



# Joan Maragall: Poet, intellectual and thinker\*

Ignasi Moreta\*\*

Universitat Pompeu Fabra

## ABSTRACT

Joan Maragall (Barcelona, 1860-1911) is an indisputable part of the Catalan canon of contemporary poetry. However, his intellectual contributions also came in the field of journalism, through a clear desire to affect his times by acting as an intellectual in the sense that this word acquired from Zola, as well as in his essays with philosophical pretensions. This article aims to spotlight the importance not only of Maragall's poetic oeuvre but also his journalistic and philosophical output.

**KEYWORDS:** Joan Maragall, Catalan literature, poetry, journalism, philosophy

Joan Maragall (Barcelona 1860-1911) is considered the premier classical Catalan poet of the 20th century. His privileged place in the canon of Catalan literature is beyond any doubt. However, it would be erroneous to assess this writer solely in the strictly literary sphere, firstly because Maragall also had an important oeuvre as a journalist, which led him to exert a considerable influence which enables us to discuss not only "Maragall the writer of articles" but also "Maragall the intellectual" who was able to project his views onto the citizenry. Secondly, "Maragall the thinker" is also extraordinarily important, the Maragall who reflected with philosophical pretensions and bequeathed texts with impressive metaphysical density.

Naturally, these distinctions – poet, article writer, intellectual, thinker – must be made *cum grano salis*: it is obvious that the poet and thinker are intertwined, that the thinking was expressed through both poems and articles or essays, that Maragall's influence in his time was exerted through both poetry and articles or speeches, etc. We suggest these distinctions out of pure expository necessity, yet also to defend an interpretation of Maragall that does not reduce him to merely being the author of a corpus of poetic texts solely of importance to philologists and readers of poetry. In fact, one of the problems of transmitting Maragall is the fact that his work has been primarily studied by philologists; in practice this has meant that his contributions have been restricted to the field of literature. However, lately an approach to Maragall from other fields of study is gaining momentum which enables the thinking that the writer deployed throughout this oeuvre, and

especially in the latter stages of his life and creative career, to be valued in its proper measure.<sup>1</sup>

## MARAGALL, THE POET

The son of a textile industrialist, Joan Maragall – the only son of Josep Maragall and Rosa Gorina – was clearly fated to succeed his father in running the family business. However, during the two years in his late adolescence when he worked as an apprentice in his father's factory, the future writer also compulsively devoted himself to writing verses while deploring the future his family had envisioned for him. Finally, he reached an agreement with his father to enter the university in exchange for pursuing a degree with a "practical application": law. As a university student, Maragall learned German and studied Germanic literature in depth while he also cultivated his musical pursuits. He earned his first literary prize for a poetic re-creation of a passage from Goethe's *Faust*. During those "years of apprenticeship", the Liceu opera house and the Ateneu Barcelonès were Maragall's "window onto the world".<sup>2</sup>

In literary terms, the first Maragall is inevitably Maragall the poet: journalism and the conscious development of his own thinking would come later. As a poet, Maragall rejected long poems and rhetoricism and instead chose a kind of poetry that was fully connected to life and even to its impassioned exaltation. In parallel to his cultivation of poetry, Maragall also developed his own poetics, hints of which can be seen in the verse that opens his first book of poetry, the "Oda infinita":

*Tinc una oda començada  
 que no puc acabar mai;  
 dia i nit me l'ha dictada  
 tot quant canta en la ventada,  
 tot quant brilla per l'espai.*<sup>3</sup>

\* This article benefitted from financing from AGAUR to the "A Cura De" research group (2009 SGR 552).

\*\* **Contact address:** Ignasi Moreta. Department of Humanities, Universitat Pompeu Fabra. Ramon Trias Fargas, 25-29, 08005 Barcelona. E-mail: ignasi.moreta@upf.edu. Personal blog on Joan Maragall: <http://lectordemaragall.blogspot.com.es/>

(I have an ode begun  
Which I can never finish;  
Day and night it has been dictated to me  
Even when the wind sings  
Even when it shines through space.)

Thus, the poem arises from a dictation from nature. The poet simply transcribes the words that have been given to him, which he must take care not to embellish. However, it should be noted that this poetics does not make Maragall a banal romantic: the writer upheld not only the connection between life and writing, but also, with particular emphasis, the distance between the two. Maragall stressed that nature is the point of departure, but that the poem does not fully fall within life experience; rather it occurs when the experience has already happened and has had time to settle: that is when reality dictates to the poet the words with which he should reflect what he has experienced.

Between 1895 and 1911, Maragall published the bulk of his poetry in five books *Poesies* (1895), *Visions & cants* (1900), *Les disperses* (1904), *Enllà* (1906) and *Seqüències* (1911). All the volumes are relatively short, and each contains diverse poems: even though Maragall crafted his books in an attempt to ensure that they had some sort of thematic unity and a structure that articulated them, it should be noted that the poetic unit in Maragall is not the books but the poems themselves. The only – and quite relative – exception is the poetry series that could have become a unitary book, but which Maragall, in fact, published in three instalments distributed in the books *Visions & cants*, *Enllà* and *Seqüències*, namely *El comte Arnau*, his only attempt at a long poem.

In the three instalments of *El comte Arnau*, Maragall re-creates a figure from Catalonia's legendary past and uses it to express his metaphysical concerns, which change over the years that he wrote the poem. These concerns include the contrast between asceticism and vitalism, the exaltation of effort, the role of the body and the land in sensuality, the contrast between the life drive and family and civic commitments, the desire for eternity and its tedious fulfilment, the shortcomings of the "law of love" and its ebb, and the role of poetry. Maragall does not use the figure of Count Arnau to perform archaeology or to make a romantic re-creation of an ancestral figure to serve the national ideology, but to place the myth at the service of his own metaphysical stirrings.<sup>4</sup>

Maragall's five books are infused with other themes that are also worth highlighting, even though generally speaking they never actually become series in their own right with an identifiable protagonist and a clear narrative progression. We shall focus somewhat schematically on four of these themes: love, nature and the passage of time, civic duty and the religious experience.<sup>5</sup>

In Maragall's poetry, love is primarily embodied in two polarised female figures: Clara (the wife) and Haidé (the lover). The poems dedicated to Clara show a clear progres-



Figure 1. Poster depicting *El Comte Arnau*, one of the most emblematic poems by Joan Maragall, which was put on by the Teatre Nacional de Catalunya in 2011 to commemorate the 150th anniversary of the poet's death and the centennial of his death.

sion: falling in love, desire, courtship, marriage and motherhood. They obviously contain conventionalism, but also sensuality: they include verses with much more explicit eroticism than what blossoms in the poems dedicated to Haidé. More than revolving around transgression, the latter formally constitute a poetic reflection on the role of absence and presence in love. Even though the identification between life and literature is clear in the Clara series (Clara is the name of the writer's wife, Clara Noble Malvido), in the Haidé series this issue is more controversial: the attempts to attribute biographical reality to Haidé have generated a controversy that is still alive today.<sup>6</sup>

Nature plays a prominent role in Maragall's poetry. He was known to be fully urban, so his poetry examines the landscape with the eye of a summer visitor. In Maragall's poetry, nature can be either fully autonomous from the poet's moods or the objective correlate of these moods, or, in some cases, it can even be what triggers his moods. The poems in which the poetic voice identifies with the landscape in terms of merging with it fit into the third category, which ties Maragall's oeuvre with mystical literature. Closely related to the role of nature is the passage of time. The purpose of many of Maragall's poems is to pay witness to the passage of time: months, seasons, weather phenomena and the changes in plants associated with them. Running parallel to the natural changes in the

weather over the course of the year are the cultural changes, namely festivals, the time when the everyday course of time is interrupted by “intense” moments laden with significance and meaning.<sup>7</sup>

The poet’s civic duty is manifested in texts in which he glorifies the role to be played by the new generations in restoring the Catalan fatherland: the “cants” from *Visions & cants*, the anthems to flags and choral societies and the odes to Spain and Barcelona all testify to the poet’s endeavours serving a given ideological commitment. However, these poems also permit a vitalist interpretation that enables us to forget their nationalist bent: when he says “l’hora nostra és arribada” (“our time has come”), he could be referring to either the upswing in Catalanism (nationalistic interpretation) or the glorification of the strength of youth (vitalist interpretation).<sup>8</sup>

Finally, we should note that the religious experience appears in many of Maragall’s poems. In some cases, the purpose is simply to attest to the conventional forms of religiosity common in his epoch and his country. However, much more often, what Maragall does in his poems is note the possibility of a religious experience outside the conventionally established channels.<sup>9</sup> His most celebrated religious poem is unquestionably the “Cant espiritual”, in which the poetic voice wonders what better afterlife God can offer after death, given that what he truly values is this life.<sup>10</sup>

Maragall’s poetry has been assessed in many different ways. No one doubts that he earned a privileged spot in the canon of 20th century Catalan literature with his poetry. However, there has been a constant stream of reservations when assessing the literary and linguistic quality of his poetry. It has been said that Maragall is a poet “for kitchen cooks”,<sup>11</sup> that he is “an awkward, and sometimes very awkward, poet”,<sup>12</sup> that he wrote verses that are “poorly wrought” (Ruyra), and that, in short, he did not know how to write. Recently, however, scholars tend to take issue with these portrayals and spotlight the literary and even linguistic quality of his poetry.<sup>13</sup>

## MARAGALL, THE WRITER OF ARTICLES AND INTELLECTUAL

In 1890, Maragall joined the editorial staff at the conservative newspaper *Diario de Barcelona*, where in his early years he only performed anonymous management and writing jobs (secretary to the director, Joan Mañé i Flaquer, and to the editorial department).<sup>14</sup> Between 1892 and 1901, he also began to write articles, especially investigative articles, in Spanish, with no set frequency, which earned him prestige as a political commentator. The overarching theme of the articles from his early years is a criticism of parliamentarism, an acerbic, caustic and even brittle criticism. However, the range of themes gradually expanded and the tone shifted: he wrote texts with clearly literary pretensions, critiques and texts on literary theory

and commentaries on political and social issues with a more personal voice. Worth noting, for example, is his series of articles that reported on the loss of the Spanish colonies in Cuba and the Philippines (1898).

In 1901, after a six-month leave of absence for depression,<sup>15</sup> Maragall started to publish weekly articles in the *Diario de Barcelona*. In April 1903, he left the newspaper over political disagreements with the owners, who were not fond of their contributor’s Catalanism.

Between 1904 and 1906, Maragall published monthly articles in Catalan, most of which were literary, including stories, in the magazine *Il·lustració Catalana* at the request of Francesc Matheu. Between 1905 and 1906, he resumed his contributions to the *Diario de Barcelona* with a series of heavily connected weekly articles whose point of departure was not so much the outside world as commented on by the writer but the interior life of this author himself, where impacts from the outside world resonated. The 1905-1906 series in the *Diario de Barcelona* boasts perhaps the highest literary quality of his entire journalistic oeuvre.

Between December 1908 and December 1909, he contributed a monthly article to the Madrid-based literary magazine *La Lectura*, where he published articles with a heavy speculative content, the reason many of these texts were compiled in *Elogios*, Maragall’s book of philosophy.

Finally, in June 1911 he once again resumed his collaboration with the weekly *Diario de Barcelona* with a second series of articles once again linked to one another. In these latter texts, Maragall offers a critical view – often anguished, and with prophetic and apocalyptic tones – of his times. He questions great collective social and cultural undertakings because he believed that the emphasis should be on the individual much more than on the collective. He is a critic of the bureaucratisation of society, which is opposed to the soul that the individual genius is capable of putting into his works when he acts in obedience not to outer instructions but to an inner drive. In these texts from 1911, we can also find a reflection on the great metaphysical themes that concerned him, including sensuality and asceticism, corporality and spirituality, time and eternity.<sup>16</sup>

This Maragall the journalist mostly reveals himself on the pages of *Diario de Barcelona*, but also in his regular contributions to *Il·lustració Catalana* and *La Lectura*, and in his sporadic contributions to *El Poble Català*, *La Veu de Catalunya*, *Los Lunes del Imparcial* and other periodicals. If we recapitulate this twenty-year career in journalism, we see that Maragall dabbled widely. First came the anonymous news briefs on topics which range from a report on a trial to the opening of an orphans’ school or a concert critique.<sup>17</sup> Then came political articles, from the early ones which were limited to capturing the reactionary positions of the newspaper where he wrote to the ones committed to Catalanism with more nuanced social positions than in his earlier contributions (between 1890 and 1911, his writings show a rising social consciousness).



Third were the literary articles, including stories, highly lyrical or metaphysical evocations, theoretical constructs to profile a given poetics, reviews of new literary and theatre and music releases. And fourth were the reflection articles on social and spiritual issues written from a mature standpoint with prophetic undertones.

Even though he had often accepted regular (weekly or monthly) columns, Maragall often criticised the obligation to write on a given day by calling it plying a trade; he thought instead that article writers should only address the people when they have something to say.<sup>18</sup> This is what occurred particularly during the Tragic Week (Barcelona, 1909), and it is what made Maragall become not merely an article writer but also an intellectual: someone who makes use of the prestige he earned in the field of letters (as a poet and journalist) to strive to affect the life of the collective. In fact, on the occasion of Tragic Week in 1909, Maragall spoke up in *La Veu de Catalunya* in an effort to clarify understanding of the events and affect their outcome. The three articles he wrote there, which are clearly anthological (one of them, a plea against the death penalty, was censored), are the clearest proof of his desire to exert an influence in his society.<sup>19</sup> It has often been said that in this sense Maragall was the first modern intellectual in Catalonia, and his pioneering role has been compared to Zola's in the birth of the figure of the socially committed intellectual in France.

In fact, the term *intellectual* used as a noun became popular in Europe around the same time that Maragall began to make a name for himself.<sup>20</sup> On the 13<sup>th</sup> of January 1898, Zola published his celebrated "J'accuse" in the newspaper *L'Aurore*, in which he came out in defence of "la vérité et la justice", which were seriously threatened if the Dreyfus trial were not reviewed, the trial of French-Jewish soldier unfairly condemned for treason. The Dreyfus Affair polarised French society: where some invoked justice and truth, others appealed to the preservation of society, the defence of the nation and the higher reason of the State.<sup>21</sup> It is interesting to note some of the parallelisms between the Dreyfus Affair in France and the public debates in which Maragall participated in Catalonia. On the 6<sup>th</sup> of January 1898, Zola published a leaflet entitled "Lettre à la France" in which he stated: "Je t'en conjure, France, sois encore la grande France, reviens à toi, retrouve-toi."<sup>22</sup> Precisely six months later, on the 6<sup>th</sup> of July 1898, Maragall addressed his own letter to Spain in which he cried: "¡Espanya, Espanya, — retorna en tu, | arrenca el plor de mare!"<sup>23</sup> (Spain, Spain, return to yourself | The mother's cry gushes forth!) Can this "retorna en tu" addressed to Spain be interpreted as an echo of Zola's "reviens à toi" to France? Doesn't the same underlying attitude inspire the two letters written to the fatherland? Zola and Maragall stood up against the discourse of the defence of the fatherland, its honour, its reason of State. Both wanted to advocate truth and justice. Both were intellectuals: they used the prestige conferred on them by their literary successes to strive to affect public life.<sup>24</sup>



Figure 2. Portrait of Joan Maragall (Barcelona, 1860-1911). Catalan poet and writer, a crucial figure in modern poetry at the shift from the 19<sup>th</sup> to 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.

### MARAGALL, THE THINKER

It would probably be excessive to speak about Maragall the philosopher because this would lead one to imagine him dedicating himself professionally to thinking, with all the tools and terminology of the philosophical trade. And it is true that Maragall was not a professional philosopher, nor did he ever pretend to be one. However, he did have the pretension of thinking about the major questions and to do so with precision, trying to provide his own answer to them expressed in rigorous, intelligible terms. For this reason, his texts in verse and prose are not limited to returning to society its own set of ideas in literary form; rather they offer society thoughts that the writer has crafted with effort. Gabriel Ferrater said that Maragall was the most interesting poet "of content" in all of Catalan modern literature.<sup>25</sup> I believe that the stress – the most interesting poet "of content" – refers precisely to this fact: that Maragall did not limit himself to poeticising based on the ideological coordinates given to him; rather he personally considered the problems and strove to give them his own answer, made up by himself.

This thinking was spread over his entire intellectual career but manifested itself in a particularly conscientious,

sustained and successful way during the last five years of his life. The late Maragall is unequivocally a thinker, and a thinker who wishes to leave a body of thought. For this reason, he so enthusiastically welcomed Eugeni d'Ors' proposal to compile his theoretical texts into a volume of miscellany as part of a philosophy collection. This project, which never materialised within the scope and calendar initially called for, nonetheless bore fruit in the book *Elogios*, which contains Maragall's most elaborate philosophical texts.<sup>26</sup>

What is the content of this thinking? Let us systematise it by saying that there is a metaphysicist, aesthete and ethicist – or a political philosopher – inside Maragall. Let me begin with the metaphysicist.

### Metaphysics

Maragall strove to answer his metaphysical questions primarily in two texts: "Elogi de la poesia" and "Del vivir".<sup>27</sup> In "Elogi de la poesia", the writer conceives of human beings within the framework of a cosmogony that determines a teleology: the origin points to the end. The cosmogony tells us: we come from God. The teleology tells us: *ergo*, we will return to God. Between the point of departure and the destination there is a task that Maragall explains by utilising three concepts: love, effort and pain. Out of love, God turns chaos into cosmos. Out of love, God creates man. Out of love, man collaborates in God's creative endeavour. However, doing this requires effort: one must make an effort to struggle against chaos, against the resistance offered by matter, against the mystery of evil. This effort is possible because there is love; Maragall very opportunely cites the last verse of the *Divine Comedy*: love is what moves the Sun and the other stars. We develop effort motivated by love. However, it is an effort, and all efforts result in the experience of pain. This pain is necessary and must be understood in metaphysical terms, not physical or emotional ones. *Pain*, to Maragall, implies having lived, having made an effort, having acted, having worn oneself out. He expresses this very well in verses from the poet "Cant de novembre": "De plànyer és el donzell que ajeu sos membres | ans d'haver-los cansat en el plaer" (We should pity the maiden who lays down her body before having exhausted it in pleasure).<sup>28</sup> Another image that he offers to explain pain is a drop of water: it evaporates to form clouds, it transforms into rain and snow, it converts into a river and it arrives at the sea, and from there it once again evaporates, giving rise to an endless cycle of successive, painful transformations. This process repeated time and again is Maragall's "eternal recommencement", a recommencement which, however, is not the way the animals in Nietzsche's *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* announce it: it does not come back identical, the same, ever the same, because each turn that man takes with love, effort and pain imply a purification and an ascension, so that he gradually *spiritualises*, that is, draws closer to God. There is in Maragall a unique idea of progress, what he called the "indefinite ascension of matter".<sup>29</sup> For this rea-

son, we can say that his metaphysics is unequivocally optimistic: pain is not in vain; rather it has meaning.

However, Maragall's optimistic conception does not mean that there can be no regressions. Maragall, in fact, predicted them: what is more, he attests to them everywhere and bears them closely in mind when developing his philosophical proposition. In Maragall's opinion, regressions are automatisms, that is, movements that are only apparent because they are not motivated by love. Effort is precisely justified for this reason: because it breaks with the waning inertia that automatism instils in us. For this reason, in "Del vivir" the writer encourages readers to make an effort to live to the utmost, to struggle for every detail, to overcome the ennui of chaos with the creative effort. Because, as he had established in "Elogi de la poesia", chaos puts up resistance to the creative effort, and this effort thus creates a *rhythm*, another key concept in Maragall's metaphysics which is crucial to the construction of his aesthetic. Rhythm is the alternation between action and repose. Effort does not develop in a linear, cumulative fashion but with ups and downs, with faster and slower periods, since the chaos of matter generates a resistance which must be overcome. Even though it is prompted by the resistance to chaos, this rhythm is positive because it validates movement, effort, life. However, when man resigns from effort, when he stops making an effort, movement may seem to continue, yet it is no longer rhythm per se but automatism: it seems to be alive, but it is actually dead – or dormant, as he would say in many texts. Maragall encourages the human being, the creature that is aware of creation, to realise the automatism into which he often falls and to transform it into creative rhythm.

This conscious nature that Maragall attributes to man within creation is important. In some texts he says that man is "the consciousness of Earth" (an idea he attributes to Nietzsche). This consciousness is what allows man to experience this process – the gradual transformation of chaos into cosmos, the gradual spiritualisation of matter, the return to the God from which we came – knowledgeably and to contribute to it with positive effort. When effort ceases, man falls into automatism and slumbers. Therefore, it is good for man to awaken. In fact, the call to awaken is almost a leitmotiv in Maragall's works at least since the "cants" in *Visions & cants*. Conscious, awake, aware man: this is his human ideal.

However, this awakening does not exclude the capacity to close our eyes, or to leave them half-open, in order to begin to explore our interior world. Maragall is keenly interested in this exploration, although he excludes the dream world, which is virtually absent from his oeuvre. What he is interested in is not *dream*, but sleepiness, day-dreaming, the state in which, half-awake and half-asleep, memory travels through time, images are superimposed upon one another and our consciousness of time is altered.<sup>30</sup> And we thereby enter the last point worth examining in Maragall's metaphysics. To construct it, let us re-

tain this idea of an alteration in our consciousness of time, which is present in almost all Maragall's texts linked to mystical literature.

We have already mentioned the idea of eternal recommencement, a non-Nietzschean eternal return because it entails the progressive purification or ascension of the subject that recommences. We have also mentioned in the section on "Maragall the poet" the importance he attached to the passage of the year, to the changing seasons. In numerous texts, the passage of the year is viewed as a wheel that rotates and allows us to pass by the same points every year, points which are progressively purified or ascended. Maragall nuances his linear conception of time – a conception gleaned from a metaphysics based on a very simple cosmogony and teleology (we come from God and will return to God, alpha and omega) – with a clearly circular conception which, however, does not preclude progress (more accurately, in fact, with a linear comprehension). In this circular conception, not all times are equal. Collective festivities and moments marked by events in one's personal history give differing weights to different moments. Time is not a cumulative succession of identical time intervals. Maragall calls these weightier moments, ones with more vital density, which often entail a loss in time references, "moments of eternity".<sup>31</sup> And he asks his readers to try to arouse them: man must strive to make all instants moments of eternity. That is: man must try to experience eternity in time. Therefore, according to Maragall, eternity is not a future promise that compensates for the negation of a life lived in time but the experience *in time* of individuals capable of living moments of great vital intensity to the utmost. To achieve this, sometimes one must have one's eyes open, but sometimes one must close them or leave them half-open in order to be capable of perceiving the world with "your [God's] peace in our eye".<sup>32</sup>

### Aesthetics

Maragall's aesthetics – we have already hinted at some of its general features when introducing his poetry – can also be sought in his "Elogi de la poesia", unquestionably his most philosophically solid and ambitious text, and in many other earlier and later texts as well. We can start with the idea of *rhythm*, as we have discussed when examining the author's metaphysics. If Maragall conceived of the creative force as a rhythmic force in which action and repose alternate due to matter's resistance to the creative effort, his aesthetic starts from the fact that this rhythm has left a mark on things. Aesthetics is based on nothing other than this mark of the creative rhythm on matter, a mark that, according to Maragall, makes up what is commonly known as form. When this form reveals to us its essence, we call that beauty. Beauty is, therefore, a revelatory form, a form that communicates, but what it reveals or communicates is itself, the form itself. When this beauty has a human expression, then we can call it art. Art is, therefore, the form rendered by the human hand that reveals in itself the essence of itself.

This understanding of beauty as the form that reveals the form itself through itself places us on the pathway to Maragall's autotelic conception of the aesthetic phenomenon. Art has no purpose outside art itself, or, as stated in Kantian terms, art is "purposefulness without purpose". Maragall is quite insistent on this point (he returns to it time and again in different texts), but perhaps the place he expresses it the best is in the poem in prose that he inserted in "Elogi de la poesia": the passage in which he explains the specific experience of contemplating the sea one afternoon. The author explains that contemplating the sea leads him first to prayer (religious moment), secondly to reflection (philosophical moment), and next to curiosity as to *how* (scientific and technical moment). Then the view of men working on a boat leads him to piousness and love (moral moment). However, at the end of the process of contemplation, a moment comes when the voice does not inspire either religious emotion, or philosophical or scientific questioning, or moral rumination; rather the spectacle leads him to contemplate the form itself: that is exactly, Maragall claims, the aesthetic emotion. The aesthetic moment has been reached: the contemplation of a form without any other interest than the form itself.

Naturally, a poet's aesthetic always ends up being poetry: Maragall's Kantian aesthetic takes shape in a poetics whose keywords include *spontaneity*, *purity* and *sincerity*. Let us begin with *purity*: to Maragall, *pure* means artistic to the exclusion of anything that is not artistic. And since by *art* he means the revelation of the essence of the form wrought by man, a work of art is pure inasmuch as it is limited to revealing itself, that is, to showing its beauty beyond any other consideration. This excludes from poetry any purposes that are not strictly artistic, including pedagogic, social, political or moral purposes. Maragall's literary criticism is full of recriminations levelled at authors judged to have "contaminated" their poetry with purposes outside the act of poetry, especially ideological purposes.

With regard to *spontaneity* and *sincerity*, he refers to the patient attitude the poet should have at two key moments that make the creative act possible: the contemplation of nature and the writing of the poem. Nature must be contemplated *spontaneously*: the poet cannot go into nature seeking inspiration for his literary work; rather nature must spontaneously offer the poet a suggestion, without his purposefully seeking it. Nature unleashes the process that leads to poetry, but it does so when it wants, and the poet should not try to force it. Once this spontaneous contemplation of nature has taken place, the poet must write the sacred words that surge forth with utter sincerity, that is, limiting himself to transcribing the words that are dictated to him and refraining from embellishing them with poetic resources.

These are the fundamental principles of Maragall's poetics.<sup>33</sup> Obviously, there is an important distance between this aesthetic proposition and Maragall's real poetry. For example, in his aesthetic proposition, Maragall upholds restraint from embellishing and polishing the text. How-



ever, his manuscripts and the successive editions of his poems reveal a poet who corrects and gradually fine-tunes his verses. Yet we must acknowledge that in his poetic oeuvre there are traces of a certain formal nonchalance (with which some of his contemporaries found fault, as did later critics, as mentioned above) which are probably not too far from his aesthetic proposition.

### Ethics or political philosophy

In Maragall, there is an interest in the social – and therefore political – nature of all human action, while at the same time a horror of the perils of socialisation and the individual. This socialisation generates institutions, and the great peril of all institutions (State, Church, political parties, unions, social initiatives, etc.) is that they can automate movement, that is, that things may be done not through the impetus of the love of a living being but through the momentum developed by a bureaucratic body. Let us recall the dialectic between sleep and wakefulness, between automatism and rhythm, referred to when discussing the author's metaphysics.

Maragall explains how at first, the founder of an institution performs each of his actions with love. However, the institution grows, the founder disappears and the functions he used to perform directly are now performed by a long chain of emissaries that *represent* the institution, but *are not* the institution themselves.<sup>34</sup> The bureaucrat *represents* a third party, but at the expense of not being anything himself. For this reason, Maragall shows extreme scepticism towards the actions performed by institutions and believes that trying to affect this would be futile. He is convinced that it would be much more effective, politically speaking, for each person to make an individual effort in the job at which he can excel: “each individual should reconstruct himself incessantly following the light he has been given, and not be at all concerned – or only for the most precise moment – with the law, nor the king, nor social convention, nor the system,” he says in “Del viuir”. The love of humanity, of man in the abstract, is sterile because “*man* does not exist; only John, Peter and James exist”.

Maragall's anti-gregariousness is accentuated – or even taken to its extreme – in his last journalistic series in 1911, but its roots go further back to his readings of works by Carlyle, Nietzsche and Ibsen in 1893.<sup>35</sup> In *On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and the Heroic in History*, Carlyle asserts that history is not propelled by collectives but by great individuals. In Maragall's first reading of Nietzsche, he is a keen critic of democracy and Christian piety and a fervently exalts the unique, selfish personality of the superman. And in Maragall's readings of Ibsen (basically grounded upon his work *An Enemy of the People*), the latter author compares intellectual daring with the individual's desire to overcome the reactionary nature of the masses. Equipped with these intellectual tools, Maragall always mistrusts collective movements, and when he detects them he always seeks the soul – the individual soul –

that made them possible. When there is no specific individual soul, the collective movement becomes an *abstraction*, which in Maragall is always a clearly pejorative term because it contrasts with the specific, real, unique nature of every individual.<sup>36</sup>

His rejection of abstractions and adherence to the individual as the only force capable of moving societies forward did not prevent Maragall from contributing to the shaping of a Catalanist ideology and from seeking the chance to put it into action. Maragall is in no way a neutral observer of the political scene in which Catalanism emerged with force. He enthusiastically celebrated the Solidaritat Catalana (1906) movement and provided explicit support for the politicians on the Catalanist right, including Prat de la Riba and Cambó. However, he also had affective ties with Catalanist politicians and intellectuals on the left, such as Pere Coromines and Carles Rahola, and he always maintained his independence, as shown, for example, in his refusal to participate in the active politics and disobedience of the Catalanist right on the occasion of the Setmana Tràgica (Tragic Week).

Maragall's political thinking on Spain is not unequivocal. Before the end of the century, he contributed to a newspaper that was hostile to Catalanism, but he allowed himself – privately – to focus on “breaking bonds with Death” (and “Death” obviously referring to Spain). Ultimately, he supported a relationship between Catalonia and Spain in confederal terms, one that would extend across the entire Iberian Peninsula: each of the three great

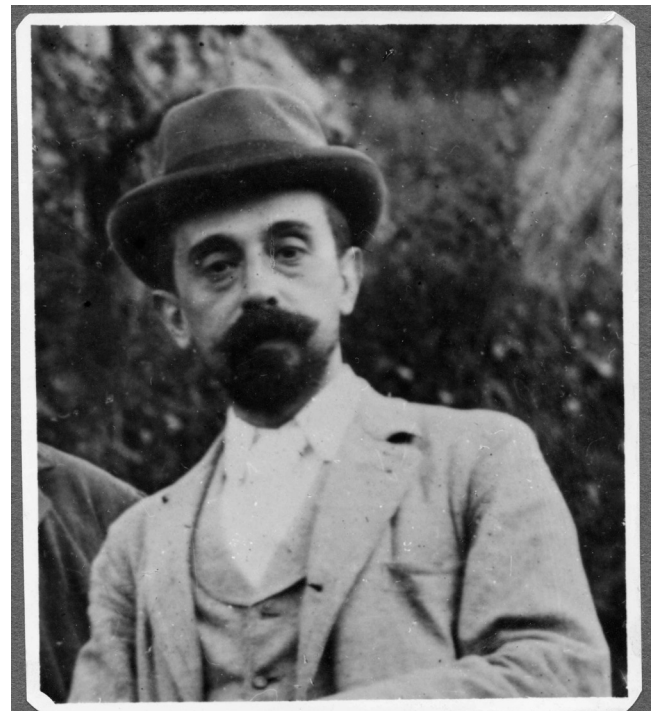


Figure 3. Joan Maragall was a romantic, bourgeois personality rich in nuances, a propagator of authors and ideas that were circulating around Europe at the time. To Maragall, poetry was not just another activity for his restless temperament; instead, poetry filled his entire life.

civilisations on the Iberian Peninsula – Catalonia, Castile and Portugal – should govern themselves within an Iberian confederation that is respectful of the freedom of the peoples within it.<sup>37</sup>

## MARAGALL THE MYSTIC

Maragall's overall intellectual contributions would remain incomplete if they were limited to the fields of poetry, civic journalism and philosophy. We must thus introduce the last key to understanding him, primarily to grasp his oeuvre as a whole: mysticism.

By this we are not claiming that Maragall was a mystic, or that he was the author of mystical literature in the conventional sense of the term. However, what we do wish to convey is that there is a strong spiritual dimension in Maragall's approach to the world, an awareness that matter does not exhaust the content of what we perceive and experience. There is an "extra", a "something else" which can be perceived in Maragall's texts, something that gives them an easily noticeable depth. In some texts, this "extra" attains a formalisation that unequivocally associates them with mystical literature.

In 1905-1906, as part of the aforementioned journalistic series in the *Diario de Barcelona*, Maragall published three articles that were written in this vein. They are clearly mystical literature.<sup>38</sup> However, this is a profane mysticism, the kind Michel Hulin calls "savage mysticism" or that Juan Martín Velasco defines as "non-religious forms of mysticism".<sup>39</sup> It is a *savage* or *non-religious* mysticism because it is not cultivated within the framework of a religion. Maragall does not recount an experience of contemplating explicitly religious content. There are no apparitions, nor visions, nor stigmata, nor any of the phenomena traditionally associated with mystical literature. Nor does any God appear. And yet, the texts echo a wholly unique experience that we can clearly describe as mystical. Within a privileged setting in time and space (country roads, the summer), the writer experiences a suspension of conventional time and shows signs of experiencing a state of altered consciousness. Something has happened which surges forth in the normal course of events and creates a rupture. It happens at a specific instant, an instant that seems to fuse the present, past and future. Maragall attests to the experience and reports on it to the reader, whom he encourages to intensify his own perceptive capacities. These are not private but public writings: newspaper articles! And yet, what Maragall reveals in these public texts are the byways of his own soul in those privileged instants when it experiences a rupture from the workaday world.

Later on, Maragall reflected on that kind of experience: after practice comes theory. We have already discussed Maragall's metaphysical considerations around what he called "moments of eternity". In his "Cant espiritual", what the author proposes is that these instants of eternity are not occasional privileged moments that surge forth

from a temporality experienced in conventional terms (as the mystical texts of 1905-1906 would lend themselves to being interpreted, where he refers to unique experiences that can clearly be dated and located). Quite to the contrary, the goal is to get all instants to become moments of eternity: "Jo, que voldria, | aturar a tants moments de cada dia | per fé'ls eterns a dintre del meu cor!" (What I would like, | is to stop so many moments every day | to make them eternal inside my heart!).<sup>40</sup> Maragall's proposition entails making time eternal, experiencing every moment with the same intensity, striving to "make eternal" each moment. For this reason, we can say that in Maragall, eternity is not an experience to be had *after* time, but an experience that we are called on to have *in* time.

## NOTES AND REFERENCES

- [1] The literature on Maragall is quite extensive. A sweeping compilation is available in Ignasi MORETA. *No et facis posar cendra: Pensament i religió en Joan Maragall*. Fragmenta, Barcelona 2010, pp. 499-527. For Maragall's thinking in particular, see: Eugenio TRÍAS. *El pensament de Joan Maragall*. Península, Barcelona 1982; Ignasi MORETA. *No et facis...*, *op. cit.*; Josep-Maria TERRI-CABRAS (ed.). *Joan Maragall: Paraula i pensament*. Càtedra Ferrater Mora, Girona 2011. Recently, Ricard Torrents has strongly supported incorporating a philosophical and mystical perspective in the study of Maragall, in contrast to the traditional literary and social-historical approaches. Cf. Ricard TORRENTS. "Art, literatura i pensament *versus* contemporaneïtat: Antoni Gaudí, Joan Maragall...". In: Ricard TORRENTS. *Entorn de Maragall i Gaudí*. Fundació Joan Maragall i Claret. Barcelona 2012, pp. 5-23.
- [2] There is no biography of Maragall written with ambition and scholarly neutrality. Ignasi MORETA. *No et facis...*, *op. cit.*, offers an "intellectual biography" and on pp. 459-496, an extensive "Cronologia de Joan Maragall" (Timeline of Joan Maragall). To reconstruct Maragall in his youth, the *Notes autobiogràfiques* (Autobiographical notes) are necessary. Cf. Joan MARAGALL. *Com si entrés en una pàtria. Cartes a Josep M. Lloret (1882-1895) and Notes autobiogràfiques (1885/1910)*. Edited and prologue by Glòria Casals. Publicacions de l'Abadia de Montserrat, Barcelona 2007.
- [3] I cite Maragall's poetry from the best edition around, a peek at the edition that will appear in the future critical edition of the writer's complete works: Joan MARAGALL. *Poesia completa*. Edited by Glòria Casals and Lluís Quintana. Edicions 62, Barcelona 2010, p. 25.
- [4] The literature on Count Arnau in Maragall's works is quite extensive. In the latest interpretations published, see: Ignasi MORETA. *No et facis...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 158-168 and 258-268; Lluís QUINTANA, "Estudi preliminar". In: Joan MARAGALL. *El comte Arnau*. Preliminary study, working proposals and supplementary material by Lluís



- Quintana. Edited by Glòria Casals. Educaula, Barcelona 2010, pp. 9-35; Margarida CASACUBERTA, "El comte Arnau: la trajectòria d'un mite". In: *En el batec del temps. Vint invitacions a la lectura de Joan Maragall en ocasió del cent cinquantè aniversari de la seva naixença i el centenari de la seva mort 2010-2011*. Institució de les Lletres Catalanes, Barcelona 2012, pp. 373-399; Simona ŠKRABEC, "L'escut brillant de l'èpica. Faust de Goethe i El comte Arnau de Maragall". In: *En el batec del temps...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 401-433; Cici MALIK, "Ressuscitant la llengua: El Faust de Goethe i El comte Arnau de Maragall". In: *En el batec del temps...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 435-452.
- [5] The most far-reaching studies on Maragall's poetry are: Arthur TERRY. *La poesia de Joan Maragall*. Quaderns Crema, Barcelona 2000, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed.; Joan MARAGALL. *Poesia. Edició crítica*. Edited by Glòria Casals. La Magrana, Barcelona 1998; Sam ABRAMS, *Llegir Maragall, ara*. Proa, Barcelona 2010.
- [6] Glòria Casals suggested breaking Maragall's love poetry down into two series (Clara and Haidé) in Joan MARAGALL. *Poesia...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 442-459. This was disputed in Francesco ARDOLINO. *Una literatura entre el dogma i l'heretgia: Les influències de Dante en l'obra de Maragall*. Cruïlla, Barcelona 2006, pp. 50-52. Later, Glòria Casals suggested identifying the literary character of Haidé as the writer Andrée Béarn, the pseudonym of Marie Marguerite Laborde. Cf. Glòria CASALS. *Joan Maragall: Carnets de viatge*. Diputació de Barcelona, Barcelona 2010, p. 302; Glòria CASALS, "Dones de Maragall. A propòsit de Clara i Haidé". In: Josep-Maria TERRICABRAS (ed.). *Joan Maragall...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 37-69. I disputed this identification in Ignasi MORETA. *No et facis...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 353-380, where I uphold the fact that Haidé is a literary figure that comes from a variety of literature sources through which Maragall reflects on the interplay between presence and absence in love. See also the interpretation of the poem "Represa d'Haidé" proposed by Miralles (who also presents Haidé in terms of absence-presence) in: Carles MIRALLES. "La paradoxal presència de l'absent Haidé". *Haidé. Butlletí de l'Arxiu Joan Maragall*, no. 0 (2011), pp. 35-40, available at [https://botiga.bnc.cat/publicacions/haide\\_num0.pdf](https://botiga.bnc.cat/publicacions/haide_num0.pdf). Last retrieved on 19 January 2013.
- [7] For an examination of how nature is dealt with in Maragall's poetry, see Arthur TERRY. *La poesia de Joan...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 77-86.
- [8] The interpretation of *Visions & cants* proposed by Joan-Lluís Marfany is now a classic, as he believes that with this book Maragall was offering a symbolism and mythology at the service of the nascent Catalanist ideology. Cf. Joan-Lluís MARFANY. "Maragall, poeta regeneracionista. Lectura de *Visions & cants*". In: *Aspectes del Modernisme*. Curial, Barcelona 1990, pp. 99-121. This is disputed in Antoni MORA. *Mite i raó política en Joan Maragall*. Fundació Joan Maragall i Claret, Barcelona 2000, p. 14; Antoni MORA. "Joan Maragall, poètica i política del desemparament". In: Josep MONTSERRAT MOLAS i Pompeu CASANOVAS (ed.). *Pensament i filosofia a Catalunya*. Vol. I. 1900-1923. INEHCA and Societat Catalana de Filosofia, Barcelona 2003, pp. 55-56, and Ignasi MORETA. "Visions & cants: molt més que una contribució al catalanisme". In: Joan MARAGALL. *Visions & cants*. Edited by Ignasi Moreta. Hermes, Barcelona 2003, pp. 16-30.
- [9] For an examination of the popular expressions of faith in Maragall's poetry, see Anna M. BLASCO BARDAS, "Maragall i les festes religioses". In: Pere Lluís FONT (coord.). *Les idees religioses de Joan Maragall*. Cruïlla, Barcelona 2012, pp. 91-111 (I disputed this in Ignasi MORETA. "Maragall i les festes. Apunts sobre un text d'Anna M. Blasco". In: <http://lectordemaragall.blogspot.com.es/2012/11/maragall-i-les-festes-apunts-sobre-un.html>. Last retrieved on 19 January 2013). On Maragall's religious poetry with regard to the limits of the institution of the Church to channel the sacred, see Ignasi MORETA. *No et facis...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 145-175, and, regarding the specific case of "El Mal Caçador", see the analysis I propose in Ignasi MORETA. "La inquietud religiosa de Joan Maragall". In: *En el batec del temps...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 17-31.
- [10] The literature on "Cant espiritual" is extraordinarily vast. One recent contribution, which engages in dialogue with some of its predecessors, is the one by Josep M. JAUMÀ, "Lectures del "Cant espiritual" de Joan Maragall". In: Pere Lluís FONT (coord.). *Les idees religioses...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 145-161.
- [11] This is reported in Jordi MARAGALL. "Pròleg". In: Eugenio TRÍAS. *El pensament...*, *op. cit.*, p. 12.
- [12] Lluís QUINTANA TRIAS. "La definitiva bondad de la vida. El pensamiento religioso en la obra de Joan Maragall". *Bulletin Hispanique*, no. 1 (June 2003), p. 146.
- [13] See particularly Sam ABRAMS, *Llegir Maragall...*, *op. cit.*, *passim*.
- [14] Maragall recounts that he joined the *Diario de Barcelona* in his letters to Anton Roura dated the 20th and 22nd of October 1890 and in the letter to Josep M. Lloret dated the 27th of October 1890. See the first two in Joan MARAGALL, *Obres completes*. Vol. I. Selecta, Barcelona 1960, pp. 1100-1101, and the third in Joan MARAGALL. *Com si entrés...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 138-139.
- [15] Regarding this period, see Ignasi MORETA. *No et facis...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 195-197.
- [16] Maragall's last stint at the *Diario de Barcelona* has caused some controversy. What some commentators present as lucid, prophetic-style writings, others consider pathetic and disconcerting irrational exaltations with messianic tones. Some of the most prominent texts which comment on these writings are: Joan-Lluís MARFANY. "Joan Maragall". In: Martí de RIQUER (ed.). *Història de la literatura catalana*. Vol. VIII. Ariel, Barcelona 1986, pp. 243-246; Carles MIRALLES. "Un xic exòtic i desorientat". *Semblança de Joan Maragall l'últim any de la seva vida. Conferència pronunciada davant el Ple per — el dia 13 de desembre de 2004*. Institut d'Estudis Catalans, Barcelona 2005; Pere MARAGALL. "La crisi religiosa de Maragall en els darrers anys". In: Pere Lluís FONT (coord.). *Les idees*

- religioses...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 113-124; Antoni MORA. “La “darrera campanya””. In: Glòria CASALS and Meritxell TALAVERA. *Maragall: textos i contextos. I Congrés Internacional Joan Maragall*. Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, Bellaterra 2012, pp. 179-191.
- [17] These anonymous texts have never been compiled in any of the editions of Maragall’s complete works. The ones that we have been able to identify will appear in the forthcoming edition of complete works edited by Lluís Quintana, Francesco Ardolino, Glòria Casals and Ignasi Moreta.
- [18] See Joan MARAGALL. “El derecho de hablar”. *Diario de Barcelona*, 30-1-1902 (Joan MARAGALL. *Obres completes*. Vol. II. Selecta, Barcelona 1961, p. 177).
- [19] See Joan MARAGALL. *La Setmana Tràgica. Tres articles*. Edited by Ignasi Moreta. Fragmenta, Barcelona 2009.
- [20] In this paragraph, I revisit the thesis I upheld in Ignasi MORETA. “Joan Maragall, articulista i intel·lectual”. In: Ramon PANYELLA (cur.). *La projecció social de l’escriptor en la literatura catalana contemporània*. Punctum and Grup d’Estudis de Literatura Catalana Contemporània, Lleida and Bellaterra 2007, pp. 283-292.
- [21] Michel WINOCK. *Le siècle des intellectuels*. Seuil, Paris 1997, pp. 30-31.
- [22] Émile ZOLA. “Lettre à la France”. In: *L’Affaire Dreyfus. La vérité en marche*. Imprimerie Nationale, Paris 1992, p. 87.
- [23] Joan MARAGALL. *Poesia...*, *op. cit.*, p. 382. Regarding the date of the poem, see Joan MARAGALL. *Poesia...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 382-383.
- [24] For the letters to Josep M. Lloret dated the 3<sup>rd</sup> of August 1889 (Joan MARAGALL. *Com si entrés...*, *op. cit.*, p. 130), we know that Maragall had read *Germinal*: “I have read Zola’s ‘Germinal’, and I loved it, especially all the scenes from the strike”.
- [25] Gabriel FERRATER. “Dues conferències inèdites sobre poesia catalana (c. 1972)”. In: Dolors OLLER and Jaume SUBIRANA (ed.). *Gabriel Ferrater, “in memoriam”*. Proa, Barcelona 2001, p. 20. Along similar lines, Josep PLA. *Joan Maragall. Un assaig (Obra completa. Vol. X. Tres biografies)*. Destino, Barcelona 1968, p. 10, stated: “In his oeuvre there is a great deal of reflection and a vast amount of thinking. Everything he wrote, in both verse and prose, was thought out, deliberate, meditated and well-grounded.” In the book’s epilogue, p. 175, he stresses: “What so many cultivated people have asserted, that Maragall’s antennae were almost exclusively emotion and intuition, is not quite true. In my modest opinion, Maragall was a man of thought, an intelligent man primarily in the sense of always trying to give his statements solid footing.”
- [26] See Ignasi MORETA. “El pensament de l’últim Maragall (1906-1911)”. In: Josep-Maria TERRICABRAS (ed.). *Joan Maragall...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 283-314.
- [27] See the critical edition of the Catalan and Spanish versions of “Elogi de la poesia” in Lluís QUINTANA TRIAS. *La veu misteriosa. La teoria literària de Joan Maragall*. Publicacions de l’Abadia de Montserrat, Barcelona 1996, pp. 452-472 and 480-499. Regarding the text “Del vivir”, it can be read (as we await the critical edition) in Joan MARAGALL. *Obres completes*. Vol. II, *op. cit.*, pp. 67-71. For the metaphysical thinking that can be gleaned from these texts, see Ignasi MORETA. *No et facis...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 315-351 and 415-445.
- [28] “Cant de novembre” (Joan MARAGALL. *Poesia completa*, *op. cit.*, p. 102).
- [29] Joan MARAGALL. “La ley del progreso”. *Diario de Barcelona*, 21-5-1895 (Joan MARAGALL. *Obres completes*. Vol. II, *op. cit.*, pp. 467-468).
- [30] On this issue, see Lluís QUINTANA TRIAS. “Memòria involuntària i ‘rêverie’: dos elements del procés creatiu en la literatura catalana de finals del segle XIX”. *Bulletin of Hispanic Studies*, no. LXXVIII (2001), pp. 219-240.
- [31] He uses this exact expression — “momentos de eternidad” (moments of eternity) — in “Los vivos y los muertos”. *Diario de Barcelona*, 1-XI-1911 (Joan MARAGALL. *Obres completes*. Vol. II, *op. cit.*, p. 764).
- [32] “Cant espiritual” (Joan MARAGALL. *Poesia completa*, *op. cit.*, p. 289).
- [33] For Maragall’s aesthetics, see Lluís QUINTANA TRIAS. *La veu misteriosa...*, *op. cit.*, passim, and Ramon PLA I ARXÉ. “La poètica de Joan Maragall”. In: Pere Lluís FONT (coord.). *Les idees religioses...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 33-89.
- [34] See “Preparad los caminos”. *Diario de Barcelona*, 13-7-1911 (Joan MARAGALL. *Obres completes*. Vol. II, *op. cit.*, pp. 755-757).
- [35] See Ignasi MORETA. *No et facis...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 109-116.
- [36] Eugenio TRÍAS. *El pensamiento cívico de Joan Maragall*, Edicions 62, Barcelona 1985, pp. 59-61, 78-79, 90, 211-212 and 216. Trias is perhaps the person who has best explained what “the impulse of abstraction” means in Maragall.
- [37] For Iberism in Maragall and other writers of his day, see Víctor MARTÍNEZ-GIL. *El naixement de l’iberisme a Catalunya*. Curial, Barcelona 1997.
- [38] See Ignasi MORETA. *No et facis...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 269-284.
- [39] See Michel HULIN. *La mística salvaje. En los antipodas del espíritu*. Siruela, Madrid 2007 (original French edition: 1993); Juan MARTÍN VELASCO. *El fenómeno místico. Estudio comparado*. Trotta, Madrid 1999.
- [40] “Cant espiritual” (Joan MARAGALL. *Poesia completa*, *op. cit.*, p. 290).

## BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Ignasi Moreta holds a PhD in Humanities from the Universitat Pompeu Fabra, where he has taught since 2003. He is the author of the monograph *No et facis posar cendra. Pensament i religió en Joan Maragall* (Fragmenta, 2010), along with other studies in the field of Catalan philology and religion. He is the literary director of Fragmenta Editorial, which he founded in 2007 with Inès Castel-Branco.