises for the city's appearance, saying they are doing it up. Her street, like others we've seen, is full of clothes and accessories

shops. And there's no protection in the stores. Yesterday we were surprised that they don't use any metallic shutters. I imagine that, in a country with such a big police force, where people have weapons at home, the minimal sound of an alarm going off will bring half the neighbours down to the street bearing guns. We've seen peaceful and modest fathers of families stroll with their wives and kids, wearing a revolver on their belts. It can't be easy to mug anyone around here.

I hadn't seen any poor people begging anywhere. Here in Tel Aviv, you can see some, especially in the centre. No more than in Spain but it had seemed that there weren't any in Jerusalem. They beg in a very strange way: kneeling and bent forward with the foreheads and arms on the ground. A very worthy posture but without much success, from what I can see. Nobody takes much notice of them.

In a jewellery store with a crafts workshop I see a set of 14-karat gold earrings and ring with lapis lazuli that I like. In the end I can't resist.

In the afternoon, we walk along a street we had visited the evening before. It had been nine and getting dark, and the shops were still open with people working inside. Here they work really long hours and only Saturday is a holiday. We notice that there are heaps of hairdressers' and wedding dress shops.

Israel is a confessional state. Marriage is religious. Since they need to have children, everybody needs to get married here. Now, at six, it seems to be the time at which brides try on dresses in the shops. Very coquettish, by the way; no embarrassment about being seen through the display. And the dresses are not even remotely modest. There's a bit of everything, but the slapper model is the most popular. Corsets and plunging necklines like you wouldn't believe. Babylonian. Israel: an exaltation of seduction at the service of reproduction. They may be very religious, but in their own way. That is, the way it suits them,

just like everywhere else in the world, except fanatical countries.

In half an hour, we've seen six weddings. Bridal cars, all decorated, pick the brides up from the hairdressers'. Since the nuptial parade has begun, the street has lost that practical and business-like air that it had before and become more jovial and warm. Even Josep and I are looking at each other suggestively.

The only reason we don't pinch each other's asses is because we're from Tarragona.

We go for dinner along the beach. The security measures have become far less intense now. It's all far more neglected than in Jerusalem. In the restaurant where we stop, nobody checks or searches our bag. Crowds and crowds of people wandering aimlessly. As I write this page (today is the 31st), I have just heard that two buses blew up in a city sixty kilometres from Jerusalem. Twelve dead and fifty wounded. Now there'll be fear in the air for a few days. But then they'll get over it and live like everyone else again. They won't be able to defeat these people's vitality and enthusiasm for building their country.

Let's hope not.

August 26th

Going-home day. Ellen's son comes to pick us up at the hotel. Ellen is my Jewish, Argentine friend. Her son is a good-looking, thirty-something year-old. Somewhat homesick. He says he found it really hard to make the decision to emigrate to Israel.

—I would certainly have preferred to go to Spain. For the cultural closeness, the language...

But his wife, a biologist, wanted to further her scientific career and

in our country that's not a possibility. Bad luck. Now she works as a biochemist. He's recycling his law degree and willing to do whatever is necessary in the meantime. It's clear that he has complete belief in an improvement. He is proud to be an Israeli citizen. The Jews are granted citizenship as soon as they get here. Within three months he had already voted in the elections.

Like his mother, he's a very left-wing boy. But a liberalism that people here wouldn't understand. He couldn't care less, obviously. And he'd dead right.

When we get to the airport, we suffer through draconian security measures. They go through everything. Even though they bother us far less than the majority of others. We must inspire trust. I watch everyone, expecting to discover an infiltrated terrorist. I feel like I should help out. But I end up paranoid and can't be bothered.

The worst has yet to come though. When we get to the check-in desk, it turns out that my flight is the next day. Good God! All of a sudden, I remember that I prolonged the holidays one day more when I found out my parents were celebrating their golden wedding anniversary on Sunday instead of Saturday. I have no choice now but to go to the El Al counter and change the ticket. I pay 150 euros, but we will be able to fly. It must be horrible to have to go back through all those controls again the next day.

The journey is peaceful. We travel along the coast of Africa: for two hours, we have land to our left. It must be Egypt. Afterwards the sky clouds over.

Alex is waiting for us with Alba. Suddenly they look very solid to me. I can't imagine him without her anymore.

August 27th

Terrible things have happened while we were away. An Italian journalist, Enzo Baldoni, has been kidnapped and killed. And ETA also appears to have stood out: seven bombs in the north of Spain in just two weeks. With warnings, but they planted them.

August 28th

The bad atmosphere hasn't changed since we left. From the *ABC* newspaper:

The PNV senator, Iñaki Anasagasti yesterday stated that Juan José Ibarretxe «should not» attend the Summit of Spanish Regional Presidents proposed by the president of the central government, José Luis Zapatero for August, as Zapatero is trying to put the Basque Regional President «on a par with the equivalent authority from Murcia».

No, please. How could he possibly be considered on an equal level as Murcia? We are a nation! And they're «*castellanets*⁸⁷», as my first mother-in-law used to say, and she was from Valencia. Because the Catalans are famous for being racist, but the people from Valencia aren't bad either. They don't say «*charnego*⁸⁸», but they say «*castellan-et*».

A friend of the bombers has been given a prize: the ineffable Xirinacs. A Bonafini-type freak. The Summer University of Catalonia, that has no scruples, has just granted it to him for his career in the «defence of democratic freedoms».

87. *TN*: Derogatory term to refer to people from other regions of Spain.

88. *TN*: Derogatory Catalan term to refer Spanish immigrants who have settled in Catalonia.

At present, you are better off not getting certain prizes, even the Nobel Peace Prize. They wanted to give that to Xirinacs too. The same way they gave it to Arafat.

And during the act and his subsequent statements the priest reasserted his sympathy for the terrorist group, ETA.

When I ask my friend Esther if she's not afraid of living in Israel, she replies that it's just as dangerous to live here. And even more so since March 11th. Maybe it's true. «A low-power artefact explodes in Santiago de Compostela», says the radio. If I had known, I'd have stayed in Israel. Luckily nobody was wounded.

August 30th

Today's news is the kidnapping of two French journalists by an Islamic terrorist organisation. The ransom they are demanding is for the French state to withdraw the «ban on face covering». I hope they don't give into this sort of blackmail. And they thought they had no problems since they didn't take part in the Iraqi war! They don't realise that the war is waged against them too, just like everyone else. The war is against our culture, that they hate and envy in equal measure.

August 31st

Taking advantage of the basil growing on my balcony, I improvise a pesto with pine-nuts and cheese that turns out delicious. As we eat our spaghetti, Josep and I remember a report we saw yesterday on television. A really nice and multi-cultural journalist informed us of

the high number of arranged marriages among immigrants living in Europe with girls living in Maghreb. The report spoke specifically of Morocco. A huge amount of weddings. They were saying that there were about thirty-thousand each summer. The point is that they interviewed an immigrant who explained that they go to look for the girls over there because they share the same blood and religion. And his racism didn't stop there. He then went on to say that in Morocco the women offered «more guarantees». Guarantees! As if they were washing-machines (although they probably are those too).

Here in the city of the Forum, multi-culturalism and inter-breeding are on the tip of everyone's tongue. Yet these people not only completely reject inter-breeding, but actively seek girls who are neither integrated nor Westernized, just like the Moroccans who have been living here for years. They want girls from abroad because they're more docile, more ignorant, and because they'll raise children who are isolated from the values of free societies than the women who already live like us. Conclusion: there are good girls with guarantees and there are girls who are dubious.

Apart from being a strategy to attract more immigration, this is also a way of preventing adjustment to our customs. It's their way of building a ghetto, not always imposed by the authorities. They have no wish whatsoever to build Europe, or an open society, or people's rights. Not these people anyway.

Like every day when it gets dark we head towards the Balcó. There we see Santiago taking the fresh air. «Fresh» in a manner of speaking because the heat and humidity are unbearable. We get to talking about politics as usual and he tells us sardonically that he's spoken to some common friends and that he's still under the effects of what they said to him. A couple of suitably anti-American, anti-Israeli liberals who fit the bill of the perfect lefty to a 't'.

—Then they come out and say that before they get old they trust they'll see the «decline of the United States»?

—They really are obsessed! —I say laughingly.

—They're senile.

I tell him a story to distract him:

—This reminds me of the joke about the guy who wants to kill his wife and someone suggests he should torture her with five shags a day, and she'll be dead within the week. And the guy, in complete exhaustion and coughing his lungs up, hears her singing joyfully as she cleans the windows and says to himself: «Sing away, sing away, you have just two days left».

—Ha-ha, very good. They're dragging themselves along and the world laughing at the spectacle.

Exactly. *Identical*.

And when I get home I find out about the terrorist attack in Israel that I mentioned before. Two regular buses full of people going to work.

I write to Esther to say how sorry I am.

September 1st

Thanks.

Yesterday my day was interrupted at three pm, when I got in a taxi and heard the news. As they were explaining what had happened on the two buses, a third explosion could be heard live. At that point the Radio Israel war correspondent began to cry. Not desperate crying, but his voice was transformed. And the way he spoke too. It was an explosion, but not another attack. I felt so angry that I started to get a headache. I didn't take anything. Just water. Six glasses.

You never get used to irrationality.

Esther

And it won't be the only news related to Islamic terrorism: «Chechen terrorists lay siege to a school in a border town of North Ossetia». It was a primary and secondary school with children aged between seven and seventeen years old. In Beslan, a city around twenty kilometres from the north of Vladikavkaz, the region's capital. A small city of around 40,000 inhabitants.

September 2nd

We are following the news from Beslan in horror. Nobody knows what's happening and the distress is growing. It's only been six months since March 11th and it would be very hard to accept another civilian massacre. The role played by the Russians in Chechnia leaves a lot to be desired. André Glucksmann, in *Dostoyevsky in Manhattan*, explains the terrible repression the Chechens are subjected to. But there is no doubt that the Chechen conflict goes far beyond a region aspiring to independence. International Islamic terrorism distorts all the old conflicts.

The same old mentality as always prevails in Spain though: rewarding good intentions rather than common sense or reason. The socialist Minister for Justice, Juan Fernando López Aguilar, has announced that the State will not only finance the Islamic cult, but will also promote Muslim religion education in schools and its presence in the public media.

For a secular humanist like me, this is very bad news. Those of us who are against mixing religion (of any type) with the state have to

put up with a government that calls itself left-wing taking it upon itself to mix them. Rather than supporting the spread of critical thinking and secular ethics, now it turns out we'll all have to pay for an extra religion with the excuse that the fundamentalist Islamic countries don't pay for Spanish Islamic centres. Brilliant solution! Rather than controlling and denouncing any defence of ideas contrary to democracy, it seems that now we have to help one of the most virulent and expansive faiths.

They haven't understood any of their own preachings. It's a question of showing anyone who wishes to live in an open society like ours that religion is a private matter of the faithful and that, if there's any extra money, it should be assigned to promoting those philosophies that establish civil, secular, coexistence, aside from the religions. Because public money must be spent on what benefits us all as a whole.

September 4th

Russia claims that the number of dead in the Beslan school is over three-hundred, half of them children. Even if it is happening to Chechenia, even if the heirs of the disastrous and unjust genocidal policy of the czars and Stalin have governed based on obsolete policies, there will never be any justification for the murder of so many innocent people without any responsibility for what is happening to the Chechens. But our media and politicians will be tempted. Wait and see. Maragall himself couldn't resist being topical when after the Al Qaeda attack of September 11th, all he could think to say was: «there was a very important REAL UNDERLYING element of resentment».

He should have just kept his mouth shut.

September 5th

In the afternoon, I have a coffee with Elisabet. And we argue as usual. She sympathises more with the French-German axis than the Atlantic front. She thinks that the French policies for the integration of Muslims are exemplary.

I don't know where she got such an idea from. None of the news from France leads to that conclusion. But she believes the declaration of the imminent release of the two French tourists proves that our neighbours do a better job of things than other countries like Italy or even Nepal, where some of the kidnapped in Iraq are from and they are being killed like flies.

—France has given a lesson on how to achieve the social integration of other communities. Thanks to recognition of the secular (and not religious) state, and it has done so peacefully, within the law.

—That would have been ideal for everyone. And me too, obviously. Unfortunately, that's not the way it's happened. France has not integrated Islam in any way. There are neighbourhoods in which the Shariah has been established and women are mistreated and insulted if they dare leave the house without a headscarf. Things have got worse and there are areas the police can't even enter. I don't think you have any idea of what you're talking about. They have millions of Muslims who mock laicism and detest France and everything it stands for. At an Algeria-France football game a few years ago, Muslims with French nationality insulted and booed the *La Marseillaise*. And that's the least of it.

—The option of war is always open, but we should leave that to Bush. He gets us into it because only he can protect us.

—It's not about going around making wars. But, open your eyes, you are at war against Islam and you haven't even realized it. All the current international terrorism that exists right now is Islamic. Moreover, we don't know how much money France has paid for the journalists. Money that will be used to finance the deaths of more innocents. Just like all those people who pay ETA and don't question it. That's collaboration with terror. France has collaborated with terrorism.

—And what would you have done?

—If it had been me, the same. But the government... There's a kidnapping mafia in Iraq. Not only the «rebels» or the ones from Al Qaeda. It's a business.

—If you say so...

—I'm not making it up. The kidnapers know what they're doing, they knew they could make something out of it. The bastards killed the Italian hostages. And the Nepalese are junk because, as they said, they're Buddhists.

—Bismilah arrahman arrahim —she answers. She's studying Arabic.

—I don't know what you're saying.

Elisabet smiles.

September 7th

Before going to bed, I read an interview on *E-noticies* of a man called Josep Maria Soler y Sabaté. To the question of how Catalan culture can survive in a globalised world, he replies: «I think the objective

is to weaken the power of the states, they're the world's major culture killers. In addition to preserving our own culture through our power».

What a beast! If it's necessary to weaken the power of the states to preserve a culture, what would an *independentista* do the day Catalonia becomes a state and, from Tarragona for instance, someone wanted to play the same game of strengthening the local cultures by weakening those of the state?

One more nationalist mystery.

But there are people who are even weirder: the pro-independence supporters who are not nationalists. One has just appeared on the blog. He says: «I'm *independentista* (though not nationalist). Some will find this odd, or incongruous».

My heart's desire. I take advantage to have him enlighten me, as I am truly intrigued:

It would be great if you could explain what it means to be *independentista* but not nationalist. Some of us here have read Rubert de Ventós, and he hasn't convinced us. Maybe you can help us.

And he says:

We don't consider ourselves nationalists because our nation «already is». There's no need for the «ism». It doesn't need to be created. The thing is our nation is not reflected strongly enough in politics. Which is the root of the search for sovereignty (to be exercised or not). The nation denotes a pre-political reality, sovereignty denotes the political consequences resulting from the existence of a nation.

In other words: we're a nation but we don't want to talk about it

to avoid the discredit inherent to the concept. So, what we're doing is «begging the question», as it's called in philosophy; that is, we demand that it be taken for granted that we are a nation as that way we don't need to worry about defining what makes us one or why that should result in our self-government.

I take advantage to ask the usual questions: what practical, not «spiritual», advantages would we gain.

He replies (honestly): «I promise I'll give you an explanation. Now I don't have time. Another day».

It's impossible, they all say the same thing to me. Not even Elisabet has found the time. Woe is me. When I go to my grave I'll put a post box up beside it in case nobody has answered me yet. In case they haven't had time yet.

September 8th

Elisabet sends me a photo with the caption «Spain is ra ra ra», with the queen, the princess Elena's husband, Marichalar and the Duke and Duchess of Palma with bored expressions on their faces. She says I'm always «stuck on my subject», but she never rests either.

I have to finalise the details of our party. Fernando has already told me what time his train arrives.

September 9th

At sunset, I go and pick Fernando and his friend Jesús up from the AVE station in Lerida. The latter is extremely polite and witty. He's a professor of mathematics at a university in Madrid. Like I said

before, I met him in Madrid. I don't know if he's very quiet or if he's given up talking whenever he's with someone like my friend Fernando, who never stops. They've come to spend the weekend, until Monday. I'm really happy to have my friend with me.

September 10th

Fernando promised to prepare a dinner for our shared friends tonight. He's always boasting about what a great cook he is and I thought it would be fine. But I'm not so sure it's such a good idea now. I'm regretting not having organised it my way. He's very creative, but also chaotic, in the way he carries out his objectives. I don't think we understand each other.

With a foreboding of the mess I've got myself into, we take the shopping trolley at noon and head for the market, the two of us and Jesús, his patient soulmate. We look like the cat dragged us in! Not only because Fernando, a fifty-something-year-old, is big and tall, gesticulates constantly and calls out his opinions (any of his opinions) loudly. But also for our clothes. Fernando's clothes, I mean. He's wearing a pair of trousers that come to below the knee, somewhere between fisherman's pants and Bermuda shorts, and blue braces with yellow polka dots to hold them up. Milikito the clown in person. And he chats exuberantly and happily to the people in every shop we go to. He's a force of nature.

Since he's convinced that not only our blessed politicians are firm nationalists but so also are the long-suffering people around us, he's extremely sensitive to any detail he thinks proves this nationalism and anti-Spanish hostility. And like any self-fulfilling prophecy, he finds proof everywhere. When we go to buy wine, he thinks the

shop assistant is cold to him because he speaks Spanish. Maybe, but I don't know him well enough to say. There are rude people everywhere, and this is our typical manner of being rude. Though that doesn't mean that they don't have their own curmudgeons in other regions too. For instance, thinking that just because we're Catalans we swagger arrogantly around in life and screw us for it.

We're still in the wine shop. Fernando says the shop assistant changed his tune pretty quickly when he saw we were going to buy pricey wines. The implicit reproach is that the Catalan might be all very nationalist but money has no smell. Our real nature gives us away.

Okay. It's not very original. Rather disappointing in fact. Sceptics should be really good at discovering other peoples' prejudices, but then as the saying goes, there's none worse shod than the shoemaker's wife. And he, doing his own thing, doesn't even realise.

The market climax comes at the fishmongers'. We buy four kilos of mussels and a variety of fish for a pastry he wants to cook for dinner. He starts to make shocking comments out loud aimed at me, but at the world in general, as well. And the world is quite compact in these parts: there are about fifteen people squashed into a bare four square metres. Nobody has any choice but to listen to him. He seems to be talking just for the sake of it, being provocative; I don't understand him. Now he's beginning to worry me.

I don't know how, but he mentions Jordi Pujol. He's all that we needed right now. Spontaneously, a very short woman with a very strong character, basket hanging from her arm, says to him:

—God protect him and watch over him.

And this triggers a chain reaction from the parish. I get a fit of laughing. Everyone starts going on about Pujol yes or Pujol no. An unusual scene in the fishmongers' queue. I tell the woman that, in

any case, Pujol is no longer in power. And she replies:

—But he still has a big influence on everything —and she repeats—: God protect him and watch over him!

And we all provide a comment on the ex-president of Catalonia. Incongruously, Fernando says that «tomorrow is the feast day of *Sant Jordi*⁸⁹». Everybody looks at him and thinks that either he's not the full shilling or he's foreign. Myself and the woman from before tell him that it isn't, that tomorrow is the *Diada*⁹⁰. And he replies that he calls the *Diada* the day of Sant Jordi.

Fine, Fernando; you're on your own on this one. Nobody pays much attention to him, they must think he's a madman. I bet they'll turn their fingers at their temples once our backs are turned.

After lunch, the witch's coven begins. The kitchen becomes a battle ground. Armageddon. He might know an awful lot, but he definitely can't be called neat and tidy. Nothing horrifies me more than to watch him advance towards me with a dripping spoon in his hand saying:

—Teresa, try this.

Beyond words. I spend the whole time running around after him with a mop. Poor Jesús chops and slices onions, tomatoes or whatever else is required. We all work as the kitchen help. Since every now and then I have to run out to buy something that's missing, I lose sight of them for a bit and that gives me a brief respite. But

89. *TN*: Sant Jordi or Saint George is the second most important National Day in Catalonia, the day is known in Catalan as the *Diada de Sant Jordi*. It is celebrated on April 23rd, and according to tradition gifts are exchanged: a book for the men and a rose for the women. Book and flower stalls are set up along the streets of Barcelona.

90. *TN*: National Day of Catalonia (Catalan: *Diada Nacional de Catalunya*) is a day-long festival in Catalonia and one of its official national symbols. It takes place on September 11th.

the preparations, the sauces, the salads, the oven... take longer, and longer and I can tell that we're not going to make it.

Naturally, I would have liked to rest a little. Just a short nap. But nothing. By the time the dinner is ready and I tidy up all that havoc, it's already eight-thirty. I barely have time to shower and get dressed. No beauty rest for me, as my ex used to call it.

The first ones to arrive are Santiago and his wife. I introduce them to Fernando and tell them there'll be a «duel of titans». My two friends know that I'm referring to their unstoppable habit of monopolising the conversation. They look at each other and smile as if to say «don't do that to her». Well, well. We'll see.

José M^a Fernández and his wife, Marisol, come next. Then *El Marqués*, as we call Fernando García, the Madrid biker and doctor I met this summer. He comes with a friend, Regina, and two impressive bottles of «excellent red wine», as he put it himself. Which, naturally, turns out to be true.

Then Arcadi and Pat, his wife. The last to arrive is Ivan Tubau, who got lost on the way. Apparently he didn't receive the right address. My fault. I try to introduce everyone to each other, but I'm not sure if I'm entirely focused.

Fernando is splendid, as usual. He's the star of the evening. Arcadi translates one of his «juicy» erotic poems from his book called *Semen* into Spanish for Ivan. In a subsequent conversation, Ivan talks about my book and says that «the best ones are lost». I say that's not true. But I'm not really in the mood for talking. I'm unfocused. He says that maybe «it has an open ending». That's precisely what the book doesn't have and what I've never wanted it to have. But for some unfathomable reason I agree with him. Fernando thinks I'm so distracted that he says something like «if you don't know what it's about, then who does...». Everything happens very fast, with con-

versations that cross over each other and I forget all about it. But my observant husband doesn't, he'll reproach me severely for days.

The evening passes pleasantly and everyone seems to be comfortable and glad to have come. Arcadi even suggests officially celebrating the «eve of the *Diada*» in my house every year.

September 11th

We get up late. Josep has had to take his parents and mine to Alforque, the town my father is from, where they wanted to spend a few days together. He won't be back for the whole day. Santiago will come over to take us for a spin. Over breakfast I tell Fernando that we could invite Elisabet to spend the day with us. It wouldn't be bad if they hit it off I think, in my matchmaker mode. Maybe she'd have fun with a native of Madrid like this one. They could discuss their perspectives with a sense of humour: they do both have one.

Obviously, he asks me if she's good-looking. Since I know his tastes, I tell him he might not think so.

—So she's ugly then, is she?

—I didn't say that —I say, alarmed.

He's so undiplomatic. He's incorrigible. We call her but she's in Vimbodí, a village in Tarragona. Convenient timing. I would have enjoyed it. A magnificent counterpart to Fernando and Santiago. A heated nationalist against firm constitutionalists. And I would have supported her. Just to piss them off. Pity.

At twelve fifteen Santiago appears. He says that he will also come for lunch with us. I ask him if his wife will come too but he says no. Not to worry. They're a very peculiar couple and it doesn't matter if he leaves her at home alone on a Sunday. Of course, knowing him

and guessing what the rest of us are like, it's the smartest thing she could do.

Just as I imagined, they never stop talking. They only let Jesús get a word in every now and then. Even though he'd love to. Especially to put a spoke in the works. He considers Santiago too right-wing and a bit extreme, and he shakes his head sadly at certain things he says. But it's impossible to get a word in edgewise.

We go to Casa Castellarnau, a lordly mansion that you can visit like a museum in Tarragona. In the old town. Fernando finds another opportunity to detect or imagine anti-Spanish coldness among the employees. He thinks the woman in the ticket office lacks enthusiasm when she receives us. He makes a couple of seductive comments and the woman gives into his charms straight away. They exchange jokes. And to complicate matters even more, I tell her that he's separated, and the young and beautiful woman says that she's a widow. Romance is in the air.

When we go for lunch, he says that «the Catalan changes completely» if the person addressing them in Spanish has something to offer. The wine-store salesman was hostile until he discovered good buyers in us. The ticket seller was cold too until she discovered he was separated. It's an unacceptable theory coming from a sceptic. But now he's not speaking as a sceptic. He's speaking as a typical pain in the arse from Madrid. He goes on relentlessly. He's doing precisely what he considers unscientific in any other situation: seeking out those arguments that theoretically support his hypothesis. Even forcing deductions on behaviours to make them fit. He criticizes Maragall for his anti-Madrid invective, but hauls out a whole battery of prejudices about Catalonia.

He's boring me now. We go for lunch and he still has his nationalist-detector device switched on. He applies it to the person who

attends us (a nice woman with a very strong Catalan accent). For instance, they joke about people from Catalonia and people from Madrid. She asks him if he's from Madrid. And he says.

—I'm from Madrid, but I'm not practising.

—Ah, well, you should, you should. You can practise. All places are lovely in their own way —she answers just to be nice.

—That's a privilege that only a few can claim, Madam —he answers.

The woman doesn't pick up on this «awful» insinuation at all, as she's in her own world, and the veiled accusation of Catalan nationalism he's made gets lost. She probably isn't even one, the poor woman. Santiago is sick to the teeth of him too. He already has enough of a reputation in Tarragona for not being «one of ours» without walking arm in arm with the exuberant Fernando who's going around «righting wrongs» and seeing things. And he does everything in his power to change the subject.

Luckily, I'm in the company of men who are extremely cultured and knowledgeable. Santiago has finally discovered how to distract him. He takes him to his own, less volatile, area of expertise: political philosophy. A highly specialized conversation. They seem to want to focus entirely on the Second World War, a subject they are both experts in. Perhaps Jesús is too. Fortunately, they'll allow him to show it. I'm left offside, but rested.

But the local issue returns. Speaking of Esquerra Republicana militants, Fernando is reminded of Elisabet and he tells Santiago at full volume that he knows she's not attractive (to put it mildly). «At the top of his voice».

I knew it. I had good reason to be alarmed. I reproach him for speaking publicly about something we had discussed in private. I remind him that Tarragona is small, that she has a well-known busi-

ness and that there are tables with people at them around us. He apologises, but he's already put his foot in it.

Santiago is really surprised. But not as much as me when I hear him say, in an offended tone:

—She might not be gorgeous, but she has a figure that would take your breath away.

Well that just takes the biscuit. What does he mean that «takes your breath away»? What a bumpkin... Not to be offensive, but Elisabeth has an arse as big as a small country. If that's the way he likes his women, that's his decision. I played with the idea of whether they'd flirt or not in the beginning. But it was a joke. This guy loves them all. In confidence, I have to say that the day we met again in Barcelona at the Gotzone Mora event, he came back to Tarragona in my car and... well, he's the sort of man who flirts. It won't come as any surprise to his wife, to read this. If anybody knows it, she must. And just a moment ago, on our way out of the Casa Castellarnau, he said to me in an aside that I don't look more than thirty. I told him not to «exaggerate» out loud. I'm sure Fernando heard him too.

Fine. He likes them plump. People from the South have more primitive tastes. He's from Cordoba. They are differential facts, aren't they?

I let him in for it.

—See how you speak without thinking Fernando? —and I add a bit aggressively—: What if he were in love with her, what then?

I've left him speechless, poor Santiago. He looks at me in disbelief. The rest of the men squirm in their chairs. "In love" is not a word in the male vocabulary. And even less so in that of the alpha male, like them. I admit I did it on purpose. Now they're all looking at me as if they'd suddenly realized to what extent I'm not «one of the boys». Screw them.

There are moments of perplexity, a certain amount of confusion and foolishly, nobody knows where to look. Fortunately, Culture with a capital C sets strange feelings and emotions to rights. There were subjects of cultured discussion still pending and they get down to talking of them with zeal.

I leave them at the desserts and go home. In the evening, they'll come back again and, with the excuse of a big storm (tremendous thunder and lightning), Santiago will continue to evade his wife and stay for dinner.

I don't call Elisabet because I'm sure she's still in Vimbodí. Now there's no need to.

September 12th

We go to the Forum. Fernando continues in his critical/needling vein. It's all horrible and pretentious. Even though I also find the Forum rubbish, nothing but an exercise in urban promotion seeped in lame thinking, I feel like defending it just to spite him. Not to mention Josep. It gets tiresome that Fernando doesn't even try to pretend a little bit and spends the whole time saying: «Oh, oh», and ostensibly expressing his disbelief. He goes so overboard that even he, though this sort of sensitivity is not among his virtues, notices my mood and says: «Teresa doesn't like us calling so much attention to ourselves».

I am annoyed. But not for the reason he thinks. He thinks I'm afraid of being politically incorrect. In case the people around us detect that I'm anti-Catalan. He doesn't understand me. It's just that we don't consider the same things polite. It's not a national, but a personal, issue.

The climax of the Madrid-Catalan incomprehension arrives when we go for lunch. The waiter, an unprofessional guy with a bad attitude, stressed and overworked by the vast quantities of visitors, carelessly spills some of the sauce of our second course on Fernando's trousers. And he rightfully gets all indignant about it. And the waiter mutters something that sounds like «it's not that big a deal».

«It's not that big a deal?». Blimey, his trousers are destroyed. He'll think the waiter did it on purpose. Fortunately, the manager, who comes along quickly with a detergent, is very polite and considerate. And he's also Catalan.

When we leave the Forum, I feel a rush of relief. We get the car and head towards the cathedral, where we've arranged to meet Arcadi and Pat to go for a walk. We stroll as far as the Olympic Port and then have some wine and tapas in the bar, La Viña del Señor, opposite the cathedral of Santa Maria del Mar. We go up to a small private room. Everything Arcadi orders is very good and the wine is exquisite. They are connoisseurs. True gourmets.

September 13th

I've put Fernando on the train. I feel as if a weight had been lifted off my shoulders. But by the time I get home I already miss him. He has his faults, but he is my very best friend. And as a stimulus he is unrivalled. In the last three days of madness, himself and Santiago have put my Catalan-sceptic-friendly equilibrium to the test. I've seen how all my most intrinsic Catalan facets came to the surface.

The differential fact.

September 14th

That symbiotic creature called nationalism, Isabel-Clara Simó, says that 1714 was «a war between Catalonia and Spain».

All this forms part of the intoxicating campaign of historical mystification over the last twenty years, including the idea that the Civil War was actually a war of Catalans against Spaniards. As if there hadn't been as many Franco supporters here as in the rest of Spain. And I'm sure the children of today believe it. Since all they do is watch TV and read the four rudimentary things that interest them to cultivate their prejudice...

The truth is that a tribal base inherent to the primates does exist in this obvious absurdity: the need for an «us» with all our virtues and a «them» with all their defects. There always has to be someone to blame.

September 15th

The Brazilian singer Carlinhos Brown on the TV3 programme presented by Manel Fuentes⁹¹:

FUENTES.- So how's life, Carlinhos?

CARLINHOS.- Oh, very gut, very gut... the Spanish are generous, marvellous, charming people.....

FUENTES.- The Spanish? The Catalans, the Catalans, you must mean the Catalans.

91. *TV*: Manel Fuentes Muixí (Barcelona, January 14th, 1971) is a Spanish journalist and humourist who has mainly worked as a radio and television producer.

CARLINHOS.- ... eh... hmmm... ahhh... well, yes, the Catalans too (?).

(Applause and uproar.)

I don't remember who it was that said: «Madness is the ability to make fine distinctions between different classes of nonsense».

September 17th

Alba called me. She asked me how it went with my guests and I summarise my friend Fernando's antics and the trail he left in the market with his mention of Pujol. We had a bit of a laugh about that. She says:

—CiU will be back. People voted against them because they were tired.

And when she hangs up her words stick in my mind.

Okay, tired of what? Of PP, of Madrid? But are they tired of any of their own nationalist fantasies? Because those fantasies were widely spread by the CiU itself. Carod may have exalted «the inalienable right to free self-government», a phrase that flies in the face of reason, however much it is repeated. It is nonsense, but CiU has also talked about this theoretical «inalienable right».

And, on a national level (and I say «national» on purpose, given that to my way of thinking «nation» is just a synonym of “state”), all these hallucinations have led Ibarretxe to try and sell an idyllic future to the derided and rejected *maketo* proposing a voluntary and enthusiastic association that will allow it to continue selling it their products in spite of everything that has happened while benefitting from the advantages of being Spanish as if nothing had happened.

It believes that it will declare independence and the Spanish will continue to holiday on its Concha beach.

The common sense here grates, but if on top that you're also in the habit of reading things about «human nature»...

«A village's mortal enemy is the group from which it has recently split.»

This is a phrase of the famous anthropologist, expert in primates, Frans de Waal, quoted by Judith Rich Harris in her revolutionary book *The Nurture Assumption*. She seems to have had Basques and Catalans in mind, warning us of a fundamental truth. Because, according to the anthropologists, there can be occasional truces in recently separated groups to allow for trade or to arrange marriages but the slightest misunderstanding will trigger resentment. And between part of the Basque society and Spain there is already a great deal of resentment. All the dead buried not so long ago: from Seville, from Albacete. Even from Barcelona. «Free associated state»? Right. The «rest of Spain» has no need whatsoever of them.

Joseba Azkarraga, of *Eusko Alkartasuna*, Basque minister for Justice, may come up with things like: «Spain doesn't exist; it is virtual», or Carod might offer ultimatums like: «Let Spain know that the people of Catalonia have no fear, that they wish to advance peacefully and democratically; that either they love us as we are, or we will leave Spain». All these are strategies to make the idea that we are different people stick. They may sound like foolishness but, as the anthropologists forewarn us, more or less objective reasons are not always obligatory to produce a separation. Groups do not need a reason to hate other groups: the mere fact that they are them and we are us is sufficient.

According to Rich Harris:

In humans, hostility between groups leads to the exaggeration of any pre-existing differences or the creation of differences where there hadn't been any to begin with. You may have thought the opposite true, that differences lead to hostility; but I believe it is more a case of hostility leading to a search for differences.

What springs to mind is all the disheartenment and the tension between historical nationalities and the rest of Spain. We meet a series of ancestral requirements, as primates. It's a universal phenomenon. A primary instinct. If there are no damages, they're invented. It is the principle of the creation of the tribe. And the nation.

Let's see how: Eirenäus Eibl-Eibesfeldt, anthropologist and ethologist, observed that:

Humans show a strong inclination to form such subgroups, which eventually distinguish themselves from others by dialect and other subgroup characteristics and go on to form new cultures... To live in groups that distinguish themselves from the others is innate to human nature.

This process is called pseudospeciation. It may have spectacularly accelerated evolution. In some animals, the differences build up slowly and randomly (genetic drift), but in the Homo species the process cannot be random and may be accelerated by this pseudospeciation. The groups split, they distinguish themselves from the rest (even Weltanschauung itself, bloody identity!) and they go to war. The war puts a final end to reproduction between members of different groups and that's when the pre-conditions for a true speciation occur.

Somewhat ironically, I believe this country is undergoing the terrifying effect of certain natural forces. A sort of struggle between the culture and determinism of certain genes that are powerfully man-

ifest in guys like Ibarretxe or Carod, each ignorant of the fact that they are mere puppets of biology.

If these impulses were the tip of the iceberg of a vital and unstoppable Gaia, we could anticipate her lethal character from what's happened on other parts of the planet, where these forces were entirely irresistible as they lacked an enlightening culture among their people. New Guinea serves as an excellent example. When the European explorers made way to the mountainous interior of the island in the last century, they discovered a veritable Tower of Babel. Almost one thousand different languages, in a land that Rich Harris ominously compares to ours: «An area the size of the Iberian Peninsula»

Couldn't she have come up with a different example? Let's touch wood. The evolutionary biologist, Jared Diamond describes what the island was like before the arrival of the «white» man:

To risk leaving one's own territory in search of other human beings even if they only lived a few kilometres away was suicidal... Such isolation fed enormous genetic diversity. Each valley of New Guinea not only has its own language and culture, but also its own genetic anomalies and local diseases.

The Weltanschauung utopia, then. Fortunately, human culture acts as a counterpart to these trends. Disintegration and chaos are not inevitable. We can reflect, it's a question of choosing between being Homo and being human, of finding what's common between any of «us» and «them», of highlighting what unites us versus what separates us. This was well-known to all those who civilized us, from the Greeks to the Romans, going from the Renaissance to the Enlightenment.

Those who turned «the lights» on. Let's not allow opportunistic

politicians to turn them off.

September 18th

On the blog:

The Salamanca papers⁹², the «new Statute», a review of the trial of Companys, national Catalan sports teams, Catalan as an official European language...; the latest thing are stickers showing a donkey to counter the Spanish bull... I have been Catalan for many generations, I speak Catalan at home, but I am fed up of our politicians' immense stupidity. How is it possible that so many people support these complex-ridden specimens who spend their days prioritizing identity over efficacy? The multinationals are leaving Catalonia, the growth levels are minimal. Who or how are we going to fix it?

It's Saturday. Almost autumn but it's still hot. The days are pleasant, the beach magnificent. It looks more like a spa than ever. The Catalan spa, the oasis, a place where people speak in low voices. Everything is perfect if you don't «take sides». I thought that concept had been buried along with Francoism. That it was a thing of my

92. *TN*: The Salamanca Papers (Spanish: Papeles de Salamanca) refer to the 300,000 documents and 1,000 photographs confiscated from the Catalan government after the Spanish Civil War. The papers were transported to the city of Salamanca to be stored in what was later to become Spain's Civil War Archive (Archivo General de la Guerra Civil Española). The return of the documentation to the Catalan autonomous government was subject to much controversy in the 1990s and early 2000s, as well as numerous acts of violence at the moment of their physical transfer. The ad hoc committee of experts declared in 2004 that the documents should be returned to their legitimate owners. The documents were finally transferred in 2005. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Salamanca_Papers.

parents' generation, poor things.

The problem is that here individualism doesn't have many followers, or in the «rest of Spain» either. Not that it ever has had many. Stuart Mill's *eccentric* is not 'in'. The people who do their own thing and don't follow the trends cause suspicion. And maybe even resentment and distrust: the power has been assigned and anyone who comes along to question it is a potential rival.

Here, the sceptic is destined to be accused of "Spanishness" or right-wing tendencies.

September 19th

We go back to the beach. The weather is fabulous. It's a splendid end to the summer. That's the way Tarragona is. And it's the feast of Santa Tecla.

Last night we saw Ballesteros leaving a concert with his wife. It was dark and if he hadn't bid us goodnight, we wouldn't have known it was him. Politicians must have infrared vision.

September 20th

Granting and withdrawing permits for Catalanism and democracy. It says so in the newspaper, *El Mundo*:

Maragall, who presided the *Festa de la Rosa*, the festival of Catalan socialism celebrated each year in Pineda de Gavà, explained to the assistants that «when it comes to changing the rules of play, one's opponents should be included». Which is why he asked of PP «generosity, doing justice to the

Catalan party that it is (if it actually is), and to the democratic party it is (if it actually is too)».

They just can't help themselves.

September 23rd

We go for dinner at Máximo's restaurant and afterwards watch the magnificent fireworks display that concludes the Santa Tecla festivities. Every year the ones who won the competition in July repeat their display. I hadn't had a chance to see them before. From a company in Valencia, I think.

I love them.

September 24th

Local frivolities: Maragall made some statements to the press at the institutional reception to celebrate the feast day of *Mercè*⁹³. When asked about the fact that the complaints filed against Carod, who had talks with ETA while still a minister of the Catalan government, had been closed, Maragall replied: «Hadh't they already closed the case? Great, I'm glad».

Nothing has happened. It's all normal. If an ultra-right-wing

93. *TN*: La Mercè is the annual festival of the city of Barcelona in Catalonia, Spain. It has been an official city holiday since 1871, when the local government first organized a program of special activities to observe the Roman Catholic feast day of Our Lady of Mercy, La Mare de Déu de la Mercè in Catalan. Although the actual feast day is September 24, the festivities begin a few days beforehand. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/La_Merc%C3%A8.

member of the government had held talks with an Argentine paramilitary they would have called for prison. But as long as a person defines themselves as being left-wing, whatever they do will be considered well-intentioned, even talking to killers. And Carod, of course, says he would «talk to ETA again».

Very uplifting. However, I think we will pay for such irresponsibility one day. I want to believe it just to give a sense to things. At the very least, for the victims of terrorism, who are rightly screaming blue murder.

September 27th

Josep and I are watching the news and the reader says that scientists are debating whether religiousness is innate or cultural. They even talk about the «God gene». They also talk about the innate nature of morals.

A really interesting topic. Both aggressiveness and love coexist in the human being. And that's because both innate tendencies have been necessary to get us where we are today. There's not much that's useless in nature. Maybe the appendix and certain politicians.

Seriously, the moral emotions —blame, pride, shame, altruism— evolved genetically in small groups of two-hundred individuals as a form of social control and group cohesion. When agriculture made the demographic explosion of what had been these groups for 90,000 years possible, new challenges arose. We are capable of betraying and being loyal at the same time, but the casual agreements and social contracts from those times were no longer reliable. And the reason they stopped being reliable was that reciprocal altruism only works when you know exactly who wants to cooperate with you and who

wants to swindle you. In a word, when you know people. These are things that our cousins, the primates, know very well. It is «ancestral wisdom».

Politics and religion were created to govern the multitudes. Religion was developed as the main social institution to highlight the values that worked best in the community. Altruism and generosity were fostered, excessive greed and selfishness were punished, and a level of group commitment became clear through social events and religious rituals. As Michael Shermer says, «if you're seen participating in religious activities and following the prescribed rites each week, then you're a person to be trusted».

It has become fashionable to talk about the «God gene». I don't believe such a gene exists. What does exist are a series of innate moral conditions. And they are not limited to any religion, nation or people. It is a universal human trait. The ethical codes are precepts reached by consensus under the guidance of innate rules of mental development. We can only survive in a globalised world if we overcome the group instincts, if we extend the «group» concept to all human beings. This step will only be possible if we acknowledge the reality of our nature, and that's why we need science. We are animals armed with moral instincts (compassion, gratitude, niceness...) and, moreover, we have cultural technologies within our reach (democracy, laws, science) by which to achieve peace.

I have also read in a book by Shermer, one of the most prestigious drivers of the sceptic movement, this intelligent phrase from the character played by Katharine Hepburn to Humphrey Bogart in *The African Queen*: «Nature, Mr. Alnutt, is what we are put in this world to rise above».

September 29th

Like everyone else, I was happy to see that the two Italian NGO workers kidnapped in Italy had been released safe and sound. If they hadn't been, these two girls would probably have died. However, I can't help thinking that the Italian state has committed a terrible crime by agreeing to pay the terrorists.

There is a sort of myth out there that claims the means, if humanitarian, justify anything. The case of the NGOs in Sudan that rescue children and adults from the hands of armed groups, mafias that kidnap and hold them as slaves, came into my head. Their solution is to buy them. I've seen TV programmes where they spoke of these organisations as if they were doing something worthy of admiration.

Carod also gave credibility to the killers by holding talks with them in Perpignan. As usual, the excuse was, «If one single life could have been saved...». Cheap excuses. Often the wisdom gathered over centuries provides us with the key. Folk wisdom as the Anglo-Saxons call it. There is a very solemn saying that says: «The road to hell is paved with good intentions». It should never be forgotten. In the case of Sudan, I have no doubt that all those good intentions are feeding an industry that becomes increasingly productive thanks to the actions of these NGOs.

Yes. We go through the world leaving a trail of damages in our wake with the best of intentions.

October 1st

Friday. I've been running around like a headless chicken all day, and now I'm going to have to improvise something to eat. My cooking

is already improvised at the best of times. I call it camping cuisine. I do what I can. Ten minutes before lunch-time I open the fridge to see what's in it. I can't think of a question that amazes me more than when my mother calls me at nine in the morning and, among other matters of vital importance, spits out:

—And what will you make for lunch?

It perplexes me. How am I supposed to know what I'll make at nine in the morning?

Today is a typical day. A quarter of an hour before Josep arrives, I open the fridge to see what's in it. We're in luck: those savoury king prawns they sell in the supermarket; and sticks of fake crab. Ah, and a jar of mayonnaise: the best sort that takes weeks to go off. Fantastic. Warm pasta salad with seafood. A total hit.

October 5th

There's a guy on the blog who claims to have a very popular right: «I have the right to defend my own particular view or idea of what Catalonia or what Spain should be like». Another one like Elisabet. She also claims the right to this vision. It sounds so innocent. In the end, what can be bad about having an «idea» of Catalonia?

First and foremost, why is it necessary? People and politicians must have principles, common sense, values that can be shared (world peace, human rights, health and quality of life for all, etc.). But, what does «to have an idea» of a country mean? Basically, a more or less totalitarian project that has never worked.

Why don't the «visions» or «ideas» of a country or a society (also called «ideologies») work? Jonathan Glover, a secular humanist, a sceptic, a professor of Ethics at King's College, has written a book

to help us understand it: *Humanity: a Moral History of the Twentieth Century*. A book that exudes humanity.

These projects («visions», «ideas» or «ideologies») have degrees, naturally. At one extreme, we find disasters like Stalinism or Nazism. But on the same spectrum, we would also have the almost totalitarian doctrines of our Spanish nationalisms. And they all share serious conceptual errors. Let's take a look at these errors:

1) The drivers of ideologies tend to function on a blind belief that deliberately ignores what they cannot control: the implications of their decisions. Which is why Elisabet will never be able to answer my questions on why we want independence: she either doesn't know or doesn't want to know. Like Ortega used to say: «One's ideas are extrinsic, whereas one's beliefs are intrinsic».

The manifest irresponsibility is a subconscious reflection of the intimate conviction of this lack of control. Nobody in the PNV has bothered to conduct studies on the economic and social feasibility of independence. This class of foolishness forms part of the *modus operandi* of those people who seem to think that good intentions, «the enthusiasm» the project transmits, allows them to move forward with it in the knowledge that they have no foundations but faith.

The former president, Aznar, risked a great deal with the Spanish collaboration in the Iraqi war. The profits were significant: support against Morocco (and its claim over the island of Perejil), recognition of Batasuna as a terrorist group, better positioning versus other countries... But the sovereign project of our *independentistas* drastically surpasses a political decision like the former. The variables are excessive bearing in mind that there is no reason to think of profit. The standards of living will not rise, coexistence will not improve. The only theoretical payoff comes in the form of subjective, metaphysical aspects: freedom of the people, solve the problem of not

feeling Spanish, having a voice of our own... It is mere millenarianism.

2) They are rigid: they are not empirical, tentative undertakings. They do not change based on new information. Like Glover says, those who offered resistance in Russia or Germany were sent to labour camps or condemned to death. Here complaint, dissidence, the drawbacks are not assessed with a view to correcting the project to ensure it works properly. Dissenters are discarded and labelled «fascists». The fact that half the population is against an independence that will not bring improvements in either material or coexistence terms, and the verification of this fact for years has not changed the idea or the «dream» of an independent Basque Country. The fact of over a thousand victims and thousands of fellow citizens living under threat, hasn't either. And the reason for this is that what matters is the project not the people. As has happened in all other totalitarian regimes throughout history. Scientific progress is precisely that because it considers its hypotheses to be provisional. There is no closed idea about anything, everything is subject to modification based on more complete information. In this sort of project, however, reality is an enemy. To abominate reality is a key characteristic of the ideology, the vision or the idea.

3) It is coercive: it is a society directed from above, imposed and not freely chosen. In the Basque case, the maximum coercion comes from ETA, followed by the climate of intimidation and general contempt towards anyone not nationalist.

4) It is inhumane: it does not recognise the limits of cordiality or respect of the individual. Those who fail to adapt must be re-educated. The *lehendakari* insists that they live well in the Basque Country, and is even capable of saying it to a victim of ETA lying in a hospital bed, like the writer, José Ramón Rekarte. The «good citizens» are

incapable of standing up to the violent to defend their discrepant fellow citizens. And that includes from those who don't defend Rato or Piqué at a protest, where they are insulted for forming part of PP, to the barbaric acts in the Basque Country, where the armed branch of the most extreme nationalism, ETA, is capable of the worst possible horrors.

I have no intention of voting for any party with «ideas» about what society as a whole should be like. No, thank you. Every time somebody gets one they start imposing it on everyone else. We've seen terrible examples over the twentieth century. I'm not interested in any vision of Catalonia. Let them just do their jobs properly, we already know how to be Catalans, each in our own way. There is nobody who doesn't value their own people, their own landscape, their own language (all of them), their own customs or their own cuisine. My father's centre of gravity, his sentimental, moral point of reference, the nucleus of his identity, is his small, dull, ugly (it really is quite ugly) hometown in Aragon. It's his Rosebud. He can't contain his tears when a relative sings a *jota* at some family celebration. And he has never needed anyone to tell him: «Won't you stand up, Mariano? It's *La Dolores*⁹⁴!». We should never allow our most private and natural feelings to be manipulated by the people in power.

Another member of the blog reminded us of a phrase by Hannah Arendt in the prologue of *The Human Condition*, dedicated to Karl Jaspers.

What I learned from you and what helped me in the ensuing years to find my way around in reality without selling my soul to it the way people in earlier times sold their souls to the devil is that the only thing of importance is not philosophies but the truth.

94. TN: *La Dolores* is a Spanish opera by Tomás Bretón.

The philosophies and worldviews do not serve any good purpose.

October 6th

I spoke to Alba. I told her that I have meetings with colleagues who, like me, do not consider nationalism to be the right way to solve the problems of globalized societies like ours. In Catalonia, in Spain, we need a party to defend values such as laicism, secular humanism, progress and a well-grounded social change to free us from the traditional, customary and religious codes. A party to defend equality and the backbone of all humanity that denies any rights based, a priori, on race, social class, dynasty, caste, political establishment or any other system of human classification that prevents free movement of the individual within society. A Catalan and Spanish party with a universalist vocation, that aspires to the union of all people and lays the way for a world that extends those laws that best defend the human rights of humanity as a whole, and ensures these are protected by effective and responsible supranational entities.

I also told her that the only ones who believe in the need for a new party are Arcadi and I. The others are not so convinced. They agree with a manifesto, a platform, a forum, but say that a party is madness. The problem is that there have already been so many platforms and forums. And nobody has taken any notice of them. A new party is a potential threat to power itself, and the only way of gaining a certain respect. We'll wait and see.

But she's not to tell Josep. I'll let him know bit by bit...

October 7th

Multi-culturalism is another form of superstition. To paraphrase a famous and absurd phrase, «culture, may be universal or it may not». And the reason is apparent in news like this:

FIRST AFRICAN WOMAN TO RECEIVE THE PRIZE

The Nobel Prize for Peace rewards the Kenyan ecologist, Wangari Maathai.

It's not a good idea. Wangari Maathai is a woman who stated in 2001 that «female circumcision (of the clitoris) lies at the heart of the Kikuyus. All our values are built on this practice», thus supporting the forced female castration promoted by the Mungiki sect, a half-political, half-religious group, that according to its national coordinator proclaims an «African way of worship, culture and life-style».

This way of promoting local versus western values that are causing such a dilemma among individuals with «multicultural» fantasies has given rise to fanaticism and the involution of those African countries that give them credit. For instance, polio is advancing in Africa due to the boycott of the vaccine by Nigerian fundamentalists. The Islamic authorities have suspended the vaccination campaigns because, according to them, oestrogens, the hormone used in contraceptive pills, has been found in the drug preparations. They say that it's a «policy of the developed countries to prevent an increase in the number of Muslims». Pure *conspiranoia*.

I don't know how the chemists, physicists, physicians, etc., responsible can accept a Nobel prize. There are some very shady characters among the Peace prize laureates. They even considered awarding it to Xirinacs. They gave it to Wangari Maathai for being an ecologist, minister and promoter of a Green Belt Movement in Kenya that is proud to combine the promotion of biodiversity with employing

women. It claims to have employed over 50,000 women and planted thirty million trees. If that's the truth, it's certainly a good thing. But it is a drop in the ocean of decades and decades of wasted money sent to organisations with theoretically good intentions, decades and decades ignoring that the main reason for the poverty is the corrupt governments, the ethnic struggles and the inefficient economic systems.

But the fact is that, furthermore, Wangari Maathai also recently claimed that the AIDS virus is a secret western weapon to kill blacks. The woman is that crazy, and the people who chose to give her such an award are that crazy or foolish. I don't know if what she builds on the one hand makes up for what she destroys on the other. Fanaticism is an even more important scourge than AIDS.

I believe that the most urgent, priority action is to promote the values of humanism, including a commitment to scientific naturalism. The majority of the worldviews accepted nowadays (and the cases of Kenya and Nigeria are just the most resounding) are of a spiritual, mystic or theological nature, and they have their roots in the old, pre-urban, nomadic and agricultural societies of the past.

Scientific naturalism enables human beings to build a worldview. The difference compared to other views is that this is consistent and grounded, thus surpassing the old metaphysical and theological legacies. And it is different because it is not based on any framework system (ideology) but the very principle of the scientific method: that all hypotheses must be experimentally proven with explicit reference to natural causes and effects. The introduction of occult causes (NASA conspiracies, Jewish plots...) or transcendental explanations (unknown energies emanating from spiritual beings) are inadmissible.

The methods employed in the sciences are not infallible, they are

not absolute or unmovable truths; but they do represent the most faithful systems ever experimented to increase knowledge and solve problems. And that is neither western, nor white, nor Christian. It is Patrimony of Humanity, it is the only possible culture and the only way of eluding the extinction that determinism or the challenges of modernity may lead us to.

October 13th

A very sensible friend writes on the blog regarding the Armed Forces Parade that takes place in Madrid every October 12th:

Bono is still doing his thing, defending the theme park he installed on Madrid's main avenue, La Castellana, yesterday. In an interview this morning on the breakfast talk show on TVE-1, he spoke of reconciliation, in relation to the presence of two retirees, one from the Republican 2nd Armoured Division of Leclerc and the other from the *División Azul*⁹⁵.

This reconciliation already took place in Spain forty years ago. I grew up in it. My father, a soldier on Franco's side, was best friends with a soldier of the *Quinto Regimiento*⁹⁶, sentenced to death in 1940. These two old men and the thousands of survivors of the bands they both symbolize

95. *TN*: The Blue Division (Spanish: *División Azul*, German: *Blaue Division*), officially designated as *División Española de Voluntarios* by the Spanish Army and *250. Infanterie-Division* in the German Army was a unit of Spanish volunteers and conscripts who served in the German Army on the Eastern Front of the Second World War.

96. *TN*: The Fifth Regiment (Spanish: *Quinto Regimiento*, full name *Quinto Regimiento de Milicias Populares*), was an elite corps loyal to the Spanish Republic at the onset of the Spanish Civil War. Made up of volunteers, the Fifth Regiment was active in the first critical phase of the war and became one of the most renowned units loyal to the Republic.

are living together in old people's residences, they are two good people, just as my father and his friend Cándido were. To make them victims of the «Bono reconciliation» is unforgivable. They are already reconciled and Bono's game, contrary to his apparent attentions, puts them back into two different bands, it returns to division and not concord.

On the same reconciling wavelength, during the King's reception after the military parade for around a thousand guests, President Zapatero remarked to the journalists that the most outstanding element of the parade had been the Republicans' participation because «the others were already parading, one way or another».

Someone should repeat to Zapatero the words a mother said to her son when he refused to go to school: You have to go, first of all because it's Monday; but above all because you are the school principal.

Mutatis mutandis, it would seem that Zapatero hasn't yet realised that he is the President of the Government, with authority over the armed forces who have been parading since the creation of the Armed Forces Day and the decision to have it on October 12th, the national day of Spain; that this army he has authority over is not the Francoist army, but the Armed Forces of democratic, constitutional Spain. That for this same reason Maragall's proposal to fly the Republican flag constituted out-and-out stupidity.

The Armed Forces do not have one national flag and another that is Republican, they don't even have two flags. The red and yellow flag is not the flag of Franco, but the constitutional flag of Spain. It is not that one is a flag enthusiast, but one learns that there is a space dedicated to the symbolic that is worthy of respect. The National Day of Spain has been more controversial this year because this government of infants has made great effort to sow the seeds of division and aversion.

Good God the idiocy of it all.

Seriously Maragall wanted to fly the Republican flag too? With

each day that passes I'm surprised by something new. Maybe it's not idiocy. It's reinventing Francoism and anti-Francoism and re-exploiting the old bands in the party interests.

October 15th

Everyone is fighting for the spoils of Companys.

Today commemorates the death of the president, Lluís Companys, in 1940, one and a half years following the end of the Civil War. Formerly president of the Regional Government of Catalonia, he was victim of a war council without any legal guarantees, an injustice that nobody will ever forget. This man and his death have also formed one of the semi-mythological bases of Catalan nationalists, over the last fifty years.

The election of Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya to government has given rise to a different attitude to a celebration that, to date, was held privately and without any political undertones. But to them, Companys stands for the most dramatic symbol of the Catalan collective imagery and martyrdom. So much so, in fact, that the spokesman of Esquerra in Parliament, Joan Tardá, has gone so far as to demand that «the State ask forgiveness for his execution».

It is not right to use all the weapons of Catalan emotional manipulation when the imprudence of these demands may lead to undesirable consequences for everyone. If Companys' war council is reviewed, shouldn't so many more be given the same justice? A great many terrible things happened in that war. How many Spanish families have someone who not only was not treated justly, but was murdered? Is there anyone here who can claim there is an innocent band, whose hands are clean?

Companys should never have died defenceless, following a summary trial and facing a firing squad. But we should not forget all his errors either. He conspired against Primo de Rivera and he had the bad idea, on October 6th, 1934, of proclaiming the Catalan State, an illegitimate, anti-constitutional and anti-Republican act that cost him a 30-year prison sentence in the courts of the Republic. Some may perhaps consider this being a «good Catalan», but many of us find it regrettable, because to go against the Constitution, whether Republican or otherwise, is not compatible with defending freedoms.

There are too many murky issues and still too many blistering emotions. We should ask ourselves whether our party or the socialist Government isn't also digging up old grudges that we thought overcome. The success of the transition lay on a pact to not look back or demand accountability for the past. There are many ghosts in the closets of families. Is it worth playing with civil peace? This is what Josep Pla said about Tarradellas:

He always sees things as a man of government, as a politician at the orders of upholding society. He used to often repeat that if he were one day elected to government, he would not destroy anything that had been invented by Franco that were positive for the country and the general stability. I had never heard declarations of the like from a politician who has spent almost a quarter of a century in exile, who has suffered seven arrests (some by the Gestapo in contact with the Francoist police).

Well things have taken a turn for the worse since the arrival of politicians who even want to change what happened in the period of democratic transition. And the only «continuation» that interests them is their own. That's the key: «A politician at the orders of

upholding society». The ones in power now see politics as a way of upholding their own interests. We don't need Utopian and pointless projects. Suffice to have «men and women of government».

But they want to dictate the pace whatever the cost.

October 19th

A hooded group has erupted into the University of Barcelona and threatened a professor, Francisco Caja, a member of *Convivencia Cívica Catalana*⁹⁷, because he has taken legal actions against the linguistic policy of Catalonia's Regional Government, the *Generalitat*. The worst part is that the university rector didn't even ask him what had happened.

Santiago, former head of the *PSUC* in Tarragona, is an activist in this association. And it gives him a lot of headaches. He has received threats too. It saddens me; nobody should have to see a friend in such an uncomfortable situation.

This does not mean that I agree with everything he says. And I'm not just trying to cover my back and distance myself. I would if I really thought there was anything in his complaints that I considered incompatible with democracy. He has ideas about language that I'm not so sure about. *Convivencia Cívica* opposes Catalan as an obligatory subject at school. They believe it goes against the rights of the Spanish-speaking Catalans and that learning a language that is not one's mother tongue is bad for the childrens' intellectual development. I disagree with that, but I do agree that one of the Catalan

97. *TN: Convivencia Cívica Catalana*: Is the oldest of the main Catalan civil associations against independentism. It was founded in 1998 to coordinate various entities that opposed the nationalist policies.

peoples' main objections was precisely the obligation of schooling in Spanish during the Franco regime. If it was bad to stop children from being educated in a language other than their mother tongue in the past, it still is now.

In my opinion, the thing is that in the past it wasn't intrinsically bad, and it isn't now either. To be schooled in a language other than one's native tongue does not have major consequences for the education of children. There are many studies to support it. All those of us who have been educated in Spanish even though our native language was Catalan are proof of this: we haven't been irremediably affected. At least, not by the language.

The people from *Convivencia Cívica* call for teaching in Spanish too. I believe that if there were two different types of school, distances and ghettos would arise. But I don't have any certainty. I would change my opinion if there were definitive studies or data. There doesn't seem to be any ideal solution. What's important is not to defend the «language», but the rights of the citizens. And it is their and Santiago's right to campaign for what they consider correct. In the end of the day, it is far worse to demand the disintegration of Spain and a rupture between brothers, which is what Esquerra demands, and they are more socially approved. Paradoxes of our society.

Santiago says he was frightened once. He was strolling peaceably down the Rambla Nova when a woman with a child of around six shouted out to her child:

—See that man? Well, he's one of those people who don't want you to speak Catalan.

He says that he was so perplexed that he didn't even know if he should answer her. He thought it would be better to just let it go. Nobody who disagrees with nationalism can get ETA and its tribe fully out of their heads. I remember the frightful case of a child

saved by a PP militant from being run over by a lorry who, in the end, when he became a member of ETA and a terrorist, became his executioner. He killed the person who had saved his life. What a vile thing.

And Santiago says:

—Look, if I were to stand up to his mother and he were to remember it one day in the future...

Children are perilous.

—Would your friend Elisabet understand it?

—Of course. When she is away from her clan, she sees things more clearly. Like us all, by the way.

—To be honest I don't believe it.

He'd be better off not putting her to the test. Their opinions are so opposite to each other. There's nothing to be done about it.

October 22nd

The vice-president of the government, M^a Teresa Fernández de la Vega says that she will annul the crime of sponsoring illegal political parties. A few days ago, Zapatero said that he would annul the crime of illegally calling a referendum established in the new Penal Code.

There's been no reasoning with them for a while now. And ETA is increasingly active. It depresses me.

October 25th

New witches' coven: controversial reception with pro-independence flags of the Catalan roller hockey team. Even Maragall went. Bread

and circuses. Rafael Niubó, secretary general of the Sports Department of the Generalitat wants the Spanish team to «find itself another name» for the foreign competitions.

I don't understand it. But I can't be bothered. To hell with them. It would be funny one day to see the people from the Vall d'Aran demand their own team. It would really make me laugh.

October 31st

I read in the press:

ETA admits that it met with Carod to provoke a «disintegration» of the State. According to ETA, the meeting had a series of «specific goals» that the pro-independence leader was amenable to: «deepen the State crisis and disintegration».

I am really furious. We live in a sort of spa where it appears that nothing's wrong. Terrible news like this, and when they need to shout at someone, they shout at Piqué. It's not even random. It's anomie, asthenia, thoughtless.

This is the mood I'm in when Alba calls me. She's a moderate nationalist who doesn't really understand what sort of Catalan I am. I tell her that the nationalisms are exclusive philosophies frequently based on mythical and self-serving conceptions of history, that underline difference rather than what a society has in common and that it makes historical grudges its driver. And that their sole goal is separatism and, however moderate they are, they keep the national prejudices that serve their own interests alive.

I tell her that there is Catalan life beyond nationalism, and that it

is probably more prosperous and effective.

—And what would happen to the Catalan language?

—There's a statute, isn't there? —I reply, a tad forcefully—. The citizen of a democracy has the legal resources to demand its language, its customs and its place in history be respected. All societies must assign its resources. They are not unlimited. It is up to the citizen to decide with their vote. If there are enough people who want Catalan to continue, it will continue.

—Hmm... enough. And what if there aren't enough people who want it?

—It will end, in the same way that so many other languages and cultures in the world have ended. Some die and others are born. Or, rather, they are all constantly transforming. Like the rest of the dynamic systems. Two-hundred years ago, nobody danced *Sardana*⁹⁸, or bought the *tortell*⁹⁹ on Sundays and nobody did their hair in a Ferrusola bun. So were there no Catalans back then? If there is one person who cannot be denied their Catalanism it is, precisely, the ancestor, a basic element when it comes to justifying any nationalism.

—But they spoke Catalan.

—Yes, but very few people spoke Spanish and hardly anyone English. They were born and died in their villages. When one opens up to the world, there is a new re-organisation, and all individuals, followed later by societies, end up choosing what suits them best and what is most practical for themselves.

—So laws should be passed to prevent that from happening.

98. *TN*: The sardana is a type of circle dance typical of Catalan culture. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sardana>.

99. *TN*: The *tortell* is a Catalan and Occitan pastry typically O-shaped, usually stuffed with marzipan or whipped cream, that on some special occasions is topped with glazed fruit. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tortell>.

—In spite of the fact that the majority of people do not consider it necessary? Whatever you say, but by doing so you'd be putting the ideology ahead of the people. It will be coercive and a source of injustice. There's a need to think very carefully about whether a «vision» of Catalonia is so important that it should gloss over common sense and the natural flow of history and change.

—And why do you write in Catalan?

—I am fluent enough in both languages, but at this point in my life, Catalan is my «default» language for thinking in, as an IT person would put it. I practically don't speak anything else. You, Àlex, Josep, my mother, the neighbours... Naturally I feel comfortable, I love my language. My feelings of love for what is mine, for the individual, are no different to those of everyone else. But I don't write the diary in Catalan out of romanticism or an assertion of my identity: it is out of necessity. It must be that this area of my brain is more active when it comes to explaining myself, I don't know. Moreover, it's also my language, isn't it?

—But it will end up being more romantic than practical, even if you don't want it to be. The people who will appreciate your book will be from places away from here and speak Spanish.

—No, I don't think so. Good God, I hope not —I laugh.

And she asked me to explain it better to her one day in person. Okay, maybe, with a bit of luck she'll get the idea when she reads this diary.

Now it's her turn to tell me something: they're getting married. Definitely. They've set a date and everything. Next June. God almighty. I run to call Àlex.

November 2nd

What awful news. Theo Van Gogh, the 47-year-old Dutch film-maker, has died. He has just made the film *0605* about the assassination of the politician, Pim Fortuyn, in May 2002. He was cycling along when he suffered a knife attack. The main suspect is a Moroccan.

Theo van Gogh recently directed a documentary called *Submission*. Both him and the co-director, the liberal minister Ayaan Hirsi Ali, were receiving death threats for this film on Islam. Hirsi Ali, of Somalian origin and an activist for Muslim women's rights had police protection, but Van Gogh had rejected it. A real tragedy for the independent spirits still left in Europe. Some friends and I had been remembering Pim Fortuyn and the way the European parties in power tried to stigmatise him by calling him «extreme right-wing».

The same thing has happened to Fernando Savater and Arcadi Espada. Just for staying away from both the left and right-wing hegemonic parties, they find themselves in a tough no-man's land, susceptible to slander.

The defence of free thinking and reason is up to everyone. We must think of our children and the type of society we will leave behind. We must keep Theo Van Gogh alive in our memories along with so many other people who have fallen in Europe defending reason in the face of fanaticism and, sadly, the carelessness of the parties and forces in power who see dissidence as a hegemonic dispute.

They've put the film-maker's email address online and I send my condolences to his family. I'm very worried.

November 3rd

My «conspirator» colleagues and I have met in the restaurant, El Taxidermista. We were really comfortable in the private room upstairs.

November 8th

Van Gogh comes to mind again. It's becoming a matter of urgency to reconsider whether the multi-cultural model will truly be possible. We need to be aware that a multi-cultural model will include ideas like those of Wangari Maathai, for example. That is not an optimistic thought, but they also say that a pessimist is a well-informed optimist.

Since I am naturally optimistic, I look forward to an ideal future in which we will all share values proven essential for the defence of people's dignity, human rights and improved quality of life. And the only way of coming close to this ideal is by facing up to the truth, whatever it may be, and adopting measures accordingly.

We will only be able to live together when there are no more "cultures" but "civilisation". Anything that cannot be verified or proven, apart from folklore or tradition, is superstition.

November 11th

It seems that Arafat is definitely dead. As my grandmother would say: «May God forgive him».

He'll certainly have his work cut out for him.

November 19th

At the start of May, the newspapers published that Spain was being left out of the UN High Commission on Human Rights. And that Guinea, Kenya, Togo and Sudan were being admitted, countries in

which torture and amputation are carried out frequently by law.

Human Rights Commissions are places that frankly uncommendable countries and individuals can participate in. In the Basque Parliament commission they appointed Josu Ternera, a known criminal. His merit, according to a senior member of the government, was to recognise the «negative» human rights. The same merits of the newly admitted countries. We should celebrate that Spain is not included.

Today, the news says: «The UN staff present a motion of no confidence against Kofi Annan». Naturally, there's a need for high legal authority on a planetary level. As a secular humanist, a universalist, it's what I wish for. But at this moment in time, the United Nations does not respond to the needs of the free countries and open societies. It's an ineffective bureaucracy under a cloud of suspicion. Reforms are of the essence.

December 3rd

«ETA explodes five synchronised bombs in Madrid causing havoc in the holiday exodus.»

That's their way of «talking». And they haven't stopped talking for months. Yet our left insists on talks coming first. But, is it necessary to talk to everyone? Even criminals?

Let's imagine a paramilitary organisation emerging in Spain with the objective of returning the Basque Country, Catalonia and Galicia to a pre-democratic situation by means of terror. That is, returning them to a situation in which the vernacular languages are prohibited, the local governmental institutions disappear, etc. It's

not so far out. If it appears to be, it's because we've forgotten Tejero.

Let's continue with the example. These terrorists assassinate known politicians and nationalist intellectuals, and others who are less nationalist, following the typical strategy of spreading fear to broad sectors of society. In other words, doing exactly what ETA does: deaths, kidnappings, extortions, supermarket bombings... Would we say that these people so open to dialogue would continue to be in this case because «the most important thing is to save human lives»? Would they say what we've heard a million times over about ETA, that «in any case, violence must never be a reason to prevent debate but, on the contrary, an additional cause for it and for the expression of solutions to conflicts»?

Changing the odd word, these are phrases we have heard from eminent nationalists and liberals. Naturally, these same figures would raise their hands to their heads in disbelief in the face of a situation like the one I've posed above. But it would be inconsistent, because what is good for one case should also be good for the other, which is similar.

And what should be said is that by approving negotiation and dialogue, they are implicitly encouraging the appearance of this type of terrorism.

Sometimes, dialogue is quoted without specifying what it's for. To apply nice words and prolong the agony. Dialogue is a way of coming to an agreement or not coming to an agreement. But it is for something. Otherwise, it is nothing. It should be a means to an end, not an end in itself.

December 6th

Day of the Constitution. Anywhere else, it would be a day to celebrate unity. Here, even Maragall is confusing. Let his mother vote for him. The newspaper says:

«THE CATALAN PRESIDENT WILL ALSO BE ABSENT: The nationalist groups that Zapatero leans on are absent from the celebrations of the Day of the Constitution».

The only fireworks are provided by ETA, which synchronises seven explosions in seven cities. At the very least, the Day of the Constitution is important to someone.

The Constitution is a symbol of the Republican spirit that makes the citizen the depositary of the law. It does not favour the nation in the metaphysical sense promoted by the nationalists, and that's why they don't celebrate it. It favours precisely the sense of the nation as a synonym of state.

I am a republican, a universalist. Spain is a superstructure of integration that has given us a common history. And I prefer more than less. Ergo...

December 15th

I stop by the supermarket. My fridge is bare again. And there are just the two of us. We eat like woodlice. I buy a bag of salad; it works out cheaper than buying whole heads of lettuce that I end up throwing away. I entertain myself looking at the milk brands. The ones with calcium, the ones with fatty acids... Next to me a woman is looking at the expiry dates. Her glasses are hanging off the tip of her nose; she looks like a doctor. She's undoubtedly making rational decisions

about what she's going to buy.

The thing is I've just seen her in the pharmacy too. She was asking for a homeopathic product. She said that it had worked wonders for her. Homeopathy has no scientific basis. And the pharmacist, who may also be a believer, will never tell her that.

It's so paradoxical. We go to the supermarket and we're critical with the expiry dates, the components, the additives, etc. We go to buy a medicine and we demand it meet all the legal controls. I'm referring to an official medicine, one that is regulated: we are highly critical of anything that bears the seal of legality. It's funny. We show a healthy distrust for products of ordinary consumption, but we have a sort of blind spot when it comes to the money, efforts or commitments used in treatments or objects that are more or less esoteric. And people appear to be willing to play along with this game.

And that applies to everything. Nobody complains when an astrologist's horoscope predictions don't come true. It's forgotten. But we all admire when he says something that appears to come true. "If he gets it right, he has predicted it" and we think that's fine. Why? Why don't we demand so much of an alternative medical treatment, or a bracelet with magic powers, whereas we do make demands of those who come to fix our washing-machine. What's the reason for these differences?

We are in a period in which we cannot apply the same parameters to a used car salesman that we apply to a peddler of New-Age miracles; in the first instance, you will be congratulated on not allowing yourself to be tricked, but in the second you'll be fiercely criticised for not being open-minded. We have a tendency to stop thinking when the proposal is of a spiritual nature, «alternative» or idealistic. And they do as much damage or more.

Scepticism consists of the habit of asking questions. And it's ex-

tremely healthy. It is when, in the face of some statement, particularly an extraordinary one, someone says: How do you know that? What proof do you have? Could there be any other explanation for this fact? Has an independent person reiterated it? These are questions that science asks itself but that a sceptic can ask themselves too, that is, any ordinary person like one of us.

The woman from the supermarket does it on a daily basis, but perhaps she thinks that the drugs authorised by the Spanish Drug Authority are products by multinationals that are only seeking to increase their own profits. As if Boiron, the company that sells most homeopathic products, were interested in anything other than money.

A sort of alternative Mother Teresa of Calcutta.

December 18th

We're spending this Saturday with family. My parents are old now and we tend to go and stay with them for at least fifteen days. My father, Josep and I are watching television. On the news they talk about the new labelling of genetically modified foodstuffs. I tell my father that I'll read the labels too, not to avoid them but to buy them. That all this is nonsense and that the production of these foods is far better controlled than the rest.

The conversation turns to how humanity has unwittingly changed its coexistence with animals and vegetables through «genetic engineering». I explain to my father that the original corn was a tiny ear before it began to be manipulated by humans.

In these cases, he allows that I'm right (it's practically the only thing), he explains that my grandfather (a farmer from Aragon) was

amazed by how big the sheaves of wheat were in his time and how abundant the crops compared to when he was just a child. He used to say that when his mother had seen wheat like that she had cried for joy.

I ask him what year he's talking about, given that my grandfather was almost a hundred when he died, not too long ago. He says that when he was already living in Barcelona, sometime around the sixties. They used to buy new seeds.

—American—he clarifies—. Never seen the likes before.

They did complain of the price, however. But in spite of everything, they were worth it. Even though they had to re-buy them every time they planted, given that it was sterile wheat.

The same way people complain nowadays: the dependence on seeds that have to be bought from multinationals is one of the main objections to the GMOs. But, from what my father says, this was already happening long before the creation of genetic engineering. And even so, my grandmother had cried to see such huge crops and the money they earned from them.

It was a good improvement.

We frequently find anti-scientific and pseudoscientific stances among the theoreticians and leaders of ecological movements. In the case of the genetically modified organisms (GMO), excessive zeal in the application of the so-called «precautionary principle» goes beyond the scientifically reasonable in the assessment of the possible risks. The idea of demanding proof of the «null hypothesis», total security, is an over-used scientific absurdity.

The reason many ecologists reject the GMOs is the exaggeration of the dangers of genetically contaminating crops located more or less close by, which could compromise the biodiversity of the environment to a greater or lesser degree. It is also based on the disproportion-

tionate estimate of the hypothetically negative effects on consumer health. On top of this, we have the prophets and propaganda-mongers of the anti-globalisation and alternative world supporters who reject the imposition of a «seeds monopoly» and other associated products —such as specific pesticides— by a few demonic, biotechnology multinationals in the agriculture and food industries (among which, Monsanto is Lucifer, as is McDonald's in the restaurant sector), which would condemn the poor and underdeveloped countries to poverty and hunger.

These beliefs and political approaches have penetrated deeply in the public opinion of many European countries and have driven moratoriums in the EU, occasionally unjustified, and long, hard and very costly processes for the approval of GM crops. This strategy, based on an attempt to fence in the field, is likely to end up triggering the opposite effect. When the GMOs become widespread and generalised, which is practically inevitable, there will be a far greater monopoly than there is now. In fact, only a few, very powerful biotechnology companies will have been capable of overcoming the obstacles of European and other countries, which demand an extreme interpretation of the precautionary principle in research, development and sale of their products. When this comes to pass, they will end up having total control of the market.

This European situation, forced by a credulous public opinion that has been conveniently manipulated to generate a blind faith in irrational and superstitious beliefs, makes it very possible that we will be left at a scientific and technological disadvantage compared to other countries, mainly the United States of America. When numerous NGOs object to the donations from the United States to African countries suffering a terrible famine based on the false and absurd belief that the products offered, due to the fact of being

GMOs, are harmful to health, we are no longer talking about a possible problem of technological backwardness, however, but a serious error, almost a crime.

December 22nd

We walk along the Rambla towards the Balcó. Quite a stylish girl walks in front of us with a dalmatian. Suddenly, the dog gets into the right position and poohs. Right there in the middle of the street. But the girl takes out some paper and scoops it up. Not a bag; a rigid, frankly unsuitable, type of paper. She almost gets dirty herself. The dog walks a few metres forward and does the same thing again. We can't look anymore: she makes us nervous with that useless bit of paper. She has good intentions, but a precarious method.

There's a Maghrebi family sitting on a bench looking at her in astonishment. I understand that in their culture dogs are considered impure animals. That must be why they're staring like this. And yet I have here a quite refined girl, who probably has someone to do the housework for her, maybe even someone Maghrebi, who scoops her dog's poop.

Cultural clashes on the Rambla.

December 26th

Awful news. We're celebrating Saint Stephen's Day with my parents, Àlex and Alba. Moreover, these two have decided to tie the knot and we have to discuss the details. We're in the middle of all that when we hear that there's been a terrible earthquake, causing a tsunami

that has wiped away part of the coast of Southeast Asia. There might be up to 24,000 deaths.

It's odd, but two days ago I read a good article on tsunamis in a magazine. And, as I was walking along the Larga beach I was terrified there was going to be one. They can also happen in the Mediterranean. I was looking at the train tracks in anxiety: it's a definitive barrier, with its barbed wire. I wouldn't be able to jump over it and reach higher ground.

I got this obsession. But I didn't mention it to Josep, who always complains that I infect him with my fixations.

December 27th

It's Monday and I've invited Elisabet to lunch. A Christmas lunch and she's ordered green beans with potatoes. She says she's on a diet. Maybe she does look a bit slimmer. Prettier somehow.

December 28th

Today it was her turn to invite me. But for tea. She «can't cook to save her life», she says.

We sit in her comfortable living-room and she makes me tea. The sun is setting and it's pleasant in the warm room. It's a moment for privacy and confidences. National-tinted confidences. She tells me she lived in Valencia for a few years and that the *blaveros*¹⁰⁰ made her

100. *TN*: Blaverism (Valencian: blaverisme) is a pro-Valencia and anti-Catalan ideology in the Valencian Community, Spain that emerged with the Spanish transition to democracy after the death of Francisco Franco, and it is characterised

life impossible.

I didn't know that. She really is an adventurer. Watch out for the people from Valencia. I remember when I was twenty and on holidays in a little hotel in a village in Teruel, bordering Castellón, I met a girl from Valencia who was a bit older than me. She seemed nice until I got it into my head to tell her that Catalan and Valencian were the same language. It was a miracle she didn't hit me.

I tell Elisabet the story and how I was so indignant. She agrees. She says she was forced to leave. Says she was right to go and that it's what people should do if they're not happy. Her neighbours on the same floor, for instance. And she explains that her neighbours are really rude. They crucify her at all the condominium meetings, write the minutes in Spanish and even go so far as to tell her that they're sick of the «Catalans and Catalan».

But I'm not so sure that anybody needs to go anywhere.

—But they're from here too, aren't they? They're rude, but they have the right to their land—I say.

—The land is ours, it belongs to the Catalans.

—How come?

—There's such a thing as natural right.

—What does «natural right» mean?

She goes quiet. She can't remember. She studied law at university. She studied Law but never practiced: she inherited a textiles company and now she has a series of stores that make her a lot of money.

She says that the «natural right» is something that exists, like the right to life or self-government. And I tell her that there's no such

by its opposition to Joan Fuster's book *Nosaltres, els valencians* (1962), which revived the concept of the Catalan Countries which includes Valencia. They consider Fuster's ideas as an imperialist Catalan nationalist movement that tries to impose Catalan domination upon Valencia. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Blaverism>.

thing as a «natural right», that people are born with a nose, feet, womb... but not with rights; that rights are granted by each society by agreement. And that each society may grant different rights, according to its laws.

But she disagrees. I'm not sure whether she believes this «natural right» derives from the language, the history, the territory or what. Moreover, there's a paradox here. If she thinks that what grants this right is language (from the way she talks, that's how it would appear, but she has never quite clarified it for me) and that Valencian is the same language as Catalan, then she was as Catalan as them and had as much right as them to stay (in Valencia) in spite of the problems. If it is history, and she believes that Valencia forms part of the Païses Catalanes or Catalan Countries, then it was also her land and she shouldn't have had to leave.

Since she says she left because she was the one «from abroad», deep down she doesn't believe that language or history determine belonging or the natural right to a place. Hence, her rude, Spanish neighbours are also Catalans and she cannot even consider kicking them out. She can report them if they break a law, but she cannot ask for any deportation.

But I drink my tea and don't argue any more. The memory still stings; it's not worth it.

December 30th

They've passed the law by which homosexuals can legally marry, although they're a minority and it's not among the major concerns of the Spanish people. You won't find me raising any objections to this news: I want my rights to be extended to everyone; no asymmetries

for historical reasons or to set up house with one person or another. But even though 75% of the citizens of Catalonia declare themselves to be as Catalan as they are Spanish, the socialists took down the Spanish flag in the majority of the town councils on the Day of the Diada. And Patxi López¹⁰¹ has presented his candidacy to become President of the Basque Country among Basque flags and without a single Spanish one flying.

The socialists from the «rest of Spain».

January 6th

De Juana Chaos, the ETA member, could be released from prison after serving only eighteen years of the three thousand he was sentenced to. Brilliant. At the end of December, three deputies from Batasuna gave the majority of votes that allowed Ibarretxe to carry out his plan. In this case, Maragall criticised them. A real gesture.

What can people who negotiate with criminals be thinking of? Or what's worse: how to understand the people who see what they're doing and still vote for them? The ideology? Where is critical sense gone? How can they not see what's happening? Do they not see the reality?

Throughout history, people seem to have been willing to accept

101. *TN*: Francisco Javier “Patxi” López (born 4 October 1959) is a Spanish socialist politician who was President of the Autonomous Community of the Basque Country from 2009 to 2012 and President of the Congress of Deputies, the lower house of the Spanish Government, in the short-lived eleventh legislature from January 2016 to July 2016. He was also Secretary-General of the Socialist Party of Euskadi - Euskadiko Ezkerra (PSE-EE), the Basque affiliate of the Spanish Socialist Workers' Party (PSOE), from 2002 to 2014. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Congress_of_Deputies.

authority when it comes to judging questions of fact. Both the authority of the living, organised into governments or sects, and the authority of the dead, expressed in tradition or in the sacred texts. I'm not only saying that they've bowed to authority in what they claim they believe (which could be attributed to reasonable prudence), but also in what they actually believe.

In John Glover's book *Humanity: A Moral History of the Twentieth Century*, he provides us with a brilliant description of how this works. In George Orwell's novel, *1984*, his hero Winston Smith had written that «freedom is the freedom to say that two plus two equals four». The inquisitor, O'Brien takes this as a challenge. Using torture, he easily persuades Smith that two plus two equals five, but that is not O'Brien's goal. As the pain increases, Smith so desperately wants the torture to stop that he succeeds in convincing himself for a moment that two plus two could be five. O'Brien is satisfied and the torture stops for a while.

As Glover says: «Authority does not usually operate so efficiently, but even the threat of slight pain can have considerable effects... There is enough pain for us to be our own O'Briens».

What springs to mind is the ostensible acceptance of the shameful acts and crimes in the Nazi period by «Hitler's willing executors», as Daniel Jonah Goldhagen would put it. Of the peaceful German citizens.

Less dramatically, perhaps this is why so many people in Catalonia and the Basque Country are capable of believing the asymmetric claims, the historical rights and these terrible «differences» that only they can see, are progressive. People capable of going to drink «beers on the footprints of old assassinations» as if it were the most normal thing in the world, as another contributor to the blog said in relation to San Sebastián.

Like Glover says, marginalization is a «lesser evil». You can choose to take a side and be ignored. Maybe it's not such a big thing, but year after year it becomes very wearisome.

January 12th

When we speak of language, the ethno-linguists and philologists with political interests seek out differences and do not wish to see what they all have in common: the innate generative grammar, that is, those devices we come into the world with and that provide the same form of language-learning to all humans.

In an open society like ours, with the socioeconomic conditions and rights and freedoms inherent to the Western world for all citizens, bilingualism has two aspects. On the one hand, it is an advantage: theoretically it increases general cognitive capacities and facilitates new language acquisition. On the other, it confronts two languages that inevitably compete with each other.

The minority language, Catalan in this case, is the weakest as the force of a language is related to the number of people who use it and the economic, technological, cultural, etc. resources of the society that speaks it. In any case, there will always be one language that is imposed over the other, whether in the Spanish, European or world context.

Humans have an innate sense of when there is a need to communicate and when there isn't, of how to understand and make ourselves understood by the other. Linguistic diversity is not per se either a good or a bad idea: it's a reality, in the same way the earth revolves around the sun. Language extinction must be analysed pragmatically. With tenderness but realism. Otherwise, and bearing in

mind that around 90% of the world's languages are more or less at risk of extinction, we would never stop weeping.

The decline in linguistic plurality, inevitable in a globalised world, is a misfortune compensated by the ease of communication that the shared languages provides us with and which concerns the professional linguists, ethno-linguists and human language historians, more than the everyday citizen. Or those who make their livings by instilling fear with apocalyptic threats.

Diversity blossoms in isolation —let's not forget New Guinea— and that is always the fruit of a lack of development or of war. The trend towards a single language is nevertheless the result of love and not war.

A sensible policy, that fosters persuasive and not punitive measures will enable the minority language to stay alive, though increasingly hybridized with the most widespread. The surest way of triggering the extinction of a language in the short term is to maintain its purity (that never truly exists) by force. If hybridization and interbreeding are allowed (all those imported terms that contaminate the Spanish of Spanish speakers here, and all the words we Catalan speakers use and are told are incorrect or 'Spanish-isms' in Catalan), our language will thrive until the end of time.

But it is absurd to try and constantly cleanse it of Spanish contamination and vice versa. Some battles may be cruelly and painfully won, but never the war.

On the other hand, it is not true to say that the disappearance of a language implies the disappearance of a way of seeing the world. The people from Navarre, Andalusia or Caceres all speak the same language yet have a clearly differentiated culture in many respects. Margall may preach, but there is no «Catalan way» of seeing the world if this implies a sort of spirit that is channelled through language.

January 14th

I turned on the television while I was having breakfast this morning. The programme was *Saber vivir* and they were talking about dental health. From what I could see, they had just shown photos of a healthy mouth belonging to a young, smiley girl sitting on a chair with a man in a white coat beside her, whom I assume was the dentist. And this is the memorable part. To my surprise, the presenter asks the girl to stand up.

It's not possible, I tell myself. But it is. Just as I saw it coming! The girl, who's really pretty, dressed in close-fitting clothes without being brash, obliges, giving a glimpse of her midriff in the process. And the presenter says that extras—I think that, and not model, is the word he used—sometimes collaborate with the programme and that he had asked her to stand up so that we could all appreciate her beauty. A completely incongruous comment on a medical programme, in my opinion.

This programme, *Saber Vivir*, has a great many virtues, but also some incredibly Victorian habits. And I'm not referring to the girl episode, which was not very appropriate but not so serious. I'm referring to what happened straight after when the journalist, Fernando Ónega, sarcastically commented on a news item from the papers. Apparently, someone claims to have detected a gene for an elevated, neocortical type, aptitude. And they went on to talk about the so-called God gene again. Naturally, the fact that an innate mechanism is suspected to exist for the universal tendency to attribute divine origin to the unknown (even the known: see the news about how Muslim and Hindu leaders attribute the Asian tsunami to God's anger) makes it impossible to directly point the finger at «a gene». If the news were that simple, the jibe would have been acceptable.

What is reprehensible is the way they took advantage of the subject to preach irrationality, exhorting the public to not give the least credit to science with reasons like «we were taught how to pray by our mothers» and that the spirit is something unquestionable and defended by «decent people». These were not the exact words, I wasn't taking notes. But the message stuck in my mind after the initial astonishment.

I believe it is neither appropriate nor fair for a programme on the national TV channel, *La Primera*, should call on viewers to support a particular stance. I found it inconsiderate and discriminatory against non-believers and completely domineering.

January 16th

As we're eating some really good oranges, we hear this ad on television: «As winter gets closer, you need vitamins». And they sing: «Have Danao, it means you've had breakfast now».

Vitamins are always good for you. That's why we eat oranges. The ad doesn't say why we need vitamins in winter, but the person who created it already knows how the public will interpret it: it's cold in winter, people get colds and Vitamin C is good to cure them. It's been proven that vitamin C does not exert any action against a cold. Or rather: there is no proof that this vitamin has any effect on the common cold. It is not possible to demonstrate that something is not true, but to demonstrate that it is, proof is necessary.

There is none. But it is an indestructible story. It is perpetuated without any need for speech. Which is why the advertisers don't mention either cold or cure. They have no need to and they save themselves problems. Advertisers are very cunning.

January 21st

I went to Barcelona and met up with a friend for a chat. He claims to be a «lefty», PSOE militant.

We're dipping croissants in a delicious hot chocolate in the Valor café, on Rambla Catalunya, when he comes out with «the left wing has never had anything to do with terrorism».

—What? —I say to him—. I'm remembering the fraternal relations between Izquierda Unida and the FARC. Plus, when has ETA ever said it was anything other than left-wing?

They always leave me feeling flabbergasted. When some speak of the left wing, they speak of an impeccable concept that cannot be at the root of any evil. And in reality, if anything is evil it's because it is right-wing. When Stalin financed terrorist groups all over the world, he must also have been right-wing. The left has nothing to do with terrorism? In the last thirty years there have been practically no right-wing terrorist group actions.

—The difference between left and right is a question of nuances nowadays, and emotional circumstances, and the actions and approaches of each overlap. There are economic and social measures taken by the socialists which, in pure theory, would be considered right-wing; and there will be and are actions and legislations implemented by the right that could be considered part of the left's strategic programme —I tell him.

—The way I see it, the right would provide refuge to traditional, pragmatic, conservative people who favour the use of force and censorship over persuasion. Lovers of order when it comes to customs, especially of the sexual variety. Pessimistic when it comes to man («man is a wolf in the eyes of man»), advocates of historical rights or class privileges.

—Like the nationalists?

—The nationalists would also be included here —he concedes unhappily— and the people close to the armies, and the believers in traditional religions.

—Okay —I accept— and the meritocracy and excellence would be some of its more modern traits. A more traditional one would be promoting free enterprise in the face of the levelling power of the State, wouldn't it?

—Yes —he states—. And the left, for its part, would encompass the values of Enlightenment, laicism, reason in the face of religious (rather than political) dogma, man's malleability and the social systems, social justice and the redistribution of wealth, the release of people from traditional (socially generated) «roles», especially the woman and the socially excluded groups. Liberal in its morals, understood as sexual morals.

—It also encompasses Marxist ideas, and promotes a strong and interventionist State that penalises the free economic initiative of the citizens.

He doesn't like that so much, in spite of being a basic and exclusive trait of the left. We look at each other in silence. We both have the feeling of talking for talking's sake. Deep down, we know that this dichotomy is increasingly false. Many of this country's citizens would identify with elements from both of these lists. Moreover, they are based on last-century stereotypes, without including the reality that the perversion of some of these suppositions has shown us, like the dangers of nationalism and the resounding failure of Marxism. The sciences of men and society have also destroyed foundations as consubstantial to the left as the radical malleability of man and the social systems.

But once you've lived in the paradise of unassailable bounty, it's

very hard to go back to being a common citizen, with their virtues and failings. My friend defends his historical, «acquired rights», to the point of saying this:

—Let's see, I'd use the term «extreme right» for those political actions or policies that are essentially anti-democratic or excluding. Between you and me, in my party there are people who are really right wing because they would even be capable of censoring the press.

—Holy crap!!! To hell with the lot of them, darling! —I say, in admiration—. That's a good one. It turns out that even the fascists in your own party are... right-wing. I'm in shock.

—Naturally.

—Naturally? No offence but... do you realise what you're saying? If there are anti-democratic people inside PSOE, we're talking about people who are also «lefty», for goodness sake. Let every man face up to their own responsibilities. Stalin, Hebe de Bonafini, Batasuna, Gara, Izquierda Unida and its fraternal ties to FARC-EP, Grapo, Frap, Carlos... were they all, in reality, right-wing?

—I wouldn't disagree. But in my opinion, it would be a mistake to break up the traditional left-right political game.

—There are no flies on you, that's for sure. You have just hit the nail on the head all by yourself there: the reason you maintain the left-right myth following the fall of Marxism is in order to make sure you always have someone else to blame.

—And what's the alternative in your opinion?

—Honesty and for each individual to accept their responsibilities.

—Zaplana, who is a member of PP, met with the FARC when he was president in Valencia.

—That's true. It was shameful. That's why I'm telling you that nowadays, to speak of left and right is nothing more than using

self-interested adjectives. Let each one of us be judged for what we do, not what we're labelled as.

—Aznar, right-wing, went to meet Gadhafi —he says triumphantly.

—And all those who celebrated the fall of the Twin Towers were left-wing, like Hebe de Bonafini, a dimwit who claims to be a lefty and who's been given a grant from the Spanish public administration, that we all pay for with our taxes. Those who made ridiculous claims about the September 11th attack such as the fact that it was «the poor's response to the first world oppression» were left-wing.

And, from that point on, the conversation gets completely heated.

January 22nd

The *Asociación Víctimas del Terrorismo*¹⁰² has been representing all those affected by terrorism for years, whatever their political leanings. The most significant people who have come out in its defence have been from both PSOE and PP. Today, a lot of newspapers have accused it of being almost far-right because a few who couldn't control themselves insulted Bono at a protest in Madrid.

This association's biggest handicap versus the new March 11th association created by the Government is that the people it represents had the misfortune of not all dying at once. They were never worthy enough to be assigned a High Commissioner.

January 24th

102. *TN*: The Spanish Association for Victims of Terrorism.

Why am I not a nationalist? The word nation only makes sense as either a synonym of state or in reference to a group stripped of its rights by a non-democratic government.

During Franco's dictatorship, Catalonia could be called a nation because many of our rights as individuals were not respected: the right to language, for instance, was one of the most important. When a democratic regime was established that encompassed the citizen's will, the concept of «nation» no longer made sense: without oppression there is no nation.

In spite of this, nationalist parties were created in Catalonia that initially seemed to be just extensions of the administrative divisions of the territory, but with a stronger symbolic weight.

As a result, the term's capacity to sentimentally move the people was lethal and political opportunism emerged. A nation is only politically useful if it is subjugated, and Catalonia was already an autonomous region with a considerable level of decentralization and citizens who no longer needed to act as a group but rather as individuals. In addition, nobody was subjugated anymore: they were more like a supportive travel companion along with the rest of the Spaniards during the long night of Francoism. What happens, however, when there is no oppression?

The answer is that it's invented. That's what has been done by the nationalist parties during more than thirty years: they have gradually created the essential enemy. And it is demonstrable: there has been an increase in the number of people who consider themselves conveniently oppressed and believe things as outlandish as the Civil War was a war between Spaniards and Catalans (or Basques), or that there are some mysterious differences between us and the rest of the Spanish people, despite the person stating this being called García¹⁰³.

103. *TN:* *García* is one of the most common surnames throughout Spain.

The idea of nationalism within the European regions or democracies is negative. A nationalist party in the heart of a democratic framework must, necessarily, invent a grudge for itself where there are none. During the convergent era, it appeared that a balance between the cultivation of an identity and the feeling of belonging to a broader community like Spain was possible. It was an illusion. It is not possible to uphold common sense on a bed of irrationality and confusion. And from that theoretical good faith of the first few years, we have gone on to sow the seeds of vested hatred directly. And we are destroying our children's future.

If a nation is not possible without tyranny, then the tyranny is invented. The hatred, or the opportunistic need for hatred comes before the reasons. The reasons for the hatred, as history has shown so often, and as the anthropologists or psychologists keep repeating, can be elaborated a posteriori. The inventory of anti-Spanish grudges is longer now than it was thirty years ago, when we were closer to the dictatorship.

The concept of nation in a democracy and with reference to a region is by nature an incitement to hatred.

January 26th

Today they are commemorating sixty years since the liberation of Auschwitz. It is also Holocaust Day. They just mention it in passing on the television.

I go out onto the terrace. There's an amazing full moon, very high up in the sky. Maybe it needs a day to be completely full, but it's spectacular and, despite the cold, I ask Josep to come and see it from the Balcó. By the time we get there, it's already too high in the sky

to make the most attractive composition, but its light forms a sort of matte ice platform on the horizon that shatters into thousands of shiny fragments floating on the sea as far as the beach. Like a torrent of comets.

Jews, Hebrews, Israelis... I won't forget either and I will endeavour to make sure my loved ones don't forget either.

January 27th

The *Carmel* neighbourhood almost sinks. It's terrifying. All those people left without any material past. What a drama.

January 31st

People turn out in masses to vote in Iraq after the media going on about how nobody will turn up at the voting stations.

February 3rd

Since I'm not a believer, there's always some friend or other who reproaches me that atheists are incapable of explaining the meaning of existence, given that we can't use God or the afterlife.

Like my friend Consuelo did today at the end of our long telephone conversation:

—The need to find meaning in the world and the universe is proof that there is intention behind them —she assured me.

—Not necessarily —I answered her—. Neither the world, nor

life, nor man, nor the universe necessarily have any meaning or intention. It's the human brain that searches for this meaning. In reality, we're searching machines: we establish patterns and cause-effect relationships almost automatically.

—I'd say that the interest in meaning, in the point of the world and life, doesn't seem to have a very adaptative function, and may even be negative.

—It does, Consuelo. The brain assumes everything that happens, happens for a reason. And that man has managed to survive thanks to these prophecies. If a human sees a footprint in the mud, they feel the need to establish a connection with a cause that their life may depend on: a lion, for instance.

I don't know whether I've convinced her. Almost definitely not. Even though I didn't dwell on the «church burner» part of what she said to me. We have such metaphysical conversations while Josep tells me that if I don't hang up he'll have dinner without me.

The search for meaning is not a sign of the Creator's existence: it is absolutely adaptative. For thousands of years, man often got the causes of the effects right, but to understand those things that he couldn't put his finger on and attributed to divinity (lightning, the stars, infectious diseases, etc.), he had to wait for the instruments provided by science and scientific reason. The thing is that sometimes, there isn't a reason for everything or it's not possible to determine the cause. That's when the brain invents it. It even happens subconsciously in our brain's operations.

For example, our eye's blind spot is ignored by our brain, that fills in the missing information with what's happening around us. And when it comes to psychological or social constructions this is an inveterate and common practise. My friend speaks of the «mystery of the world and of life», but we can see how religions, that were the

main providers of arguments in this area, have been forced to lower the reach and detailedness of their assumptions because of scientific discoveries. The theoretical mysteries were only mysterious because of ignorance and their players (gods, demons, etc.) were not happy to be provisional conjectures or theories, like in the case of our science, but rather they were dogmas. And arguing with them was a very dangerous business.

The world does not appear to come with any intention like the ones a believer expects. It is up to the people to choose the intentions or purposes we have, we are the only ones who can give meaning, not so much to the world, but to our own actions, given that we have the will to do so.

In my modest opinion, there is no other meaning than ethics, which are absolutely a part of this world. I don't believe a sceptic or a scientist discard mystery (if this is synonymous of God), but rather like the astronomer Laplace once said, it is not a premise they contemplate. Whoever affirms has the weight of proof.

To worry about mystery is the believer's innate task. It is the effects of science that pare away the layers of mystery. But the kernel at its heart is eternal, because it feeds off the need to believe that the mystery exists, that there is a being with a purpose, a programme, an agenda as the politicians put it, and if one day someone gets close enough the world will be enlightened and it will fuse with its creator.

Or something like that.

—Coming!

February 4th

I speak to Mariona and tell her about my conversation with Con-

suelo yesterday. She doesn't know Consuelo, but from the things I sometimes tell her, she has her pegged as a sort of fundamentalist. I'm not saying she isn't one, but it makes me laugh that she, who believes in some strange things, finds the other one over the top. I don't think they're all that different from each other, to be honest, although Mariona who considers herself a liberal wouldn't agree. Not to mention nationalism or all that «oppression» that, as she always says, us Catalans are theoretically suffering. Her belief in fortune tellers is enough for me to be dealing with. I know she goes to them. She used to tell me about it before. Not anymore though.

—You attach too much importance to it —she says.

Too much importance. I don't think so. I know what I'm talking about. I know how dangerous irrationality is. I had my brushes with the beyond on Maresma street, a story that deeply affected me. Not because I believed; fortunately, I was already vaccinated against the other life and its inhabitants. The reason was the disturbing experience of seeing how a myth was woven out of the most sensitive and private details of my life. And, what's even worse, my son's. I was affected by the shameless plundering of a privacy I never wished to make public. To witness, in disbelief, the distortion of a series of circumstances we had been victims of, seeing how they were forced to fit with an archetype in which the main player was redeemed —and I considered this just— for the romanticism of the most beautiful mistake of all: to die young.

All of this gave me a feeling of defencelessness. Of facing an implacable dynamic force. Of an immemorial virus. Of verifying the futility of fighting against the mechanism of myth creation. I was never afraid, I just felt offended by the eruption of a shower of vulture-like men and women into my most private existence. And the terrible irony that I, who in my own way fought against supersti-

tion and obscurantism, won the prize, the lottery of having to live through my very own ghost story.

February 5th

I think I need some distraction. I'm feeling down. The memories of those days distress me. A while back we had spoken with some friends from Tarragona about going for lunch in one of those Michelin-star restaurants. Today, Saturday, we're going with our neighbours, Rosa Maria and Cisco, and Maria Carme and Xavier to *Racó de Can Fabes*. It will do me good to take a break from routine and get away for the day.

Everything is exquisite, but the bill, though expected, is astronomical. When we pass by the La Roca Outlets, both Rosa Maria and I remark that we could have bought something to wear with what we've spent and the pleasure would have lasted us far longer.

And Josep and I are thinking of Cervantes' play, *El retablo de las maravillas*, in which they laugh at the «marvellous» restaurants.

February 9th

I'm walking along the Rambla when a great big yellow ball bears down on me and I jump in fright. Good God. It's Eudald Carbonell, wearing a canary-yellow coat. I had never seen it before. He's stopped me to say hello and tell me that the projects are underway.

He looks so interesting and is such a fine specimen of a man. And wouldn't you bloody well know it, here am I dragging the shopping trolley along. Yes, dragging it. I'm going to the market, as I have

nothing in the house. The sexiest object in the world, the shopping trolley. I try to hide it while he looks at me with those smouldering eyes.

But it's pointless. He's seen me as a housewife now; there's no getting away from it. We arrange to phone each other for a chat.

In the afternoon, maybe to make up for the shopping trolley image, I decide to go to the hairdressers'. Housewifely remedies for housewifely problems. When I sit in front of the mirror, I pick up a newspaper and read: «ETA causes a car bomb to explode right in the middle of Madrid's fair area, shortly before the King's visit».

No way! I hadn't even realized. What a day. More bombs! Am I the only one who thinks that since we've been talking so much about dialogue, these people have become even stronger?

I get depressed. I've been feeling a bit fragile for the last few days. The hairdresser insists again on the re-structuring product. I tell her for the umpteenth time that I doubt it will do anything special for me.

—The only re-structurer that I've heard is reliable is the tele-transporter of the Star Trek spaceship, and it hasn't always worked properly —I say.

—Sorry?

It doesn't matter. The news about the bomb has exhausted me. I'm tired. To put an end to it for once and for all, I say yes, fine. But I threaten them: if I don't see any results... they take no notice of me, obviously. They will honestly think my hair looks better, and I will honestly think it looks the same.

The owner tells me, half laughing, that I don't believe anything. I

say that I don't unless there are results. But in the end, she's managed to get me to buy the bloody restructurer.

Who resists, wins.

February 10th

I don't see anything special about my hair. The restructuring is of my wallet more so than anything else. I didn't look at what they charged me but I calculate that, at least, 10 euros. It's not a fortune, but given that the result is close to zero, it's a veritable donation to the world of abracadabra.

It's amazing how they manage to cheat us women! And men too, who also cave in. There are doctors and theoretical beauty doctors who are like rock stars. I read in the newspaper: «The latest fashion among the rich: the cocktail by Doctor Chams that works as well as a facelift».

All these characters share traits with other miracle traders: psyches, quacks, tarot card readers... Maybe because they also offer the impossible or unverifiable. This Dr. Chams has a lot of the necessary ingredients: a mysterious or exotic origin (he's Iranian!, but one of the real ones, not like my friend March; the latest fashion), he has a whole list of celebrities to give him credibility and an elitist aura (like our own VIP Isabel Preysler, a few famous bankers, the odd aristocrat too, etc.) and the promise of eternal youth.

The potions are almost always a mix of illusion and ordinary (maybe even illegal) pharmacology. And if they cost the ladies (or gentlemen) an arm and a leg, the results are far more spectacular and visible. It's a common psychological law. My ex-husband, who was a urologist, used always say that once you've performed a rectal

examination on a guy, he's yours for life.

The same applies when the cost is daylight robbery: nobody can accept that they've been cheated blind. If it's expensive and you've paid for it, it has to be good. And what Dr. Chams sells is very expensive: 1500 euros per session. He says he only uses vitamins, but from what the article says there's a suspicion of Botox and other products. Bad news for people with allergies.

These treatments get results for two reasons: the placebo effect (that's all to do with the power of suggestion) and common inflammation. A doctor friend who's very knowledgeable says that this good facial appearance is almost always the result of the passing inflammation of the skin after injecting it. That's why they have to go to see the quack so often: when the inflammation decreases, the skin relaxes again.

It's the same reason for which our faces look good after sunbathing for slightly too long. Apart from changing colour, our skin also suffers an inflammation that lasts a few days. The face is firm and shining. But it's an illusion. That's why the women and men who have a very deep tan no longer look so good: their skin is just blackened and that's it.

February 17th

I accompany Alba to her wedding dress fitting. She reminds me that I promised to make a speech on the day of the wedding. Although she does ask for it not to be too long.

February 19th

Yesterday I was watching a programme on the crimes of Ciudad Juárez claiming that the victims of a lot of these crimes were young girls of a specific age and appearance. A voice-on-off warned that they may have favoured the chilling snuff movie market, those films that theoretically show murders happening live.

That night, I read the comment made by the Australian minister for Communications on a draft bill against these films in the book by Benjamin Bradford, *Media Mythmakers*. Bradford says:

[...] he specifically mentioned these films as a reason to censor Internet access for Australians: «It is not impossible to find recipes for bomb-making or paedophile lists. And if there isn't total restriction, it won't be impossible to access *snuff movies*».

Fortunately, all this concern is in vain: snuff movies do not exist. They are an urban myth, after decades searching for them in line with a governmental order, not one of these films has ever appeared.

No proof has ever been found of the real existence of these films. It is one more of the many urban myths.

A terrible myth.

February 24th

What a circus! Maragall is accusing CiU of receiving 3% in commissions on all public works! And he says it in front of everyone, in the Parliament. What's fascinating about the case is that Mas demands he take it back and insinuates that if he doesn't, the improvement of the Statute of Autonomy of Catalonia might not go ahead.

They have no shame.

March 11th

Sad, sad memories. I've been going over the notes from a year ago.

March 13th

It's Sunday night. The days are longer. It's almost seven and still completely daylight. Bright.

I'm out on the terrace. I'm lucky to have a really big space that looks over the Rambla. Leaning on the rail, I see a couple of Muslims pass by. She's young, slim and looks pretty. She's very rigorously attired: long tunic, trousers underneath and a scarf over her head. She's holding the arm of a guy who seems very attentive to her and has a very long beard.

Three older men are behind them, they look to be Maghrebi, and a girl and boy of about eight who are playing. I can't say for sure, but it looks as if they're "chaperones". They go out for a walk with the family controlling them. A few years ago I would have found it charming and ultra multi-cultural. Now, after September 11th and the attack in Madrid, they scare me more. Why? Because I know that these in particular are not lightweight Muslims, they don't believe in democracy. I know they don't believe in freedom of beliefs. They don't believe that laws are made by man and that we can change them by mutual agreement. They don't believe in the freedom of the press. They don't believe that men and women have the same rights. They don't believe in pluralism. They don't believe in freely educating men and women.

We believe they have the right to build their mosques and preach their beliefs in our countries. Yet in the most extreme Muslim coun-

tries, they have kicked out Jews and Christians, they do not permit churches to be built and occasionally they murder those who promote a religion other than their own. And worst of all: we don't believe the young should be indoctrinated until they become soldiers, as we've seen happen in Palestine, whereas they do. We consider it our duty to help Muslims when they are victims of oppression; whereas they are not willing to help an infidel, let alone an atheist, even if their life is in danger.

I don't see why we have to open the door to people who are not our friends. It scares me. Friday was the anniversary of March 11th. And the politicians look the other way. A week ago, Moratinos suggested negotiating the removal of Hamas from the European list of terrorist organisations when less than a month ago a suicide bomber sacrificed himself in a disco in Tel Aviv, killing four people and wounding heaps more.

I remember the promenade of this city and our lovely walk as I watch the pretty, veiled bride and her court of vigilant relatives move away. I go back inside.

March 16th

Sometimes, when I get up in the morning I experience a sort of vertigo from the sense of repetition that marks the days. Open the window, go to the bathroom, make tea, turn on CNN to listen to something in English, turn on the computer, read emails and the newspapers... frighten the pigeons away...

I always remember the film *Groundhog Day*. The lead actor is Bill Murray, who plays a weather man sent to a small American city by a television channel to make a report on Groundhog Day.

For some esoteric reason, the world gets stuck and the protagonist enters a sort of time warp in which every day is the same day. Given that he can't do anything else, the character played by Murray decides to refine his strategy to seduce Andie MacDowell in the twenty-four hours he has, day after day.

It's a film with very agnostic (or atheist) undertones. The way I read it, the message is that there is no other world and that an intelligent man can find meaning and hope in the beauty of the only day of his life. Each day is a human life that gives direction to the progress of humanity as a whole, if we choose the best strategy. In the sense that, according to Shermer, we improve the world.

Yes. Our time span is brief and consciousness an accidental gift in a blind and direction-less process. But this confers a totally precious and unique character on existence. Our own and everybody else's. And deepens our responsibility.

When I get out of bed, I open the window, I drink my... tea... I also have a glance at a still from this film that I have framed in the library.

It's become part of the routine, but it always makes me feel better.

March 24th

The people from ERC want to stop October 12th from being the feast-day of the «Spanish State». And I don't understand it. If they're not Spanish, what do they care about the foreigners having whatever feast-days they feel like?

April 2nd

We went for lunch with my friend who's a firm believer and practically a fundamentalist, according to Mariona. Today the Pope died and she's feeling very glum.

Josep is a very close friend of her husband's and they start to talk about old times. After lunch, while her daughter naps, she and I have a cup of tea and some chocolates she still has left over from last Christmas in a sort of small greenhouse looking over the garden.

I express my condolences for the death of the Pope. I remind her, however, that more or less a year ago she went way too far with me, calling me a «church-burning atheist». After the necessary clarifications, my friend gathers momentum and hits on Chesterton himself with her comments:

—Like Chesterton said, when a person no longer believes in God, they can probably believe in anything else. I'm scandalised by the amount of friends of mine who see fortune-tellers or astrologists. Catholicism prohibits that sort of thing.

—We're in agreement on that. I mean, finding it absurd to visit fortune-tellers and astrologists. But both you and Chesterton, whom I greatly admire by the way, protest that the decline of an ideology that you share should lead man to adopt any other of a lower order. By ideology, I mean a set of prefabricated dogmas that provide meaning and answers to the questions that the human being raises about existence in general.

—Well yes. I wouldn't say «pre-fabricated», but yes.

—Inspired by God or by the planets.

—Don't compare. Astrology is a superstition.

—Honey, to compare astrology to Catholicism is like comparing a Barbara Cartland novel or Lady Di's aunt to Madame Bovary. But the problem of the comparison lies in the quality and size, not the nature. The novels speak of love. Catholicism and astrology, of faith.

—Come off it! About faith?

—Yes, about beliefs that have not been demonstrated. Which is why you give me the only argument you have to defeat astrology: authority. «Catholicism prohibits those things». The Church condemns astrology because it is a superstition, but they are both superstitions in the sense that they are contrary to reason.

—There are things that surpass reason.

—If you say so. But the fact is that the Church doesn't condemn astrology because it says that something or someone has determined our past and future within their plan. It doesn't condemn it because it wants to sell us acts or events that are only possible through mysterious forces. It doesn't condemn it because it states things that it not only has not validated in practice...

—There are things that surpass reason —she stubbornly insists.

Fine, let's let it go. If she believes that God embodied a carpenter's son in Bethlehem, if a nationalist believes that language grants a person the right to nationality, and if my friends believe there are sorcerers who can see the future but are incapable of guessing the next lottery number correctly, it's fine by me. As long as they don't call me «church burner» or «renegade», I won't object any more. I'm not anti-clerical and I don't fight any belief or ideology. I won't be burning anything. But I do demand that our public institutions be as free of all this as possible. I don't promote laicism in society, but the laity, the non-confessionalism of the State. In the broadest sense. And, by the way, so do my «taxidermist» colleagues. It's our most important point of agreement.

April 5th

I'm still mulling over the conversation I had with Mariona. And the one I had with Consuelo yesterday. They don't understand why some things are so important to me. And they don't understand how I can compare them, since they consider themselves so different to each other. But I think that superstition and religion share that they are based on facts that are neither proven nor possible to prove. They are based on faith.

We are the only animals with an awareness of our own end. On the other hand, we need a set of rules or moral systems without which life in society would not be possible. Religion, which is subsequent to this need, embodies the two traits that characterize us. There is reason to believe that we obtained an evolutionary advantage by believing in things that cannot be proven. It's very likely that the people who uphold false beliefs live better than the strictly rational. And I'm being serious. The problem lies in the difficulty of combining reason and the progress it brings us with the claims put forward by religions and beliefs systems. As Edward O. Wilson says: «The essence of humanity's spiritual dilemma is that we evolved genetically to accept one truth and discovered another».

We discovered the reality and that sent everything tumbling down. But it is not easy to separate oneself from magical thinking, from superstition. We are fragile creatures who need to grab onto dreams that help us overcome adversities. Hopes. The problem is that this, apart from leading us down the wrong path, also potentially leaves us in the hands of manipulators. Of opportunists.

I could have given in. What happened on Maresma Street emotionally exhausted me. It got to the stage in which, drained, I started to run on automatic pilot. As I didn't believe in their reality, I didn't feel any concern about the specific claims of the neighbours. But I did feel a great deal of anxiety. The ghost dug up old ghosts. Of a

difficult time, of couple relationships that were too complex for a sixteen-year-old girl, which is how old I was when I started going out with him. Just seventeen when I discovered I was pregnant.

The *magufo* neighbours unbalanced me with claims of the afterlife and exorcisms. With the forces of Evil. Okay then: I would seek an antidote in the forces of Good. I would cure the irrational with the irrational. And, since I knew it to be a ridiculous idea, I held out my shame as an additional offering because of my survivor's guilty consciences.

I asked a former anthropology professor of mine, Josefina Roma, for advice. She was a member of a Catholic group, I don't remember which one. With a whole load of children, ten or eleven. She combined her work at the university with field research. She worked on excavations and must have measured the human craniums of medieval burials. I saw how sometimes she took the «work» to the office. One day she told me that she prayed over them, those bones. I never forgot it.

When they told me about the appearances and exorcisms, she was the first one I thought of. I decided that there was nobody better than her to provide an answer to my problem from the other side of magical thinking. She took it completely seriously and assured me that the definitive solution would be to have some masses said. So I did. Since there was nothing more I could do, I felt released in a certain way. But the feeling of indignation stayed intact.

It would be unthinkable for me to do something like that now. I have grown a lot and I'm no longer alone. I think I was lucky with my decision. For two reasons: because I was capable of looking at the reality with a critical eye and because I used «the magic» of a good woman who didn't make anything from the advice she gave me.

I haven't had any news of Josefina Roma since. Did she keep hav-

ing children?...

April 11th

A few days ago, some graffiti appeared all over Tarragona saying: «Israel, fascist state». They don't refer to a specific policy; nor do they refer to a specific politician: Israel as a state is fascist.

And it's not a problem. I'm sure that everyone finds it normal. I think they would even tolerate it if it said «Jews, fascists». I called Santiago to complain about it, knowing that he's the only one who will understand my indignation. And he has noticed the writing too. What's more, he's taken measures:

—I've written a letter to the director of the newspaper, *Diario de Tarragona*.

Good idea. I'm not sure how effective it will be, but let them see that not all citizens are indifferent to anti-Semitism.

I've called the municipal police force. I think they haven't done anything about it. I said to them: «There's a racist comment painted on the door to my house». They told me they'll clean it.

April 13th

I call Santiago again. I want to talk to him about how our projects are doing, the «Taxidermista» group project. I tell him we're writing a manifesto that we aim to make public in a couple of months. In it, we will declare that we do not feel represented by any of the currently existent political parties in Catalonia and we will call for the creation of a new one.

It makes him really happy.

April 20th

There are two sources for the creation of myths that are never-ending. One has to do with children, their defencelessness and the innocence they represent, and the other with the human body as a sacred place, that cannot be profaned, hence the temptation to violate it.

The two come together in a comment made by a blogger today:

I can ask for the exact reference if you like. A friend of mine, expert in the Comintern, told me how the former director of the KGB proudly described in an interview how a campaign in the Western media explaining the way children were killed to sell their organs to rich Westerners had been one of his biggest successes.

It's practically impossible for something like this to have happened. It has all the characteristics of an «urban myth». But the myth, though it changes place and context, always reappears. In the miserable backwaters of Africa, for instance. I recently read a report in which some African missionary nuns reported similar facts, with children as the protagonists. They spoke of soulless people who kidnapped the innocents and then took their organs.

In reality, it would be very difficult for something like that to be successful. To begin with, a sufficiently important technical team would be needed, the right means, etc. A set-up like that would find it hard to go unnoticed. The majority of these poor countries don't have any means. Even if the operators were foreign, they'd find it hard. Not to mention the need for a European or American hospi-

tal (where theoretically there are rich people who buy an organ) to justify and explain the arrival of this material from abroad. There are very strong security and health measures. Naturally, it's not possible to state 100% that it's lies, but there's a high likelihood.

My grandmother, who used to adore telling children grisly stories, used to tell me one that was truly *paravampiric*: when she was little there were some «rich people» (*sine qua non* condition) who extracted blood from children to relieve their problems with TB or one of the other stigmatizing diseases of the time. And another very popular tale, that all Catalans are familiar with, with an unhappy girl protagonist: «*Marieta, Marieta I'm on the first step...*¹⁰⁴».

Anything to do with the abuse of children holds a place of honour in the collective imagination. The Raval case, that Arcadi wrote about, connects with an age-old tradition.

May 2nd

Headline: Bono, in Washington: «I prefer to be killed than to kill, I'm a Minister for Defence».

It's beyond me... All this good cheer doesn't go with a person responsible for defending a country. It's a Forum-style spirit, soft, unrealistic, propagandistic... The left determined to follow a Rousseau model that's completely outdated. They are just empty words, sweet metaphors that darken the meaning. Bono is not a modern man, or

104. *TN*: Popular tale told to children about a girl who loses the money her mother gave her to buy liver, and to get herself out of the scrape takes a knife and extracts a good chunk of liver from her recently deceased aunt to take home instead. When she goes to bed, she hears the voice of her aunt exhorting her to return what she stole yesterday as she climbs the stairs one by one to the terrified girl's bedroom.

a posh modern man like Maragall; he's more primitive and populist. But he has the same disease.

May 11th

Blimey, I can't believe what they've written on the label of a Josep Font blouse I have. He's one of the most mega-trendy Catalan clothes designers. I was about to wash it when I spotted the label:

A basic element of the garments designed by Josep Font are fabrics in which the natural dimension takes implicit precedence in our intentional goal, which is why we ask you to treat the garment you have in your hands with care. The appearance of any alteration in the texture of the garment means that the piece you have acquired incorporates the aforementioned natural element and maximum research in acrylic fabric.

I love it. It reminded me of the text describing the work of that artist the day they invited me to La Caixa. This really is modern, Derridean and Forum-style posh. The fact that it's in an incomprehensible Spanish gives it a cosmopolitan air. Cool.

Maragall speaks the same way too. In Catalan and Spanish. Bono wouldn't like this so much. Here we'd be in agreement: neither he nor I understand this elite because we are less worldly and only know how to interpret the prose of the Zara labels.

May 14th

Exactly what I was saying yesterday about the Catalan intellectual

elites! I'm going over some notes from the blog and I come across the reply a colleague gives a previous participant, angry at an excessive number of references to the Civil War caused by the Catalonia-Spain tensions.

I couldn't agree with you more about the stupidity or foolishness of considering a civil war due to the current so-called «Catalan question». Of course, in this case the first to come out with this rubbish and therefore the primary fool, the half-wit, is Maragall, who «warned» us that if PP remained in government «the drama» and the «return to 1936» were possible. Maybe that's why in his recent conference at the Club Siglo XXI in Madrid Maragall said it very clearly: he doesn't believe there is any Catalan problem; the problem is the rest of Spain. This means that the Catalan problem, that doesn't exist, is the problem Spain has for not having problems with the Catalan problem by not acknowledging this problem that, according to Maragall himself, is a non-existent problem. Crystal clear.

Couldn't be clearer. Josep Font would perhaps applaud it too.

May 17th

I can't stand the government flushing everything achieved in the anti-terrorist fight to date down the toilet. The PP is not the only one to be firm in its opposition to this negotiation with ETA that there is so much talk about. Them and some of the Basque socialists, who know there is nothing to negotiate. There is no war here, but a criminal breach of the democratic rules. Delinquency.

«The Catalan problem...», «the Basque conflict...». The nationalists talk a great deal about this. Especially the fanatics. Hitler used to

talk about the «Jewish problem». Jorge Luis Borges used to say (before the Nazis found a remedy in the final solution) that to «preach that the Jews constitute a problem is to preach (and recommend) the persecutions, the plunder, the bullets, the throat-splitting, the rape».

They are conflicts that they invent all by themselves. They convince people they have a disease and then offer to cure it.

It's been a while now since ETA has been preaching radical surgery.

May 19th

I couldn't wait to finish wording the manifesto to send it to my friend, Marc. I thought that it wouldn't persuade him one little bit. A progressive, moderate guy with sound judgement. A manifesto for a pro-Catalan voter whose hairs are standing on end due to the radicalisation of their traditional party, CiU. But what a surprise:

Dear Teresa,

Thank you for the documents. I have read them carefully and, what can I say? I completely agree with the facts, the analysis and the philosophy. What I disagree with is the need for a new party. PP defends all these values or at least a large part of them, and I believe that the creation of another will simply serve to divide forces.

A few months ago, I took the psychological leap of voting PP instead of my traditional Convergència. It was certainly not an easy decision and now it's like in the joke: «Now that I know how to ride the bicycle, they want me to take my hands off the handlebars». That is, I totally support the idea but I believe the party proposed already exists with all the nuances you wish.

Good God almighty! What has the boy gone and done! We're too late. He couldn't stand it any longer and has thrown himself into the arms of PP. I definitely didn't anticipate that. After all his ranting against the PP supporters and he's let himself be seduced by Piqué! Darn, I was counting on him as a definite signatory of the Manifesto. He's gone and spoiled it.

Marc, *botifler*¹⁰⁵!

May 29th

Sunday. But a special Sunday. A really strange thing has happened. We were walking (as per usual) along the Larga when we got the idea of going along the rocks of the Waikiki path. We went off the normal route and there, in a somewhat secluded area, I thought I saw a head.

—Was that not your friend, Santiago? —said Josep when we had moved away a bit.

I think so. And he wasn't alone. I don't want to talk about it and I cover it up. But I can't stop thinking about it all the time and that night I don't sleep well.

May 30th

105. *TN*: Botiflers was a name given to supporters of Philip V of Spain during the War of the Spanish Succession. They were usually Catalan and Valencian aristocrats and members of the nobility who wanted to increase their power through the upcoming regime that would result after Bourbon victory. Nowadays, the term is used by Catalan and Valencian nationalists to refer derogatively to unionists or whoever acts against Catalan or Valencian nationalist interests. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Botifler>.

I look awful all day. That night, going through my bathroom cupboard I come across a vial of something called Retisdin Flash. Theoretically it gives you an explosion of brightness on your face. So it says in the prospectus. They recommend it for after a day of work, so that you look good when you go to dinner, etc. Okay then, I smooth it over my face. Five minutes later I examine myself and I don't notice anything. Ten minutes later either. And so on and so forth for a good while.

I don't see any difference because it's a sample vial; it didn't cost me anything. If I had paid for it, given the price of these things, I would have noticed something. They're so expensive because it's the only way of making them effective on us. They do it for us. The problem with the restructurer they got past me at the hairdresser's the other day is that it wasn't that expensive either. For people like me, if the white magic doesn't cost you a small fortune it doesn't work. That's one of the many problems we have as sceptics.

Shit...

May 31st

No more stupid vials. They'll give me an allergy yet. I don't want to think about it anymore. I call Elisabet. Just to see how she breathes. I don't want to seem nosey. It's to see if my eyes were deceiving me or what. But she doesn't say a word. Maybe it really was my imagination. Because it would be tremendous.

I haven't said anything to her about the Manifesto, it would just make her suffer. If it makes any waves, she'll find out about it in good time. Better to stick to the usual subjects. I torment her with my eternal question. The one I ask purely as part of my exercise

routine. A habit in our conversations that's as deeply ingrained as walking along the Rambla Nova or going to the Larga on Sundays. Without batting an eyelid.

—It's still time for you to tell me what we want with independence.

—Here we go again.

—Oh, okay: but you promised.

—Uff... There's a place in the world called Catalonia, where the people want to obtain the sovereignty that other free nations enjoy. Perhaps there are some legal aspects that need to be dealt with in the process of self-government, but it's all negotiable.

—That's no answer —I tell her, intrigued by the fact that she has given any answer at all—. I asked you for specific reasons.

—The Catalan people want it. It's a right recognized by the United Nations.

—First and foremost: «the people» don't want it, just some voters from some parties. Secondly, if this made any sense in constitutional or international law, it would be very easy for the PNV, for instance, to take the matter before the UN Special Committee on Decolonisation and they would immediately open a decolonization file. The PNV doesn't even consider doing that because they'd be sent home with their tail between their legs.

—We have the right to our future. If this is a democracy, we should be listened to.

—You still haven't said anything specific, material, measurable. And you confuse democracy with majority vote (if that's what it is). The concept of democracy does not obligatorily support all the decisions upheld by a majority.

—Doesn't it?

—No. Imagine if there were a movement to return to a denomi-

national State, or to withdraw the woman's right to vote. Or to make decisions that, like the economists say, lead to perverse side effects for the rest of the community, like in the Basque case.

—We have been subjugated for centuries. They were the winners of the Civil War and...

—They? The Spanish? Were there no right-wing or Francoist supporters here? Plus...

—What?

—Nothing.

I almost put my foot in it. I was about to say: «Hasn't Santiago already told you all this? You have a professor of Political Philosophy all to yourself». But I don't even know if it was him, and even less if it was her. I have to be prudent. Of course... if it really was them. Her and the «PP supporter from hell», as she used to say before. My God.

Of course, she still hasn't answered my usual question. Maybe, if there are other paths to this knowledge, somebody will manage to convince her of them. Venereally, for example.

June 1st

I haven't left the house all day, working on the computer. Sending the Manifesto, looking for signatures and all the work it involves leaves me no time to do my own things. Not to mention that I was supposed to write a speech for the wedding, on June 12th. In the end, by the time I finish it, it's three pages long it's so complete.

I haven't even gone to the gym. By eight in the evening I was shattered. I asked Josep if he wanted to go for a wander and have something to eat out and he agreed. We took the umbrella as the weather was turning ugly.

The sky, from the Balcó, looked like a Velázquez painting. On an angelic, pure, heraldic blue sky some enormous, round nimbuses showing off prominent dimples lit up by the sunlight in such a way that some looked an ash-grey colour while those next to them were an absolutely scandalous pink. Turning our backs on the sea, the landscape was very different: Roger de Llúria's raised fist pointing to a stream of black storm clouds covering the entire sky of the Rambla as far as the Mussura mountains, where it stopped in a frankly orangey strip.

Turner?

June 4th

There was a protest in Madrid today against the government's negotiations with ETA. As usual, the organisations claim there were a million protesters, whereas the Government says there were 240,000. Either way, compared to other actions taken, that was a huge amount of people.

A few weeks ago, ETA set a car bomb at the headquarters of the BBVA bank in Villajoyosa. On May 15th, there were four attacks against Basque companies. Last May 25th, the people behind the Basque «conflict» blew up twenty kilos of explosives in Madrid causing 52 mild injuries. It could have been a massacre.

I'm afraid that people will forget it quickly. Like perhaps the statements made to the newspaper, *Correo Digital*, by a Basque businessman extorted by ETA that I am very sorrowfully re-reading have been forgotten. Here we forget, but there «they repudiate». The businessman states: «I know that I'm a dead man walking, but I refuse to leave my homeland» And worst of all, what's shameful, is that

he adds: «The repudiation of those of us under threat is very severe».

Therein lies the great injustice. As Martin Luther King used to say: «When we look back on our twentieth century, history will have to record that the greatest tragedy of this period of social transition was not the strident clamour of the bad people, but the appalling silence of the good people».

Those who consider themselves «good people» turn their backs on this businessman:

Fear? More a sense of abandonment because on the first day of his «sentence» the telephone only rang to receive sympathy from his family —«my wife still can't believe it»— and a handful of friends. «No calls from either Vitoria or from Madrid. Not even the Department of Internal Affairs to tell me they'd be sending some police officers».

But he's a brave man. He decided to stay:

«They can shoot me now or in five years' time, but I know that I am sentenced to death. In any case, they can kill me here because I refuse to leave». [...] «I will stay, whether here or in the cemetery. I may not have Arzalluz's¹⁰⁶ famous Rh blood type, but I work and live here and I don't want to give in to the "pay, die or leave" condition».

It is not just a question of convictions: over four-hundred employees also depend on him. And in memory of his father, who had to leave the Basque Country in 1979 after a command attempted

106. *TN*: Xabier Arzalluz (born 24 August 1932) is a Spanish politician who was the leader of the Basque Nationalist Party from 1979 until 2004. He is a nationalist and a Christian Democrat. He was also the most powerful politician in the Basque Country.

to assassinate him on his doorstep: «He left at the age of 65 and the poor man died at 75 without being able to return».

Shame on the Basque people who allow it. We don't want that sort of madness here. We don't want any more politicians who separate us. They begin with the petty differences and the «historical rights» and finish with two clashing communities. And who benefits? Not the common people, that's for sure.

June 5th

Sunday, beach. The Larga. I'm nervous about the presentation and Josep has offered to «take me out». It will be the day after tomorrow. We'll do it in the *Taxidermista* and pray that someone will come. Or even better, ten or fifteen media channels. That would be great. Thank goodness I don't need to worry about the wedding: they have it all under control.

We walk hand in hand at a good pace towards the Bosque de la Marquesa. While we're chatting, a runner passes us by in a sports shirt that celebrates something sporty with the Spanish flag. Josep and I look at each other in surprise. It's almost strange to see. You don't usually see the like around here. Everyone knows: we're supposed to forget that we're in Spain. I remember when the King came to open the Forum, we weren't allowed to play the national anthem. They almost didn't allow the flag to fly either. As if they were in Barbados. Maragall's hope: Catalonia, the Basque Country, Galicia and «the rest».

I'm not a fan of either flags or anthems, but in a country like ours where we bring out the Catalan flag for every little thing, where it is omnipresent, even on the pastries they make for the *Diada*, the roses

used to celebrate *Sant Jordi*, the buses on public holidays, the jars of spices, the logos of the nationalist parties, the children's workbooks, where everyone is made to rigorously stand up when the Catalan national anthem sounds, in a country like this, it's shocking that people should shout out to the four corners of the earth when they see a Spanish flag. They say that on election day, unlike what was seen in 1982, there was no Spanish flag in Ferraz, the PSOE headquarters. Just the Republican one.

Those who have succeeded in making the flag and the word Spain inseparable from anti-Catalanism, not to mention Francoism, have done a good job. When Jordi Pujol took possession as president of the Generalitat, Josep Tarradellas wanted to finish his speech with the traditional "viva Catalonia" and "viva Spain". He wasn't allowed. They wouldn't accept it. And later on, in a letter to Horacio Sáenz Guerrero, former director of *La Vanguardia* newspaper dated April 16th, 1981, he publicly expressed that this unexpected surprise had seemed premonitory of the fact that the excitement and trust with which the democratic normalization process had begun in Catalonia could degenerate into a future rupture «of the bonds of comprehension, good understanding and constant agreements» that had existed between our land and the rest of Spain during his term. And that this particularly hurt him, as he feared they would come to a «situation that would be reminiscent of other, sadder and less fortunate times for our country».

That rupture is here now. And those «other, sadder times» a very real threat. We are alienated from the reality of Catalonia and Spain. It's been over twenty years since the authorities started working to make us believe we are different and incompatible. But reality is a hard nut to crack and we still consider ourselves the same people. They haven't succeeded in making us hate each other.

I believe that's where the key lies: we must re-establish contact with reality again. That's the spirit of the Manifesto. There is no other intention.

June 7th

The presentation to the press was a resounding success. And it's not that those ten or fifteen we dreamed of came... over seventy media representatives showed up! The CiU people are calling us «posh-liberals» and «Spanish nationalists». Naturally. What else would they say? And we were in all the newspapers. And on the front cover of ABC newspaper! I don't even want to imagine what Elisabet is going to say about that, as ABC is known to be more right. She will wring so much out of it once she gets over the shock!

But yes, a resounding success. This story will have a happy ending yet. And the most refractory of our colleagues about creating a party are beginning to see sense. At the very least, a few more of them no longer consider it madness. Maybe one day we will be able to vote for a party that doesn't speak of the nation. Is there any need to do so? None of the countries around us need to and they are not less prosperous, or less happy than we are. On the contrary.

If I had to choose a slogan, it would be: «The soul is the field of theologians; the nation the field of the nationalists. We have nothing to say about either».

Full stop.

June 11th

Over the last few days I've received all sorts of reactions to the presentation of the Manifesto. I haven't heard a word from Elisabet yet. And Mariona is intrigued by the fact that I'm not worried about whether our stances coincide with those of PP or not. I tell her:

—People need to be consistent and uphold their ideas. All we need is to have to worry about another party. Not coinciding with PP has been such a destructive obsession in this country that sometimes I think that if PP were not in favour of jumping off bridges, people would do it just to spite them.

—Get away!

—Yes. Plus, if you propose something sensible and you see that there are other people who agree, then all the better, don't you think?

But she doesn't seem convinced. The ultimate test appears to be whether PP says so or not. There is no other criteria, so what can we do? She changes subject and asks me what plans we have for the night of San Juan.

San Juan! It's just around the corner. We won't be able to do anything together because we're going away. When she hangs up, I start to remember the celebrations from previous years. Last year we had dinner on the Larga. Yes, the feast of San Juan can also be celebrated on the Larga. Probably on other beaches too. But we chose the Larga, what a fixation we have with it. But that beach just looks so gorgeous with the bonfires lit. There's room enough for everyone and, in the dark of night, the line of the sea takes on a wild air. African. Tribal in the folkloric sense of the word, which is the best sense.

Mind you, the most impressive years I remember were in the neighbourhood of Sants in Barcelona, where I lived when I was little. Maybe they were impressive precisely because I was so little. The awnings and the chocolate on the street...

A neighbourhood of Catalan craftsmen. There was only one «for-

eigner» in our building: my Dad who was from Aragon. The only person I heard speak in Spanish before I went to study with the nuns. My grandmother spoke Spanish so badly that my father used to say to her: «Please, speak to me in Catalan as I understand it better».

He used to tell us that when he and my mother were going out, he got to our house to visit her and my grandmother took her time about opening the door. This was her excuse: «Sorry: I had lain down on the leg to sleep for a while». In Catalan, leg means “bed” and the woman had got them all mixed up.

My father says he had this alarming vision of a stork-woman sleeping the siesta on one leg.

My “*iaia*”, grandmother in Catalan... I never once heard her say anything remotely discriminatory or insulting about any immigrant. She received my father like a son. A hard-working, straightforward and sensible woman. She was happy when Tarradellas returned. Very. However: she wouldn't have wanted to see me involved in something that seems like «politics».

I spend a good while thinking about her. Too long. I'm daydreaming and tomorrow Àlex and Alba are getting married. I had better prepare something. I've done practically nothing with everything else that's been going on. Also because I'm a bit uncomfortable with the subject of the wedding. Getting married seems so serious. They've been living together for almost a year and I had never felt like «a mother-in-law». Now it feels like I'm getting old. Maybe that's why I'm thinking of my grandmother. I don't like it one little bit. Will this pair be capable of having a child? Good God. It seems like the last ten years have just flown by.

I look up at Bill Murray, who looks back at me from the bookshelf. He seems to be laughing at me. «Let's see what you do with

the last day of your life, which is every day but each day is a bit more last».

You're all I needed. Drama king. You can do what you like, since you have until infinity.

June 12th

The wedding is held on a lovely estate in the mountains. We worry it might rain. It could all be beautiful, but equally horrible if it needs to be held inside the restaurant. It would be so tacky. But as soon as we arrive the clouds clear up giving way to a splendid evening. And, really, it's a relief to see that nobody needed an organizing mother-in-law: everything is perfect. The scenography of the place and the choreography of the scene are spot-on. The place where they'll have the ceremony is a secluded corner of the garden presided by a sort of floral arch under which the officiant will stand. In our case a representative of the world of mortals, the citizen mortals: the town mayor. And, of course, he is a member of Esquerra Republicana, what else! A very polite, serene and mannerly man who earns the approval of my friend Elisabet, who like Esther, Ángela and so many other friends of the groom's mother, has been invited.

And here begins the list of follies that I was at the centre of. Well into the ceremony, the mayor calls on the two people who were supposed to give speeches. The bride's friend, a journalist, begins with some brief words of praise for the couple. He sagely observes that one of the basic requirements of these kinds of speeches is brevity and that they don't bore either the bride and groom or the guests. Brilliant, and there am I with three whole pages. All of a sudden, I regret my idea and I don't want to read anything. So when the

mayor calls on the second reader I play the fool. And it would have worked if it hadn't been for the look in the eye that Alba gave me. «All that talk and now you're not going to read it?», she conveys to me telepathically.

Resignation. I get up and say that I won't read it because it's too long and that the journalist, a communication expert, is completely right. But the mayor is very benevolent and insistent. There's no choice.

I begin. But then something else happens that I was already expecting. I was expecting it so much that I had already forewarned my cousin Adela. The thing is that I cry. I mean, I'm one of those people who get emotional. I cry in Masada, I cry in churches, I cry in museums, I cry at the opera... If Elisabet hadn't insisted I get up and leave the Esquerra rally, I would have cried at the Catalan anthem that day, as it's beautiful. So, you can only imagine how emotional I get when it comes to sentimental matters like reading rubbish at my son's wedding.

In less than two seconds I'm already off and I can hear my voice cracking. Àlex, also by telepathy, communicates to me that I'm pathetic. Okay. I stop and tell the public that my cousin, a heartless woman, will continue in my place as I can't go on. They all understand and sympathise with me. Adela gets up like a lady from the salvation army. With great dignity, she takes my notes and continues as if nothing untoward had happened. She gets through the sentimental part serenely, but my speech is tremendous. Rather than an ode to the bride and groom, it's an essay on the couple. I've even included historical data and statistics. And she gets through it all marvellously.

But Adela has her feelings too. Her sensitivity. When she gets to a passage that says «when the law on divorce was passed here, in

Spain...» she stops all of a sudden. She said: «Here, in Spain». There she goes!, she must be thinking. And she glances shyly at the guests. If I had obliged her to read: «I'd do it right now under this flowery arch with this gorgeous mayor», she would have looked the same. She's very liberal and everyone knows what I'm like. But this is different. It's not a question of sexual morals, it's a question of national morale, and she has been a life-long supporter of *Convergència*. She's inherited it from her family. The public is also subtly shaken and there's a short silence. The guests from other places (Aragon, Murcia, Madrid, even Mexico) don't realise anything. It's an intimate issue, it belongs to the tribe. Strictly ineffable.

Adela plucks up her courage, smiles as if to say «this is all her stuff», and turns the page to read the back. And this is where the debacle begins. We have such a fixation with recycling paper. Since I thought I'd be reading it, I re-used old paper. There's a newspaper article on the other side. A political article. Completely unrelated. I can see the catastrophe coming but I'm not quick enough to stop it. I'm still under the effects of my national indiscretion and the possible status change I'll experience at the wedding. She continues, fatally and inexorably, and recites... «in the last elections, when PP won...» and her eyes widen like saucers. She is the very picture of martyrdom. Everyone sees that it's recycled paper and what has happened. And I ask if we can just let it go. What a failure.

Everyone is all smiles and hearty, and I try to seem natural. But I know that serious doubts have been cast upon me. A murky aura envelops me. Not only Spain has made its presence felt when nobody invited it, but we even mentioned PP. «Spanish loyalist», floats over my head. I don't know how on earth I'm going to gain back my ground. I leave with my chin up.

Too high.

June 17th

Elisabet calls me. I bet she thinks my faux-pas at the wedding were God's punishment. Like those Muslim imams who blamed the tsunami on the Western tourists. But she doesn't give out to me over that: I've already suffered enough, and she doesn't want to pour salt in the wound. She says she saw me on television with Arcadi. We were on the *Ágora* programme together. She cannot stand him and says so. She probably thinks my opinions are because of the bad company I keep. She says:

—And he dyes his hair.

—I'm sorry?

—Can't you see that his hair gets blacker by the day?

I don't know what to say to her, because I hadn't realised at all.

—He's a sleaze who uses Grecian 2000.

Grecian 2000. Come on! I haven't heard anyone mention that for years. Since the transition. It must be like *Abrótano Macho*, *Flöid* or *Azufre Veri Loción*. Old-man potions. She can't think of anything more cheesy and Spanish to accuse him of.

—I don't believe it. But the first thing I'll do when I see him next is look at his hair. And I'll give him the message for you. He'll be cross because he's quite a flirt.

She likes this perspective. But not content yet, she attacks the Manifesto. She tells me we're a pack of Spanish nationalists and... *Lerrouxists*¹⁰⁷. Nobody knows exactly what this term means, her even

107. *TN*: Alejandro Lerroux García (La Rambla, Córdoba, 4 March 1864 - Madrid, 25 June 1949) was a Spanish politician who was the leader of the Radical Republican Party during the Second Spanish Republic. He served as Prime Minister of Spain three times from 1933 to 1935 and held several cabinet posts as well. His populist and anticlerical speeches, as well as his intervention in diverse campaigns against the governments of the Restoration, made him very popular

less so. But she doesn't let that stop her and she adds, very hurt, that «we've done a lot of harm». I'd like her to know how much harm they do us with their nonsense. But, since she still hasn't had enough, she goes back to the Civil War spiel. They're all so stuck on the Civil War.

When she hangs up, I send her this by email. A guy on the blog posted it:

It's clear that we have a problem, because if after 68 years, 68, we're still going on about the Civil War, then there's something seriously amiss. I believed in the year of 1978, when the reglamentary regime was captive and discouraged and peace had been agreed and revenge ignored, that the Falange would be no more but that the reds would not resurge either. But today, almost twenty-six year later or sixty-eight or seventy, depending on how you look at it, the idiots aim to win a war retroactively or make us believe their political triumph today is that of the victors of a war that their grandparents lost, the start and finish of which was nothing but a tragedy for them and the children and grandchildren of everyone. Because my wife's maternal grandfather, who was a Carlist mayor in a town of two-thousand inhabitants, was arrested on the same day as the military uprising by the socialist militia from a nearby town, and subsequently executed for the simple crime of being the mayor in the wrong area. And we live two streets down from the house of the children and grandchildren of his executor and today we greet each other cordially as if we hadn't been tainted by the angel of death and each of us deals with our story as best we can. And that implies me and my paternal family, which has always

among workers in Barcelona, who later constituted the base of a loyal electorate. The word *Lerrouxism* was coined after this politician's name. It was used to refer to a demagogic anti-Catalan discourse in Catalonia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alejandro_Lerroux.

been and still is socialist. And I have to say that my paternal grandfather, who was a storm trooper, was mobilised from the very first day of the war, which he took part in until the day of defeat, and subsequently in the camps and wars of Europe, from where he no longer could or would return. And that my paternal family suffered reprisals and all their assets were expropriated and they suffered prison and my father tells me that he went to visit his grandmother in the prison of Basauri, where he brought her bread and since he was still a child they would let him go in through the turnstile so that my great-grandmother could kiss him. Shitty country full of shits and fucking war and fucking post-war and fucking sons of the intellectually miserable bitches that today goad the wretches that brought that whole story upon us and who want us to believe that the grandchildren of those individuals inherited the horrors of their ancestors in their genes. Equalised by the minimal common denominator. 68 years, 68, and almost twenty-six of a pact sealed not on pardon but on the desire to try and build a future without death, all for the most moronic grandchildren and great-grandchildren to have us believe today that that rancid past in which the war was not fought for freedom or justice or equality or fraternity, even if the books and television series and films lie about it, was better than this imperfect present in which only the real sons of bitches continue to kill for principles. They can all go screw themselves with their fucking Francos and their shitty Companys and let the idiots of the División Azul and Leclerc march on because you have to be a complete dimwit if you still feel like parading after a goat at the age of eighty, proud of the crappy role history has set aside for you. Fuck them all and let them bury their dead for once and for all and shove their hysterical memory up their arses and let the rest of us live in peace at long last.

Hear, hear, «let them shove it up their you-know-what's», because there isn't a family that doesn't have stories to tell. Let them not

break that which joins us, Elisabet: let's see if you understand me, not the «pro-Spanish» not anything. Only Catalans with their heads well screwed on.

June 19th

Sunday. It's incredibly sunny and we decide to go for a walk on the Larga. Later we have an endive salad and a few tapas at the beach bar. The sea looks so lovely and we're so glad to be sitting here!

Tomorrow we present the Manifesto to the public and we haven't a clue how many people will come. Maybe a hundred or two-hundred people. Josep will close early and come by train. He's sure we'll fill the venue. He hasn't said he'll divorce «me if I get involved in politics» again. I think he's also excited.

I tell him that I'm still dwelling on what Elisabet said to me about the Civil War. It affected me deeply. I tell him that I doubt the interest in resuscitating it is based on altruistic or justice-related reasons. And he agrees with me, saying:

—It's a question of fictitiously creating a «them» and an «us» to makes us hostages of our worst instincts.

Jeez. Exactly how I would have put it myself. It's exactly what I've always tried to make her understand. That I wasn't either «betraying» the left (screw the left) or becoming a PP supporter. Just a dissident.

I look at him in complicity and he fixes his green eyes on me. I don't know if he said it on purpose because he's a big tease. He might be pulling my leg. No matter. He is gorgeous, really gorgeous. We hold hands while we drink our coffee and lose ourselves in the view of the gentle, friendly and bright landscape of the June afternoon on one of the most beautiful beaches in the world.

June 20th

Presentation in the *Centro de Cultura Contemporánea de Barcelona*. Not one-hundred or two-hundred. 1400 people turned up. We were very moved by the end of it, but also worried about the responsibility we now have on our shoulders.

June 21st

In the distance, on the horizon, between the black of the sky and the black of the Earth, a greenish-yellow, irregular-shaped mist is beginning to emerge. Very rare for clouds. As we come closer, it becomes muslin, getting brighter and brighter, forming curtains drifting up off the floor. Another turn of the ship and you see them again, you are almost over them now. The curtains become defined: they are made of rays and they stretch up to very high above, higher even than the ship. You head directly towards them, and you can't help a certain apprehension. Might this be dangerous? Once inside them, all the closest curtains flash and shift shape, it's as if you were walking among sunny lace curtains. The phenomenon lasts a minute, two, even three and you don't feel anything odd, the ship continues its smooth journey along the track of its orbit. When you emerge from this phantasmagorical image and face the blackness again, you feel relief, but it is tinged with a little regret too.

Oh... what a beautiful passage! This is the description of an aurora borealis live. It was transmitted by Pedro Duque during his journey in space. Can there be anything more fascinating than to travel through space? I tell my son that I'll squander his entire inheritance travelling to space before I die. That he shouldn't get his hopes up.

I'm not entirely joking.

I want to see the Earth from the Moon! I'm sure that if we could, we would forget all the nationalist, tribal and separatist foolishness that makes no sense. The biggest danger faced by humanity is to close itself within its own group and not seek universal principles that neither use nor allow culture's most important advances to be shared.

No compelling evidence of life in space has been found. Perhaps there is no more life in the universe than ours. Not even any signs of intelligence beyond this blue sphere. Not yet. Being realistic, we have to accept the possibility that we are alone.

I feel responsible. Conscious life may well be a miracle that has happened just once on a small planet located at one end of an unexciting spiral galaxy arm. The universe is millions of years old, but man is only one-hundred-thousand. Life on Earth has witnessed a long chain of extinctions and our species, if it follows the evolution of any other, will also disappear. The difference between us and the rest of the living beings is precisely the fact that we are aware of it.

If we need a story to make sense of our history and this cannot contain —because we do not believe in it— a religious cosmology, what better idea than to take it from the history of the universe and the human species? The true evolutionary epic, told like any religious epic, is just as intrinsically noble as the latter. The material reality discovered by science already possesses more content and grandeur than all the religious cosmologies put together. It is a heartening belief, replete with hope and drive to action.

We have a series of problems that may lead us to self-destruction: environmental, new diseases, dangerous weapons... Perhaps there has been life in other parts of the universe and it has disappeared for the same reasons that will end ours. We are here thanks to a frag-

ile chain of coincidences. Until we have reliable news (and there is nothing new in sight), we cannot take the idea of any Creator worrying about us seriously. We're better off accepting full responsibility, just in case. It is up to us to preserve and protect life ourselves.

Each human being is unique and deeply unlikely. The circumstances that have given rise to life are the product of a random chain that has produced, from almost nothing, a singular being who will never exist again. We must protect and value the life of each and every human as a single opportunity. Therein lies the real challenge, the true drama. Man is what matters. Any man.

The real adventure, the «exciting project», the «utopia» (because it is almost utopian, it is so difficult), is survival. We are responsible for our continuity. Can there be any more thrilling challenge than to protect life and take it beyond the barrier of our planet?

Himmler came to Montserrat in search of the Holy Grail. To Montserrat where the UFO fans go on certain days of the month. To Montserrat, the symbol of an involutive dream, of limiting identity to a small group. The Nazis believed we live at the bottom of a sort of tank and that the sky we see is similar to what a frog sees from the depths.

They really were bonkers, those criminals, which is why the harm they did will be forever imprinted as a terrible shame for humanity. The dreams, the mythical visions are the stuff of primates not men. Until we all share the consciousness of forming part of the same group, we will be like the frog who looks at the sky from the pit of an autistic identity.

Perhaps, as the film *Groundhog Day* appears to say, there is nothing beyond the time span we have to live. But, as Shermer said, since we don't know what moment in the chain we're in or how our decisions will affect those who come after, we're better off choosing them

as intelligently as possible. And like my father used to say, words that always spring to mind when I overtake an intimidating lorry on the motorway, «we need to look ahead».

Let's look ahead. Let's become truly conscious that the Voyager, a human creation, is right now leaving the confines of the solar system and advancing towards a series of planets and stars that are mute and blind because they don't yet have us.

But we will get there. Let us not spoil the future.