

Four Poems by Juli Capilla
Translated and introduced by Jorge Salavert

Juli Capilla (València, 1970) is a young poet whose verse has received many awards and prizes. His poetry books include *Llibre dels exilis* (*Book of Exiles*), *Aimia* (*Beloved*), *L'instant fugaç* (*The Fleeting Instant*), awarded the 2008 Ibn Jadafja Poetry Prize, and *Raspall*, which received the 2009 Roís de Corella City of Valencia Prize. He has also penned an award-winning novel, *L'home de Melbourne* (2005), and several books for children and young readers.

As a professional writer, Capilla has worked as a style corrector and editor for several newspapers, magazines and journals, and as a Lecturer in Catalan Literature and Language at two universities. Capilla has also edited an annotated anthology of the late Valencian poet Vicent Andrés Estellés.

These four poems, whose original titles are 'La collita', 'La sang', 'L'infant etern' and 'Mort,' belong to *Raspall*, the book with which Capilla's work has unquestionably reached maturity. *Raspall* is divided into two main sections, the second comprising two poems about the Valencian sport of *raspall*, the autochthonous mode of pelota played in the local *trinquet*.¹ The two lengthy poems in the second section extol the ancient Valencian culture and call on the members of the community to take pride in their varied cultural expressions and their own language, endangered by many years of linguistic oppression under Franco in Spain and currently threatened by assimilatory policies from the central and the right-wing regional governments.

The first section of *Raspall* pays homage to the rural environment, the small Valencian towns and villages frequently disparaged by urban dwellers. 'Harvest' has a rural theme at its centre, but its subtext points to sexual awakenings and ripeness, too. The poems in this larger section outline poignant scenes of home life, as in 'Blood', while there are also sober reflections on memory and the passage of time ('The Eternal Child') and on death ('Death').

Harvest

It was the season of covetous fruits;
 an age discharged in abundance;
 the taut time of the rapier and the rage,
 of the irate needle, of fingers,
 rotund grapes; a time when the sun
 projected its metallic light
 upon the impatience of a febrile body;
 an age of portentous gestures,

¹ The Valencian *trinquet* is usually about 11 m wide and up to 60 m long, with walls about 6 m high. The ball is made of hard-pressed wool, wrapped around with tough hand-sewn leather. Traditionally, the sport used to be played on village streets (Translator's note).

of accurate, measured glances
at the sceptre; an oneiric concavity
that connected into fragments
of a mutilated memory,² of peonies
brusquely, indignantly uprooted,
like unsullied notes on a stave
enraging a deaf musician.

Blood

This blood gushing out of his mouth
is the same trickle of blood – it's identical! –
one day it poured forth from me,
as I cut my tongue through
when I fell off a rocking chair.
My sister witnessed my calamity,
sensing my pain, feeling sorry for me;
this stubborn blood is the same one
now soaking the urgent tea-towel fetched from the kitchen,
in the arms of the mother who now rocks
the frightened, groaning child;
the porch whitened with warm lime,
the skylight that filtered the beam
of sunlight into the tenants' flat downstairs:
the spare, torrid inner exile
I sometimes lapse into when I evoke
the childhood scene I'm living now
when I see my son in his mother's lap
crying over the fuss of his own blood,
which is my blood and my own pain.

The Eternal Child

I feel the weight of these carobs,³
I cup my hands and inhale their smell
before picking out the best:
I separate the ones I will not need,
and dump them into a basket, into cloth bags;
I carry them and pile them on the trailer.

² Oneiric: Of or pertaining to dreams (Translator's note).

³ From the Arabic '*al kharrūbah*', also known as 'algarrobas' or 'St John's bread'; carob seeds are finely ground and used in cooking, especially as a substitute for chocolate (Translator's note).

Even now I can feel the cool water
trickling down my cheeks,
rushing through my throat, like bubbles
of a delight at once unique and true.

The evening becomes neat, taut,
it cancels the tiny hands on the clock,
and makes Life quiver in all its beauty.

If there's a full moon, I instantly return
to my childhood:

 a little boy who wonders
at the forlorn, timeless air
of that fleeting moment, almost perfect;
a boy who listens, runs, laughs, kisses and breathes,
who trembles, jumps, touches, looks... and cries.

Death

And what will it be like, when we – you or I – are dead?

There will be a slight breath of Life left;
perhaps a sigh, a gesture, a glance;
your hands distributing hedonist
slogans, those carpe diem taunts,
swapping almonds for memories;
the echo of the sphere crinkling up
the mass of a hardly perceptible wind;
the indelible image of those days
when you returned from playing at the *triquet*:
I was the little boy reinforcing certainties
when I welcomed you at the doorway;
the ritual silence at dinnertime:
— “while eating, you need to shut your mouth”—
all five of us around the household light;
the fragrance, or the obvious perfumes in the bathroom
when you would comb your hair before going out to work;
the quiver of the hoarse voice
that has been rocking us from the day of our birth
to the last one that has been anticipated...

I know not what it'll be like, in the end,
when we're all away from everyone else and everything else,
but this 'rational' animal
likes to think, to take delight in things,
even though this one may be

