

The Technique of Unpopularity,
or the Problematic Reception of Francesc
Trabal's Subversively Modern Fiction

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Originally submitted on December 2019

Resubmitted with minor corrections on April 2020

This dissertation is my own work, and has not been submitted in substantially the same form for the award of a higher degree elsewhere.

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Master by Research, December 2019

Abstract

Catalan writer Francesc Trabal (1899-1957) had a problematic reception. While his works before the Spanish Civil War were generally applauded because of their modernity and freshness, after the war an important part of the readership rejected his last novel, *Temperatura*, because it was seen as a frivolity in transcendent times. This dissertation aims to establish the context of this rejection and try to prove it was caused by the fact that Trabal's earlier reception was already problematic: an important part of Trabal's readers refused to read the texts in their own terms. With a detailed survey on reviews and scholarly studies the terms and circumstances of the reception is established and clarified. With a literary analysis of *Temperatura* first and then of Trabal's literature in relation to parody and intermediality. Trabal's literature is radically modern and essentially metalinguistic and metaliterary both before and after the Spanish Civil War. While considered frivolous by critics Trabal was challenging current literary values and exploring the great topic: the relationship between literature and life, between art and life. In short, he devoted his art to explore how humans make sense of the world and themselves.

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–A veure: I excusi la interrupció: ha dit que no tenia cap enemic?

–Exacte, ni jo ni els meus amics, ens sembla.

–Miri, així no farem res. Ha pres possessió de casa seva, sap?, això sí. (I vaig començar d'aixecar-me). Si ni vostè ni cap dels seus compten amb cap enemic, són a l'aigua.

F. Trabal, 'Saber amb què es compta'

He makes no friends who never made a foe

Tennyson

–A veiam: una capseta blanca que s'obre i no es tanca, què és això?

–Sí, ja ho sé: un ou.

–No.

–.....

–Una oua.

F. Trabal, 'La tècnica de la impopularitat'

1. Introduction.

Notes per a una biografia

Ell, una vegada va anar a espetegar davant la Venus de Milo. I jo hi era. I, ell que em diu, digué:
—...Què et diré, la meva dona està molt millor.¹

[Notes Towards a Biography

He, once suddenly landed up in front of the Venus of Milo. And I was there. And, then says, he said:
—...You know what? My wife looks much better.]

When the readers of the *Diari de Sabadell* read this text on a Tuesday of November in 1927, they might have wondered a number of things. Is this meant to be an anecdote or fiction? Who is ‘ell’? Who is ‘jo’? And to whom is ‘jo’ addressing? Me? How can one ‘anar a espetegar’ in front of the Venus of Milo? Why is the language so colloquial (the choice of ‘espetegar’, the repetition of the verb ‘dir’ is in two different tenses)? What does ‘ell’ mean by saying that his wife ‘està molt millor’? Whose biography is it? What is this doing in a newspaper? Regular readers might not have been surprised, though—after all, they might well have grown used to the eccentricities of the group of young men that had joined the newspaper three years before. They started to become notorious outside Sabadell—as ‘la Colla de Sabadell’—because of this kind of offerings. But, nonetheless, what is Francesc Trabal, one of the leaders of the group and the author of the text, trying to say?

Trabal is trying to tell an amusing story, a joke with absurd overtones about a not very bright man. He is doing more than that, however. He is challenging the reader’s assumptions and prejudices and defying their expectations of what it is to be found in a newspaper. The earlier questions are meant to remain unanswered because any possible attempt to answer them would be meaningless. The colloquial tone of the text is meant to question idiomatic expressions and, furthermore, codes and communication. The repetition of the verb *dir* which could be considered ungrammatical is actually not unusual in the oral language but in written language it becomes much more obvious. The comparison between the sculpture and the wife of the character seems to try to suggest something about his personality, as well as that of the narrator who finds it relevant to refer to such a comparison. We do not know whether the narrator agrees with the character or whether he finds the comparison meaningful in any way or just amusing. The reader, however, is invited to reflect on the ways an armless statue can be compared to a woman, how different art is to life, and how it is completely possible to utter such nonsense.

This reading is merely concerning the literality of the text and disregarding historical and

¹ Trabal, ‘Notes per a una biografia’, *De cara a la paret*, p. 184. Originally in *Diari de Sabadell*, 13 November 1927.

contextual issues. Once we take them into account, we see that Trabal is mocking, teasing and challenging the values of Noucentisme, the Catalan urban classicist nationalist movement. Although the last remains of the movement as such had disappeared with Primo de Rivera's dictatorship, its ethos would remain hegemonic for years to come. In the text, the Noucentista-friendly icon of classical art is in clear contrast with the vulgarity of both the character and the narrator, which is reinforced by the colloquial register they use. Regarding the register, it is not at all what would be expected of a well behaved cultured citizen of the ideal City of the Noucentistes, and it is not precisely the literary (standard) Catalan of Pompeu Fabra, which all Catalan institutions behind him had been straining to impose. In this light, the text could also be read as an attack on the barbarian appreciation of art where a character and a narrator cannot appreciate the sculpture because they do not have a command of the artistic language. An additional reading could be that Trabal is casually and humorously pointing at the limitations of Noucentisme in its efforts to enlighten Catalans.

A second, alternative, analysis could consider it is just a joke from a mischievous snob.

Traditionally, Trabal's reception has been closer to the second explanation than to the first one. This seems to be particularly, but not exclusively, true in early reception. Certainly, Trabal posed as a snob and his literature is genuinely funny — as I hope the quotations in this dissertation will prove to those who are not yet acquainted with it. However, at the same time it challenged common notions about language, literature and taste and articulated an original literary response to what Michel Raimond would later call 'the crisis of the novel'.²

In this dissertation, I intend to prove that Trabal's reception has been problematic: his work has been mostly praised by its lightness and superficial modernity but many times there has been a lack of acknowledgement of its the radical message of modernity which explores a central topic of the 20th Century: the relationship of language and thought, and between art and life. In short, he devoted his art to explore how humans make sense of the world and themselves. In order to develop this argument I will, on the one hand, survey Trabal's reception (with special attention to contemporary reception) and, on the other, analyse his work in order to prove its complexity and modernity. Most of the work regarding reception appears in the first chapter, devoted to *Temperatura* and the changing views of Catalan readership. Nonetheless in the second chapter, which looks at Trabal's use of parody, there is a reference to the reception of one of Trabal's bold endings; and in the third chapter, which explores how Trabal's texts interact with other artistic media, there is an analysis of the relationship between Trabal's literature and personal image.

Despite the fact that Francesc Trabal's writings are relevant both considered on their own and historically, in the context of Catalan literature (where they are of a crucial importance to

² Raimond, *La crise du roman*.

understand attitudes towards the novel in the 1930s), they did not receive due attention until Josep M. Balaguer's published a series of papers on Trabal.³ Their interpretation has made a significant turn, placing Trabal's literary procedures in the framework of the western discussion on fiction. Trabal's playfulness, absurd humour, language subversion, acquiescence and abruptness are now seen as a constitutive need of the kind of metafictional and metalinguistic discourse he tries to accomplish. My reading of Trabal will assume the general principles established by Balaguer.

Francesc Trabal was one of the most important Catalan writers of the 1930s and the quality and significance of his texts justifies any attempt to interpret or reinterpret them. Furthermore, some of the bibliographic and archival research in this dissertation has an intrinsic value regardless of the value of my argument: the survey on Trabal's early reception aims to be exhaustive regarding Catalan sources and includes a good number of American reviews; and some of the texts by Trabal quoted here have not been brought to light since they were first published and some have never been published, as it is the case with the personal diary he kept during the firsts months of exile.

Although I take into account the whole of Trabal's opus, only a few will be discussed in some detail, such as *Judita*, *Hi ha homes que ploren perquè el sol es pon*, *Vals* and *Temperatura*, as well as some of his shorter works. If I have chosen to use these texts and not others, it is, basically, for convenience: the first two exemplify very clearly a variety of parodic procedures; *Vals* clearly shows the problems of different artistic languages interacting with literature; and *Temperatura*, is a radical novel that shows Trabal's ludic mode in a pure form, is paradigmatic of the reception issues of Trabal's case.

Finally, in the age of fake news and information bubbles, at a point where cultural wars to impose narratives are fought daily in virtual environments, I deem Trabal's lesson extremely useful. His scepticism regarding language and the acute awareness of its limits and traps are most relevant to our day and age.

* * *

I should draw the attention of the reader to the fact that all translations are mine except when otherwise noted. In use the term *arbitrary* as commonly understood in Catalan studies: to describe something that makes a show of the authorial discretionary power to arrange the artistic materials, include or exclude elements in a way that its contingency is highlighted. I capitalise *Author* when I am referring to the character in a given novel as opposed to *author*, when I am referring to an actual flesh-and-bone person.

³ Balaguer, 'Francesc Trabal i la paròdia', 'La brevetat', 'Francesc Trabal, narrador', 'L'acció a través de la cultura', 'Pere Calders i l'autor Déu', 'El novel·lista, l'home modern'.

2. The Final Failure

Temperatura. En Trabal quan va cometre la novel·la amb aquest títol diuen que estava a cinquanta-set i mig. I que tenia cagarrines. Feia anys que no havia llegit una cosa tan dolenta, amb un humorisme—ell es pensa que en sap—que no fa ni somriure. Aquest senyor ha fet un ou ferrat sense oli; en un moment únic de fúria interina. Trobo que l’haurien de pegar.⁴

[*Temperatura*. When Trabal perpetrated the novel with that title it is said he had a temperature of fifty-seven and a half. And he had the runs. It’s been years since the last time I read something that bad, with a humour—he thinks he knows what it is about—that doesn’t even make you smile. This gentleman has fried an egg without oil; in a single moment of interim fury. I think he should be beaten.]

This is possibly the worst thing said about the last novel Francesc Trabal wrote, *Temperatura*, first published in exile in 1947; and this is one of the worst things that could be said about any novel. In addition, these words were written by a most important author, Mercè Rodoreda in a letter to her friend Anna Murià. However, it is necessary to remark on the private nature of such a caustic phrasing of her opinion. Nevertheless, she ratified it later in less degrading terms, albeit extending it to the whole of Trabal’s production: ‘jo trobo que ara no és res’ [I think it is nothing now].⁵ But we should also note as well that both these quotes have to be contextualised in the new path that Rodoreda’s fiction was about to take and, furthermore, that the author rejected all her own former published novels with the exception of *Aloma* (which was to be extensively reworked in 1969 and not republished in its original form). This rejection had to do, of course, with the poor opinion she held regarding the quality of these works. It would be simplistic, however, not to also link it with the aesthetic change her narrative was experimenting at that time; such a change is already noticeable in her first canonical novel.

Not surprisingly, all the rejected novels, four in total, were very much in accordance with Trabal’s humorous and metaliterary style to the point that one of them, *Un dia en la vida d’un home*, was actually inspired in theme and form by a previous novel by Trabal, as Rodoreda herself acknowledged.⁶ By rejecting Trabal’s opus, therefore, she is not only rejecting the novels directly referred to in her comments but also the sort of literature she had devoted herself to before *Aloma*. Moreover, as the time-frame of the dismissal would be basically that of the novels prior to

4 Rodoreda, *Cartes a l’Anna Murià*, p. 96, (3 September 1948).

5 Arnau, ‘Una conversa’.

6 See Porta, *Mercè Rodoreda i l’humor*, pp. 188-91; and Real, *Mercè Rodoreda: l’obra de preguerra*, pp. 235-60.

Temperatura, if we considered Rodoreda's statement to include the latter work at all it would be implying it was disregarded not because of any specific shortcoming but for the same generic reasons the whole of Trabal's work had to be dismissed.

However, it might be easily argued that an absolute silence about the novel is much worse than a derogatory comment in a personal letter or even the dismissal of the principles guiding the work of the author. This is the case of Domènec Guansé, whose writings on the late Trabal, are some of the most well-balanced contemporary critical insights on *Temperatura*.⁷ Guansé, in the second edition of his literary portraits, nine years after Trabal's death, does not hesitate to state that Trabal 'became mute' in exile.⁸ He had made a similar claim in the Trabal's obituary but with a quite significant difference: in the obituary, Trabal becomes mute after having carried out 'una notable activitat cultural i patriòtica' [a remarkable cultural and patriotic activity], including the writing of a novel; in the portrait, the text Guansé decided to publish in Catalonia in a book format, *Temperatura* is not even mentioned, let alone any other activity carried out in exile. Trabal, according to this late account, seems to slip into silence without any accomplishment worth of notice. Such depiction seems to be, at least, inaccurate.

* * *

These appraisals of *Temperatura* and Trabal's works are, by no means, isolated cases. In this chapter I intend, if not to disprove them, at least to contextualise their perspective both historically and aesthetically. In other words, to consider them as instances of the historical reception of Trabal's texts. My main argument will be that the criticisms made of *Temperatura* are, in the first instance, due to a refusal to read the novel on its own terms, something that was already common in the reception of Trabal's previous work; and secondly, the terms of this refusal, more drastic than the half-hearted approval or dismissal with Trabal's other novels were received, betray a change in a traumatised readership rather than a change in Trabal's literature.

In order to develop my argument, I will first provide an overview of Trabal's cultural biography both after and before the Spanish Civil War. His endeavours aimed, basically, to consolidate and enhance what we could call the Catalan cultural system: during the 1920s and 1930s he took part in

⁷ Guansé published a review of the novel, '*Temperatura*, de Francesc Trabal', as well as an Obituary, 'In Memoriam'. Both texts were published in magazines of the Catalan communities in South America. He published the review in 1947 in *Germanor*, a magazine from Chile whilst the obituary, he published in 1958 in *Pont Blau*, a magazine from Mexico.

⁸ Guansé, *Abans d'ara*, pp. 207-12.

the collective effort to create a wider readership and consolidating, renewing or creating modern cultural industries, platforms and institutions. This would be achieved through activism, entrepreneurship, journalism and fiction writing. The ultimate goal was not only that Catalan culture would become hegemonic, modelled after a nation-state culture, but that it would become a singular voice of European culture. As political circumstances changed dramatically during his exile, his ambitious positions and refusal to change the overall objective, seen by some of his fellow exiles as foolish obstinacy, would eventually lead him to isolation. This biographic overview is indeed relevant because, on the one hand, it will show how Trabal's activities changed with the circumstances but were always in the pursuit of the same goal and, on the other hand, it will show how his literature is absolutely consistent with his cultural and political positions.

Secondly, I will give a critical account of the contemporary and posthumous reception of Trabal's literature based on the reviews which appeared in the main Catalan newspapers, magazines and journals, and how this reception influenced the perspective of later scholar approaches. Both reviewers and academics tended to judge Trabal's novels according to realist values, of course, to varying degrees. This would prove impossible in *Temperatura*, and hence its poor reception. There has been, however, a turning point in the reading of Trabal's works with the approaches taken by Josep M. Balaguer, drawing from some contemporary reviews which assessed Trabal's literature on its own terms. I will then argue that such a perspective is much more heuristically useful in assessing *Temperatura*, as I hope to prove with a reading of the novel.

Finally, I will address *Temperatura* as a political stance, essentially consistent with Trabal's long held views. This literary rendering was, if not unbearable, at least untimely for part of his readership.

2.1 Cultural Activism

Guansé's claim that Trabal 'became mute' is inaccurate because it seems overtly selective in what is taken into account. It is true that after he published *Vals* in 1935 Trabal did not publish any other significant original book in eleven years (during three years of war and eight years of exile); nevertheless, we should consider that, as Maria Campillo has shown, he carried out intense institutional, civic and cultural activity during the Spanish Civil War,⁹ activity he kept up in exile as much as the circumstances allowed him. In Chile, where he arrived in 1940, Trabal took part in radio broadcasting projects and directed Radio Prat, from September 1941 to February 1943;¹⁰

⁹ Campillo, 'Actuació civil'.

directed the cultural magazine of the *Mercurio* newspaper, 'La Gaceta Literaria';¹¹ wrote a number of articles and short stories for Catalan South American magazines such as *Germanor*, of which he was member of the editorial team;¹² promoted and founded the *Instituto Chileno-Catalán de Cultura*;¹³ and was an important member of the PEN club in Chile and achieved a national Catalan section.¹⁴ He also tried to promote a series of socio-cultural initiatives through his articles and contacts with a series of politicians and intellectuals, namely Pi i Sunyer.¹⁵ In addition to this, and besides his own Spanish translation of *Temperatura*,¹⁶ he had his most acclaimed novels translated into Spanish: *Judita* in 1941¹⁷ and *Vals* in 1945.¹⁸ Hence, it was not until the late 1940s, when an allied intervention in Spain became more and more unlikely, that we could maintain that Trabal

10 As it appears advertised in the Chilean newspaper *La Nación*, 27 September 1941; and in a brief from the Chilean magazine *Ercilla*, 3 February 1943. Cuttings from the Fons Trabal in the AHS, AP 123/20.

11 Benguerel, *Memòria d'un exili*, pp. 15-16.

12 Campillo, 'Francesc Trabal a Amèrica', p. 15. The articles published in *Germanor* have been collected by Campillo in Trabal, *Els contracops*

13 Oller, 'Pròleg', p. 9. It is unclear how successful the institution was. In an article Trabal wrote for *La Nación* (28 August 1945), 'Chile y Cataluña', he gives details regarding the foundation of the Instituto Chileno-Catalán de Cultura, its objectives were, among other things, organising art exhibitions, creating a disc collection, publishing Catalan books in Spanish translation, holding conferences and the building of a fountain celebrating the 19th century Catalan poet Jacint Verdaguer. At least one conference, on Verdaguer, was programmed for the 7 September 1945 with the Catalan author Xavier Benguerel and the Chilean author and academic Mariano Latorre (1886-1955) who had just recently been awarded the Chilean Premio Nacional de Literatura. The organisation planned to have regular direct exchanges with Catalonia as soon as it became possible (AHS, AP 124/11). Joan Oliver claimed he was the person behind the creation of the Instituto Chileno-Catalán de Cultura but that it failed (Oliver and Calders, *Diàlegs*, p. 50). Before the war Trabal had already tried, seemingly unsuccessfully, to create a disc library in Catalonia, see Trabal, 'Els discos', *Mirador*, 29 January 1931.

14 Campillo, 'La construcció cultural' p. 252. More details of Trabal's role in the PEN in Llopiès, 'Francesc Trabal a Xile'.

15 Campillo, 'La construcció cultural' pp. 249-51.

16 Francesc Trabal, *Temperatura*, trans. by Francesc Trabal (Santiago de Chile: Tegualda, 1947). The translation is Trabal's own and not Oliver's, as wrongly stated by Campillo in 'Francesc Trabal a Amèrica', p. 18. Although Oliver had translated *Vals* two years before, it would have been certainly odd for Trabal and Oliver to cooperate in such a project at the same time Oliver was abrasively antagonizing Trabal's views privately and publicly, and their friendship was at a breaking point, as discussed by Campillo in the same text. Besides this, the Spanish edition, which contains bold innovations, clearly states the translator is Trabal.

17 Francesc Trabal, *Judita*, trans. by Manuel L. Salvat and prol. by Ricardo Latchman (Santiago de Chile: La Mirada, 1941).

18 Francesc Trabal, *Vals*, trans. by Joan Oliver (Santiago de Chile: La semana literaria, 1945).

actually ‘became mute’.¹⁹

And, if he became mute, it could be argued that it was due to the kind of literature he pursued: autotelic, playful and not concerned with any immediate political situation or cause other than to bring Catalan culture into line with other Western national cultures. Such a position proved difficult to hold given the context of exile. This last political and cultural concern, which was coherently held along with his thought and political action, aimed towards the building of a solid assertive – rather than resistant – national cultural system. Guansé, in a rather acerbic tone, suggests that the reason why Trabal stopped writing was because his only real interest was in being notorious, and in exile he could not find new ways of attracting attention. Guansé, thus, regards Trabal’s literature and activism as subsidiary to a somewhat childish desire to be the centre of attention and, furthermore, seems to question the earnestness of his public activity.²⁰ In fact, Trabal’s public activity and the goals he pursued proved incompatible with the actual circumstances of the Catalan exile or, at least, they proved to surpass his capabilities. And, as will be claimed later in this chapter, he *was* actually made *mute* as his politico-cultural initiatives were disregarded once and again, a circumstance running parallel to the serious decline of his personal image among his fellow exiles in Chile and beyond,²¹ and the stabilization of the Catalan cultural system into collective resistance. In such contexts, both his literary activity and cultural activism were purposeless.

* * *

Certainly, Guansé’s statement can also be upheld, albeit partly, because Trabal’s activity in the years prior to the Spanish Civil War was continuous and even hectic: from the publication of his first novel, *L’home que es va perdre*, in 1929 to the publication of *Vals* in 1935, he published six novels, with *Judita*, *Quo vadis Sánchez?*, *Era una dona com les altres* and *Hi ha homes que ploren perquè el sol es pon*, completing the list. To this main corpus of pre-war works we should add a number of

19 On the 8th of June 1949 Trabal tells Joan Triadú he has not been writing for a while, this being due to both economic and cultural ambience factors; however, he claims to be working on two new texts *Square Saussure* and another one as yet untitled. Trabal, ‘Una carta de l’exili’. In the Fons Trabal of the Arxiu Històric de Sabadell there are several manuscripts with projects for novels and short stories, one entitled ‘Square Saussure’, consisting of 28 cards outlining several characters and ideas for the novel. The project, however, seems to be at a quite early stage (AHS, AP 122/16). The other preparatory texts do not seem to match the description given to Triadú for the other novel he was working on, which might well be a fictional project. In any case, none of the projects seem to go beyond a mere sketch of a general plan.

20 Guansé, *Abans d’ara*, p. 210.

21 Campillo, ‘La constucció cultural’. Also Llopis, ‘Francesc Trabal a Xile’

short stories published in the press,²² his short and unorthodox first book, *L'any que ve*, published in 1925, and, possibly, five lost pieces of different lengths. The latter include the libretto for an opera, *L'ascenció*, from 1927, with music to be written by a certain Pierre Bourgoïn;²³ a text for a ballet, never staged, *El rapte de les sabines*, with music by Manuel Blancafort;²⁴ a play, *Els mediocres*, written in 1929 but not staged until 1931;²⁵ and, if we are to credit him, two more novels he had ready to publish when he left Catalonia. We have three different possible titles for one of them: *El tifus*, *El drama del Premi Crexells*, or *Notes per a una biografia o 'Constance'*. The other novel would have been entitled, most likely, *El pit a la mà*.²⁶

Besides this activity, from 1921 onwards he also wrote for the daily press (*El diari de Sabadell*, *La Publicitat*) and, a little later, for cultural magazines (*La Nau*, *Mirador*) and journals too (*Revista de Catalunya*). In *El diari de Sabadell* he performed different roles: he was its chief editor from 1925 to 1931 and from 1931 to 1933, its director. Furthermore, he promoted several cultural organizations: a federation of local music associations in 1920, *El club dels novel·listes* in 1935, and a publishing house (*La Mirada*), with some colleagues, in 1925.²⁷ During the years of the Spanish Civil War, he was founder and member of the Associació d'Escriptors Catalans, integrated in the trade union, UGT, a key organization in articulating intellectuals' action in the war effort. He

22 Most of them collected now in Trabal, *Contes, arguments i estirabots*.

23 As reported by *Diari de Sabadell*, 9 October 1927. Quoted by Iribarren i Donadeu, *Literatura catalana i cinema*, p. 211 n.195.

24 However, an orchestral version of the ballet, transformed into a suite but preserving 'les línies generals' [the broad outline] of the original idea, was performed in El Palau de la Música Catalana in 1932, as advertised in the program of the Orquestra Pau Casals, 19 October 1932.

25 The year of writing appears in a list of 'Altres obres de Francesc Trabal' [Other works by Francesc Trabal] in the novels he published in Proa's series 'A tot vent': *Era una dona com les altres* and *Hi ha homes que ploren quan el sol es pon*. The year of the premiere is given by Balaguer in 'L'acció a través de la cultura' p. 10.

26 A number of novels were advertised in Trabal's previous works and in miscellaneous pieces of advertisement on bookmarks, and in magazines and newspapers. Trabal mentions *El tifus* in a newspaper article as the novel he is writing at the time: 'Menes de catalanisme', *Diari de Sabadell*, 6 May 1934 (as quoted by Balaguer in 'L'acció a través de la cultura'). *El pit a la mà* is mentioned in 'L'actualitat literària', *Meridià*, 21 May 1938 as being near to completion, and had been already referred to, although titleless as a 'novel·la de guerra' [war novel] commissioned by the Institució de les Lletres Catalanes ('Carnet de lletres', *Meridià*, 22 May 1938). Furthermore, Trabal claims in a letter to J. Triadú that he left a novel already packaged to be sent to the publishing house and another one 'llestà' [ready], see Trabal, 'Una carta de l'exili'. And, yet, some caution is advisable when dealing with such statements because the author was very keen on misleading his readership, as a list of 'Otras obras de Francesc Trabal' in the 1941 Spanish translation of *Judita*, proves: several titles are either inaccurate (a reference to the 'ballet' *El rapte de les sabines*) or fictitious (*Santapaula*, *el sauri*, 'vodevil' or the novel *L'home que feia miracles*) and appear mixed with Trabal's real works.

27 Balaguer, 'L'acció a través de la cultura' p. 8-9; see also, Bach, 'La colla de Sabadell', p. 53.

inspired and became secretary of 'Relacions Exteriors' [Foreign Affairs] of the Institució de les Lletres Catalanes (ILC), and held some responsibilities in the library services for the front. In addition, due to his role in the ILC he was part of the Catalan delegation at the PEN Club that attended its International Congresses abroad, Paris in 1937 — along with Carles Riba, Joan Oliver and Joaquim Xirau — and Prague in 1938 — along with Mercè Rodoreda —²⁸ where he could take advantage of his international connections in order to develop a network of supplies for writers and intellectuals. All this cultural activism was not to stop until the end of the Spanish Civil War, when he played an important role in organising and leading the escape to France of a group of intellectuals, including himself, and, once in exile, securing a haven for them at Roissy-en-Brie, thus attaining a much easier start than most exiles.²⁹ He also acted as an institutional link, as secretary of the Institució de les Lletres Catalanes, between intellectuals and the Generalitat in exile.³⁰

2.2 Reception

The examples of rejection we have already seen regarding *Temperatura* can also be related to a traditional lack of understanding of the literary praxis of the author which arose from his very first literary steps. His first book, *L'any que ve* (1925), a collection of jokes, caused great confusion and

28 Campillo, *Escriptors Catalans i compromís*, pp. 191-2 and pp. 343-4.

29 His role in these events is not at all clear, and there are contradictory claims to be found in different sources. Oliver states he had a critical role in building the network of supplies and in organizing the refuge of Roissy-en-Brie, but does not mention anything about him leading the escape of intellectuals (Oliver, 'Francesc Trabal, recordat', p. 49). Oliver is followed by Oller, 'Pròleg' p. 8, by Jorba in Trabal's entry in the Edicions 62's *Diccionari de la literatura catalana*, and, partly, by Arnau who reports he was 'one' of the organizers of the refuge and does not comment on the other two aspects (Arnau, 'Crisi i represa', p. 85). Campillo agrees with Arnau on that point and adds Trabal organised the escape of intellectuals with Pi i Sunyer (Campillo 'Actuació civil durant la guerra...' p. 28-30). However, in his memoirs Benguerel gives an account of the events which do not put Trabal in a particularly significant role in the escape from Barcelona, the crossing of the border nor in stabilizing the situation of his group of intellectuals besides that of being their 'public relations' because of his personal 'charm' (Benguerel, *Memòries*, pp. 234-68). There is a further lack of unanimity between accounts in relation to a subsidy this group of intellectuals received while staying in Perpinyà during the first days of exile. While Benguerel mentions every individual received 450 francs as a subsidy from the Generalitat (Benguerel, *Memòries*, pp. 249-50), Palau i Fabre reports it was Pablo Picasso who sent 300 francs per person, this was confirmed to Palau i Fabre by Joan Oliver and Sebastià Gasch (Palau i Fabre, *Picasso i els seus amics*, pp. 186-7).

30 Campillo, 'Actuació civil durant la guerra' p. 28-30. See also some of the letters from Carles Riba, *Cartes*, vol. 2, letters 277, 278 and 281.

even such indignation in the Catalan literary world³¹ that the director of the newspaper *La Publicitat* forbade its journalists to publish a word on it³² thus, the angered letter of a reader being the only trace of the book's publication in that paper.³³

In this first book Trabal³⁴ humorously explored the nature of language and written conventions through the speaker's unnoticed arbitrariness of language, by highlighting non-standard grammatical forms or by forcing a literal interpretation of their common use.

The novels that followed this first literary mischief generally received mixed reviews, although only one, and for non-literary reasons, was overtly negative. The critics described his works, either approvingly or disapprovingly, as fresh, simple, natural, irreverent, neglectful or humorous. Almost all critics coincided in highlighting his originality and his lightness. Also, most of the critics underlined his arbitrariness and labelled him as a humourist, and they used such a label in order to justify his arbitrary excesses, usually relating them to his alleged unique personality. This, surreptitiously suggested his works, or some parts of them, were unintelligible. Further references to the author's craft seemed to suggest his novels lacked a deep human truth to convey.

Rosend Llates, in his review³⁵ of *L'home que es va perdre*, argues that the humour in the novel comes from the simulation of 'indiferència davant la jerarquia' [indifference towards hierarchy]. This simulation, however, according to Llates, actually expresses a deep human truth highlighted by the implausibility of the characters and the plot. This implausibility, making a referential reading impossible, far from creating a sense of arbitrariness, would force a symbolic or allegoric reading. Conversely, for Guansé, in the review of the same novel, this detachment from reality has to be related to the air of unimportance and playfulness of the whole novel which would produce, not a symbolic text but an eccentric book 'alhora buit i sorprenent' [both empty and surprising] *i.e.* lacking human depth—a flaw the critic hopes will be addressed in future novels.³⁶ But despite this arbitrariness *L'home que es va perdre* still contains, according to Guansé, freshness in

31 Oliver, 'Francesc Trabal, recordat' p. 47.

32 Reported by Domènec Guansé, *Abans d'Ara*, p. 208.

33 Clarasó, '*L'any que ve*, el «timo de les misses» o donar gat per llebre' *La Publicitat*, 31 December 1925. The letter could very well be a hoax fabricated by Trabal or one of his colleagues to give some [desirable] bad publicity to the book in the newspaper that had banned its very mention from its pages.

34 Although it is signed by Trabal, the author produced the book with the collaboration of other members of the Grup de Sabadell who drew some of the cartoons and that might have played an even larger role as hinted by Joan Oliver in a letter to Xavier Benguerel (Benguerel and Oliver, *Epistolari*, p. 186, 9 January 1950). The collaborative nature of *L'any que ve* is also stated by Bach, 'La Colla de Sabadell', p. 52.

35 Llates, 'Els llibres: *L'home que es va perdre*' *Mirador*, 1 September 1929.

36 Guansé, '*L'home que es va perdre*', *La Publicitat*, 26 July 1929.

unconventional realistic details and delicacy in female characterization. Sagarra, in his casual and literary 'aperitiu' basically agrees with Guansé but in a more positive light.³⁷ In this way he praises and highlights the playfulness of the novel and compares the author to an illusionist and the novel's careless and yet dynamic style to a fresh and sour light wine made from unripe grapes. From the opposite position, Ramon Rucabado³⁸ condemns the whole novel and predicts the eternal damnation of the author as, from this critic's conservative aesthetic point of view, the only way to attain beauty is through goodness and truthfulness, and *L'home que es va perdre*, in addition to offending morals, lacks both characteristics.

With regards to the reviews of Trabal's subsequent novel, *Judita*, Miquel Carreras³⁹ praises the sensitivity of the novel and, although he acknowledges its comicality, fails to see its basic irony and finds the mix of serious and humorous elements confusing. Finally, like Guansé, he concludes by stating the *possibilities* that might stem from the uniqueness of the author's personality.

In his review of *Quo vadis Sánchez?*⁴⁰ Sindreu Ponç praises the novel as, on the one hand, a satire, a critique of the corruption of sporting attitudes and, on the other hand, as a parody, a successful attempt to overcome the conventions of sport literature. However, Ponç, like Guansé and Sagarra, limits the novel to an amusement written in an agile and 'a lovely' neglectful style. From this point on we are to find little change in the overall terms in which Trabal's novels are assessed.

Manuel de Montoliu's reviews of *Quo vadis Sánchez?* and *Hi ha homes que ploren perquè el sol es pon*,⁴¹ although more insightful than those of his predecessors, follows Ponç in underlining the parodic character of the two novels although with the first novel he considers this parody to have a chiefly social, satiric, character. The critic also points out the fact that Trabal's characters are deliberately schematic and grotesque — 'ninots' [puppets] — and suggests that they become increasingly caricatured as the novel unfolds. Montoliu relates these puppet-like characters as well as the arbitrariness to a contemporary trend and is the first critic to refer to Pirandello as an influence. Like Rucabado, he condemns some immorality in the books, but more lightly. However, very much like Llates, he also praises them as carriers of deep symbolic human truths.

Reviewing *Hi ha homes que ploren perquè el sol es pon*, Agustí Esclasans⁴² also saw a satiric spirit in the novel but, in line with Guansé and Sagarra, considers it to be a well-crafted, intelligent

37 Sagarra, 'L'aperitiu', *Mirador*, 8 August 1929.

38 Rucabado, 'L'home que es perdrà', *Catalunya Social*, 10 August 1929.

39 Carreras, 'Judita, de Francesc Trabal', *Mirador*, 2 October 1930 and 9 October 1930.

40 Ponç, 'Quo vadis Sánchez', *La Rambla*, 26 October 1931.

41 Montoliu, 'Breviari crític: Francesc Trabal' *La Veu de Catalunya*, 5 April 1932 and 'Entre el ninot i l'home' *La Veu de Catalunya* 23 September 1933.

42 Esclasans, 'Converses literàries', *La Humanitat*, 6 October 1933.

and modern insignificance. In similar terms but in an absolutely different vein, Carles Sindreu, reviewing this same novel,⁴³ praises its modernity, its agility, its simplicity and readability in what, actually, seems to be a tacit attack on Esclasans's review (and literature) as Sindreu finds playful intranscendence much more appropriate than pedantic and boring literature.

From the same perspective that made Guansé and Ponç hope for an improvement in Trabal, Maurici Serrahima, in his review of *Era una dona com les altres*,⁴⁴ praises the new direction the author has taken by producing a well written, well-constructed and almost serious novel which produces a great sense of reality. However, he has a similar opinion to Carrera's on *Judita* that, regrettably, Trabal cannot avoid overstressing some arbitrariness which disrupts a serious and realistic reading.

Rafael Tasis i Marca, first in his review of *Hi ha homes que ploren que el sol es pon* and two years later in his panoramic of contemporary Catalan narrative, provides a most typical insight on the author's narrative: despite admitting the wit and the craft of Trabal, he censures most of his central characteristics as a narrator.⁴⁵ Particularly, the critic describes, in an oddly clairvoyant manner, these features as well as the precise effect they cause in the reader, although, he fails to give any reasonable and coherent explanation for them. For Tasis i Marca the main source of all flaws of Trabal is his exceedingly humorous and original personality which brings him to disrespect all the rules of novel-writing and to be inconsiderate towards his readers' expectations.

* * *

Both Josep Carner and Carles Riba gave a contemporary plausible explanation for the kind of fiction Trabal was writing. The former, in his tongue-almost-in-cheek yet perceptive prologue to *L'any que ve*,⁴⁶ explained the process of breaking the automatic perception of everyday language through decontextualization and the candid use of platitude, thus exposing the mechanisms of representation as well as denouncing the unawareness of such mechanisms; the latter, in a review of *Judita*,⁴⁷ analyses the tensions that arise between language, literary discourse and 'reality', mainly focusing on parody and the intentional infringement of literary conventions.

Armand Obiols also published reviews on Trabal's works but he has to be regarded in a different

43 Sindreu, 'Hi ha homes', *La Rambla*, 16 October 1933.

44 Serrahima, 'Les lletres: Era una dona' *El Matí*, 28 May 1932.

45 Tasis i Marca, 'Els llibres: Francesc Trabal', *Mirador*, 26 October 1933 and *Una visió de conjunt*, pp. 96-100.

46 Carner, 'Pròleg'.

47 Riba, '*Judita*, de Francesc Trabal', *La Publicitat*, 26 July 1930.

way than the rest of the critics as he was also his close friend and the intellectual centre of the Grup de Sabadell. In addition, as we will see, his literary ideas actually shaped those of his friends Trabal and Oliver and, as established by Balaguer, his reviews have to be regarded as both an insider critical analysis and a programmatic discourse on the texts.⁴⁸ In his reviews of *Quo Vadis*, *Sánchez?* and *Era una dona com les altres*, the critic explains that the centre of Trabal's writing is the twisting of conventions to make them obvious and to show that the readers' acceptance of such conventionality is a matter of will. In other words, Trabal deliberately disrupts the suspension of disbelief to highlight its existence. Furthermore, and particularly addressing the latter work as well as referring to *Judita*, Obiols describes — using the term *pastiche* — the parodic use of the style and lyricism of romantic literature. At the same time, he points out the author's irony on his use of a biased internal narrator.

The vast majority of critics did not assume these interpretations as they considered that all these kinds of resources were accidental and eccentric, only superficially modern and had nothing to do with the basic literary matter the author was trying to convey, hence Guansé's adjective *empty* and Serrahima's praise of an *almost serious novel*. This is also thoroughly proved by the fact that these critics welcomed and unanimously applauded *Vals*. This was the most ambiguous of Trabal's novels with regard to the use of parodic strategies and, apparently, the least humorous and arbitrary. It was seen, ultimately, as the culmination of a maturation process where finally the craft was matched by the expectations on the narrative matter.

Thus, Guansé, despite noting some monotony, highly praised the novel — in which he saw autobiographical traces — for its 'poetic' sensitivity and for reflecting the social reality of the time.⁴⁹ Serrahima, despite pointing out some flaws in the same way Guansé does, considers *Vals* a masterpiece as opposed to the previous cold and arbitrary production of Trabal which, for the critic, were only useful inasmuch as the novelist could acquire a technique and purify his style.⁵⁰ For Serrahima, therefore, if Trabal has attained such a good result it is because he finally had a deep human truth to convey and his craftsmanship was up to the challenge.

None of the other reviewers of the novel depart much from this: Montanyà considers it to be Trabal's maximum attainment and praised his realism and the fact that he left aside humourism;⁵¹ Tasis i Marca also suggests the novel is the culmination of an improvement process, a powerful

48 Balaguer, 'Armand Obiols 'crítica'', p. 47-8. See also Marrugat, 'Obiols i la configuració'.

49 Guansé, 'Una novel·la eròtica', *La Rambla*, 14 April 1936.

50 Serrahima, 'Les lletres: 'Vals'', *El Matí*, 05 April 1936.

51 Montanyà, 'Francesc Trabal' *Mirador* [1937?].

display of maturation and sensibility;⁵² Francès, while giving a superficial account of the plot, considers the novel is both Catalan and European and applauds the precision and perfection of the form expressing a moral parable;⁵³ Montoliu, in his review in *La veu de Catalunya*, had already praised such *achievements* but also stressed the mastering of Trabal's craft and the complexity of the novel situated at the core of Catalan literary tradition;⁵⁴ Esquerra, from the same newspaper, praised more or less the same characteristics as Montoliu, Tasis i Marca and Montanyà but particularly emphasised the verisimilitude of Trabal's writing which, according to the critic, is able to express a 'fragment de vida' [a fragment of life];⁵⁵ the critic, furthermore, agreeing with Serrahima, feels the need to relegate all the previous work of Trabal to mere attempts leading to such a success as *Vals*.

* * *

Later on, after the war and after the last of Trabal's novels, Triadú promoted a re-evaluation of Trabal's literature on several occasions. Firstly, in the early 1950s, in his *Antologia de contistes catalans* of 1950 as well as in the new edition of *Vals* in 1956.⁵⁶ In the introduction of the anthology he praised Trabal as one of the main authors of his generation and in the prologue to *Vals*, although observing signs of the novel's ageing, he praised its humanity, its commitment and the relegation of humour and arbitrariness to secondary significance.⁵⁷ After the death of the author, Triadú reassessed Trabal in his articles in *Serra d'Or*, and in *Avui* on different occasions.⁵⁸

These later reassessments of the author as well as a wider interest in his works stemmed from the new edition of all his novels by Quaderns Crema as well as a collection of articles. These new editions of *L'any que ve*, *L'home que es va perdre*, *Hi ha homes que ploren perquè el sol es pon* and *Temperatura*, which most likely were instigated by Quim Monzó,⁵⁹ took place between 1982 and

52 Tasis i Marca, 'Francesc Trabal: Vals', *Mirador* [1936?].

53 Francès, 'Dansen les ànimes: El meravellós "Vals"', *La Humanitat*, 19 March 1936.

54 Montoliu, 'Breviari crític: Una excel·lent novel·la': *La Veu de Catalunya*, 28 June 1935.

55 Esquerra, 'Una gran novel·la catalana' *La Veu de Catalunya*, May 1936.

56 Joan Triadú, *Antologia de contistes catalans: 1850-1950* (Barcelona: Selecta, 1950); Francesc Trabal, *Vals*, (Barcelona: Selecta, 1956).

57 Triadú, 'Pròleg' (1956).

58 Introductory note to Trabal, 'Una carta de l'exili', *Serra d'Or* 1981, p. 262; 'L'impossible i refiat humor de Francesc Trabal', *Avui*, 14 May 1986; 'Trabal, la darrera aventura', *Avui*, 24 December 1986 and 'Dolç i amarg', *Avui*, 20 May 1999.

59 Monzó's proximity to the publishing house in conjunction with his vindication of Trabal on several occasions seem to suggest so. See Monzó, 'Pròleg'.

1998 and constituted the first after the death of the author. Although, *Judita*, was first republished by Edicions 62 in 1977 and has been in its catalogue ever since, being the only novel not to be published by Quaderns Crema. Later on, the Fundació la Mirada published a number of books and pamphlets by Trabal — including two collections of diverse works, one of articles and another one of short stories — as well as others promoting his study. Additionally, some translations also appeared in Spanish, (*Vals*, *Judita* and *El hombre que se perdió*), French (*Judita*, *L'homme qui s'est perdu*) and English (*Waltz*).⁶⁰ These new editions, collections and translations triggered a number of pieces on Trabal whether in the form of prologues, reviews of the books or scholarly articles.

In terms of the reviews, little was added to the discussion held during the 1930s: Oliveras in her review of *L'home que es va perdre* seems to reduce it to an amusing and funny story of love and adventure;⁶¹ Triadú in his review of *Vals* addresses the paradox that the least Trabalesque of Trabal's novels is actually the most well received. In his review of the new edition of *Hi ha homes que ploren perquè el sol es pon*, Pla i Arxé adds new elements to the discussion by addressing the parodic nature of a vulgar story told in grand words.⁶² He also suggests that had Trabal been more confident in his materials, he could have achieved a better novel. The more original insight comes from Prudon who, in her foreword to *Judita*, very keenly points out the metaliterary and metalinguistic nature of its unconventionalism.⁶³

More recently, Quaderns Crema has remarketed all the novels they had already published — this is, all of Trabal's novels except for *Judita* — in two volumes.⁶⁴ This has sparked some new interest and brief comments in the press, which, nonetheless do not seem to add any new insights or perspectives to the readings we have seen so far.

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Most of the scholars that followed have accepted more or less critically such an interpretation of Trabal as a whimsical unconventional narrator, and, those concerned by his evolution would assume

60 *Vals*, transl. by Joan Oliver (Barcelona: Seix Barral, 1970). Actually, a new edition of Oliver's 1945's translation. The prologue was a translation of Oliver, 'Francesc Trabal, recordat', from 1968; *Judita*, trans. by Montserrat Planas (Barcelona: Seix Barral, 1972); *El hombre que se perdió*, trans. by Javier Cercas (Barcelona: Sirimio, 1992); *Judita*, trans. and intr. by Montserrat Prudon (Nîmes: Jacqueline Chambon, 1994); *L'homme qui s'est perdu*, trans. by Marie José Castaing (Paris: Autrement, 2011); *Waltz*, trans. by Martha Tennent, (Champaign: Dalkey Archive Press, 2013).

61 Oliveras Samitier, 'Quan el verb'.

62 Pla i Arxé, 'Causticitats'.

63 Prudon, 'Francesc Trabal: mode d'emploi'.

64 Francesc Trabal, *Novel·les*, (Barcelona: Quaderns Crema, 2017-2018), 2 vols.

the narrative of an ascending Trabal who gradually moves away from arbitrary humoristic avant-garde-like eccentricities in order to become a true writer capable of a lively and faithful portrayal of a hypocritical bourgeois society at the same time as he tells the erotic-sentimental story of a teenager with a subtle psychological characterization.

In this way, some scholars, although mechanically referring to the avant-garde or to linguistic humour to describe some of the characteristics of Trabal's prose do not consider it as central and then evaluate his progress on a conventional conception of mimesis and the novel as a genre. This is the case of Jordi Pinell who, in the only ever published monograph on the author, archetypically reproduces the narrative of an ever-ascending Trabal until *Temperatura*, where he would return to the *lesser* style of his earlier books.⁶⁵

From a less sympathetic perspective, Carme Arnau reads Trabal's novels in accordance with the characteristics of the 'novel·la psicològica' and judges them in relation to the fulfilment of such characteristics, which are ostensibly not fulfilled except in *Judita, Era una dona com les altres* and, mainly, *Vals* which is praised as a lively chronicle of its age. From this view, all other novels by Trabal would be failed attempts.⁶⁶

Although Miquel Bach, in his introduction to a collection of articles,⁶⁷ drawing from Carner's prologue to *L'any que ve*, analyses Trabal's 'technique' in its more linguistic aspect, he does not consider its wider implications regarding the challenging of the fictional discourse but seems to just reduce it to a very personal humour.

Both Rosselló i Bover and Berbis, whilst insisting on the parodic character of Trabal's texts as well as stressing his use of linguistic humour, relate these to an attack on bourgeois society.⁶⁸ When it comes to assessing the value of the texts, Rosselló i Bover seems to disregard what he has identified as the author's essence, deeming some of his resources as childish, and argues, along the same lines as Arnau, that Trabal's best novels are those which are more serious and move away from avant-garde and humorous tendencies.⁶⁹

Other scholars do consider such elements as an important part of Trabal's fiction and try to give an account of their relevance in his novels. Dolors Oller, the first scholar to study Trabal, in her two short pieces on him, tries to balance a reading of his humour as essentially linguistic and parodic and a reading of his works based on their more human content.

65 Pinell, *Francesc Trabal i les seves novel·les*.

66 Arnau, 'La novel·la dels anys 20 i 30', 'Crisi i represa' and *Marginats i integrats*.

67 Bach, 'Francesc Trabal: un humor impossible' introducing Trabal, *De cara a la paret*.

68 Rosselló i Bover, 'Entorn de Francesc Trabal' and Berbis, 'Trabal, Calders i la paròdia'.

69 Rosselló i Bover, 'Entorn de Francesc Trabal', p. 129

It is not surprising, then, as already suggested by Llopis that some of Trabal's contemporaries as well as the scholars who later approached his work generally consider *Temperatura* as an aesthetic move backwards with respect to his acclaimed *Vals*, or even judge it to be his worst novel.⁷⁰

The anonymous reviewer of the exile magazine *Ressorgiment* declines to assess the novel, only going so far as to describe it as extravagant and difficult.⁷¹ Guansé in his review and, later, in Trabal's obituary, considers the novel as a *regression* to the first style of Trabal, an attempt to produce pure humour, which he judges unsuitable for the aftermath of the Spanish War;⁷² Andújar in a very brief paragraph is much more severe and considers the novel an unqualified failure;⁷³ Riera Llorca disregards it as a whole because it does not fulfil the requirements of the genre: 'I [Trabal] fa passar com a novel·la tot un seguit de facècies i estirabots'⁷⁴ [And (Trabal) passes off a series of jokes and pieces of nonsense as a novel].

Not all critics and scholars agree on that point, though: another unknown reviewer does not find it a regression but rather a continuation, where the author is faithful to 'els dos pols de la seva inspiració' [to both sides of his inspiration], and despite some carelessness it is 'un dels llibres més curiosos i interessants que s'han publicat en català' [it is one of the more interesting and curious books to be published in Catalan], the reader, however, must accept the game – the absurdity the improvisational style – in order to enjoy the novel.⁷⁵ Regarding later critics, Valentí Bru, praises its wholesome modernity;⁷⁶ another, Manuel Jorba, considers it Trabal's best and most ambitious novel;⁷⁷ whilst, moderately, yet another critic, Jordi Pinell, refuses to call it the worst of Trabal's novels.⁷⁸

When we look at Chilean reviews that appeared after the publication of the Spanish translation of *Temperatura* we can see how they differ from the Catalan ones: as they do not have a knowledge of Trabal's previous work, they do not judge his evolution. We find, nonetheless, all the positions we

70 Llopis, 'Francesc Trabal, una revisió' p. 85.

71 Anonymous, 'Temperatura, per Francesc Trabal' *Ressorgiment* (Buenos Aires), 376, November 1947, p. 6111.

72 Guansé, 'Temperatura, de Francesc Trabal' and 'Francesc Trabal, In Memoriam'.

73 Andújar, *La literatura catalana en el destierro*, p. 36

74 Riera Llorca, *Els exiliats catalans* p. 113.

75 Anonymous review from an unknown exile magazine, cutting from the Fons Trabal in AHS, AP, 124/18.

76 Bru, 'Una rebentada de novel·la'.

77 Jorba, 'Francesc Trabal'.

78 Pinell, *Francesc Trabal i les seves novel·les*.

have already found before. An anonymous reviewer acknowledges the experimental nature of *Temperatura* but considers it an unsuccessful novel: too complex and varied to the extent that ‘el asunto deja de interesarnos’⁷⁹ [the matter stops getting us interested]; Luis Meléndez finds it amusing and superficial, clever and original, but voices some reservations regarding its philosophical assumptions;⁸⁰ Eleazar Huerta, similarly, finds it a most enjoyable and superficial book, not destined to survive the test of time.⁸¹

However, with regards to the reception of *Temperatura*, different authors make opposing claims agreeing only on the fact that it did not receive much attention. Riera Llorca, who strongly criticized the novel, states that his point of view was the least common although he does remark on the low profile of any opinion (‘comentaris elogiosos i vagues’ [laudatory and vague comments]) which, according to him, were actually a sign of mistrust of the novel’s quality; in turn, Campillo, in two different papers,⁸² reinforces the idea that the novel did not receive much attention and that Catalans in exile did not like it and yet she claims the novel was very well received by Chilean critics on the occasion of its Spanish translation. Quite the opposite of what Albert Manent reports: according to him, *Temperatura* received negative reviews from everywhere. It is necessary to point out that none of these commentaries give much basis to the opinions expressed on the reception. They back them up only with a very limited corpus of reviews; furthermore, Manent seems to misrepresent P[ere] C[alders]’s review as negative. When quoting it, Manent points as a flaw what in the review is actually highlighted as one of the novelist’s virtues: what for Calders is a praiseworthy ability and strength of Trabal to remain faithful to his aesthetic objectives and ‘amb una actitud olímpica’ [with an Olympic attitude] disregard any influence of the ‘catàstrofe’ [catastrophe], in Manent’s text this positive element is interpreted as a reproach of disengagement.⁸³ Most possibly this is due to the fact that, for Manent, showing a militant conception of culture, disengagement could only be negative. Be that as it may, the fact is that, even though he considers only two reviews (one of which is misinterpreted) and quite inaccurate in factual detail with regards to the novel, Manent’s popular book seems to be, besides the novel itself, one of the causes of the

79 Anonymous, review from an unknown Chilean magazine, cutting from the Fons Trabal in AHS, AP, 124/18.

80 Luis Meléndez, *Las Noticias* No. 4558, unknown date, cutting from the Fons Trabal in AHS, AP, 124/18.

81 Eleazar Huerta, ‘Críticas de libros’, *Las Noticias*, 8 November 1947. Taken from a cutting from the Fons Trabal in AHS, AP, 124/18.

82 Campillo, ‘La construcció cultural’, pp. 14-16, and ‘Francesc Trabal a Amèrica’, pp. 18-19.

83 This is further confirmed by a letter Calders sent to Trabal praising *Temperatura* and explaining the circumstances of the review he wrote. However, Calders notes he sees some regressions in the novel to the earlier sense of humour, which, despite being excellent, is not as good as the current stage of maturity shown by the best passages of the novel. Letter from P. Calders to Francesc Trabal, 11th August 1947. Ms. AHS, AP 125.

poor reputation of *Temperatura*.

A first step towards a re-evaluation of Trabal was taken by Martí-Olivella in his comparative analysis of *Judita* and Calder's *Ronda naval sota la boira*.⁸⁴ Using Bakhtin and Todorov, Martí-Olivella considers Trabal one of the first dialogic/carnavalesque writers in Catalan and denies any possibility of an allegorical reading of the features of the text which are not verisimilar, thus opposing readings such as those of Llates. He also acknowledges the influence of the avant-garde, chiefly surrealism, but sharply, and unlike previous scholars who pointed out this influence, argues for the author's subversive use of avant-garde.

Despite this, it has not been until Josep M. Balaguer has implicitly discredited the interpretations of Trabal's work that led to the considerations we have seen so far. In a number of articles on the author, Balaguer has justified all the aforementioned features of Trabal's art, putting his works in the context of the different solutions provided for the crisis of fiction during the interwar period.⁸⁵ Balaguer maintains that, in light of the ideas of European contemporary literary trends, we should consider that the arbitrariness, humour and parody in Trabal's literature aim to show that the very nature of language (a conventional symbolic system) limits its ability to convey. Furthermore, this limited tool of language is used for human beings to build their identity, to explain themselves and to explain the world, and they do so sometimes without noticing that it restricts both the building of one's identity and how it can be expressed.

Simultaneously to Balaguer's insight, Lunati published an article, largely ignored by Catalan scholars, addressing the whole of Trabal's production by drafting its general characteristics mainly through the analysis of some aspects of *Hi ha homes que ploren perquè el sol es pon*.⁸⁶ She, like Balaguer, stresses the importance of the wider European context to understand Trabal's texts and highlights the centrality of his playful metaliterary praxis which she relates to the first traces of what is to become postmodernism.

Some later scholars who have approached Trabal's literature assumed Balaguer's framework to varying degrees: Implicitly following these approaches and bringing Martí-Olivella's argument further, Dasca, in her analysis of *Judita*, explores the parody of the surrealist discourse of

84 Martí-Olivella, 'Trabal i Calders'.

85 Balaguer, 'Francesc Trabal i la paròdia', 'La brevetat com a espai de reflexió', 'Francesc Trabal, narrador', 'Pere Calders i l'autor Déu' and 'El novel·lista, l'home modern'.

86 Lunati, 'Re-reading Francesc Trabal'. To my knowledge this article has never been quoted by any work on Trabal since its publication and is not present in the repertoires of critical literature — as pointed out by Jordi Larios in his review of 'Joquim Molas, *Les avantguardes literàries a Catalunya. Bibliografia i antologia crítica*, (Madrid: Iberoamericana/Frankfurt am Main: Vervuert, 2005), 302 pp.' in *Bulletin of Spanish Studies*, 86, 1, (2008), pp. 134-5. This is most likely due to the difficulty of access as well as for being published in English in the UK.

representation and establishes its wider implications regarding the limitations of any linguistic discourse;⁸⁷ Simbor Roig, assesses the central role of the narrator in the disruption of narration as a way to attack and overcome the traditional realist-naturalist narrator and, more generally, the realist-naturalist mode of representation; and Teresa Iribarren, in her book on the influence of silent film on three Catalan authors, analyses in detail *L'home que es va perdre* and *Quo vadis, Sánchez?*⁸⁸ and, despite this limited scope, she also addresses Trabal's playful use of intertextuality beyond film and is able to convey a sense of the complexity of the texts.

2.3 *Temperatura* as an aesthetic stance

Regarding *Temperatura*, Domènec Guansé made some interesting and very pertinent observations:

Estem avesats a què correntment una novel·la consisteixi principalment en una d'aquestes dues coses. En l'explicació d'uns caràcters i d'uns sentiments o en la narració d'un argument que marxa entre embolics, però amb passa segura, vers un desenllaç. Sovint una i altra manera es combinen. Però en l'originalíssima novel·la de Trabal no estem segurs de res: ni dels caràcters, ni dels sentiments, ni de l'argument que narra.⁸⁹

[We are used to the fact that ordinarily a novel mainly consists of one of the following two things. In the explanation of some characters and some feelings or in the narration of a plot that develops through tangles but with steady steps towards a denouement. Often one way and the other are combined. But in the extremely original novel by Trabal we are not sure of anything: not of the characters, nor of the feelings, nor of the plot he is narrating.]

I could not agree more with Guansé in his remarks: the characters are completely unsound and the plot is totally illogical. We need to add to these remarks, though, that the main function of the characters is to show how unsound they are, and that the main function of the plot is to show how illogical it is. As Bru put it clearly in his review of the new edition of the book, *Temperatura* is 'una negació burlesca de la novel·la' [a burlesque negation of the novel].⁹⁰

As regards the plot, it is difficult to summarise due to the fact that it is composed only of

87 Dasca, 'La invectiva'.

88 Iribarren i Donadeu, *Literatura catalana i cinema mut*. This book is the publication of her PhD thesis *La revolució silenciosa*. For a more detailed discussion on this source, see the chapter 'Novels in Black-and-White'.

89 Guansé, '*Temperatura* de Francesc Trabal'.

90 Bru, 'Una rebentada de novel·la'.

episodic sequences of mostly disconnected actions with feeble or no ties of necessity or causality. In this light, one of the episodes (or jokes) in the novel arises as highly significant. In this episode, in a utopian new continent emerged from the waters and colonized by a highly civilized and sophisticated society, the Subcomitè de Planificació Cultural [Cultural Planning Subcommittee], proposes a new literary challenge:

[R]educir a un màxim de cent paraules, en qualsevol idioma bàsic, les obres completes de certs autors considerats d'interès històric. Només s'hi feia una excepció per Proust, per a les obres completes del qual es fixava un màxim de cent trenta paraules.⁹¹

[To reduce to a maximum of one hundred words, in any basic language, the complete works of certain authors considered of historical interest. There was only one exception for Proust, for whose complete works the maximum established was one hundred and thirty words.]

We can see from this excerpt, which constitutes a practical *reductio ad absurdum*, the mockery Trabal directs towards plot or, at least, plot-driven readers. Furthermore, what might seem at first sight a simple joke, turns out to be, in fact, a way to relativize the importance of plot as well as an assertion of the identity of the text with itself which cannot be replaced by any paraphrase. Moreover, such a statement is found in a novel whose plot seems deliberately to lead nowhere: the novel, which seems a parody of a Bildungsroman, tells the story of Anna, a female character who, as opposed to the rest of the characters is real, 'ja existeix'⁹², and intends to 'penetrar el sentit del món d'avui'⁹³ [to penetrate the meaning of today's world] or 'l'ànima mateixa del segle'⁹⁴ [the very soul of the century] and, yet, she is a puppet in the hands of the author. In this sense, the motor of the novel appears to be the struggle of the character to become human—just the opposite approach of *Madame Bovary* or *Don Quixote*, a character trying *not* to be novelesque.

On this subject, we shall compare this use of characters with that of Pirandello. This connection was already pointed out, as we have seen, quite early by Trabal's contemporary critics, and more particularly Guansé in his appreciation of *Temperatura* but restricting the influence to the appearance of a fictional author. Here, the relationship concerns chiefly Pirandello's *Sei personaggi in cerca d'autore* where *real* characters try to find an author and a company to play *their* story. As with Pirandello, Trabal presents the character Anna as a completely accomplished

91 Trabal, *Temperatura*, XXX, p. 332.

92 Trabal, *Temperatura*, II, p. 25.

93 Trabal, *Temperatura*, XXII, p. 247.

94 Trabal, *Temperatura*, XXIII, p. 262.

and independent being who reveals the complex dynamics of fiction. Of course, in the case of Pirandello, the author explores the problematic inherent to theatre as actors having to impersonate characters.⁹⁵ Trabal, instead, uses the framework of the novel where the issues are entirely textual. In the case of Pirandello, the characters, in contrast with those of Trabal, carry their own story which defines them. Yet both authors address the implications of authorship with regards to the characters. The approach Trabal takes, fictionalizing an author, creates a complex dialectic between fiction and reality resulting in the reduction of all textual — and linguistic — elements to the same level:

Ella està formada. Ella ja existeix. Ella existeix més que jo mateix. Ella serà, en tot cas qui farà de mi el que ella vulgui. Però ningú no ho sap. Ningú no la coneix. Ningú no l'ha vista mai. Ningú mai no la veurà. Només jo.⁹⁶

[She is shaped. She already exists. She exists more than I myself do. In any case she will do whatever she pleases with me. But no one knows it. No one knows her. No one has ever seen her. No one will ever see her. Only I will.]

In this passage, like Pirandello, Trabal presents the character as a fully autonomous being which overpowers the Author and yet only exists for him, in his consciousness. However, the truly remarkable feature of the text arises when the referent *jo* [I] appears just besides *ella* [She]. If Pirandello is able to, side by side, present a set of actors playing the characters and a second set of actors playing the actors, similarly, our author is able to put side by side the allegedly pre-existing characters by the side of an Author with, actually, the same textual presence as them. While Pirandello forces us to realize the only way to embody characters is through actors and the only way to have actors is having actors playing them, Trabal forces us to realize the only way to embody characters is through words—and that the only presence the author might have is also through words.

The events that unfold to reveal Anna's struggle to overcome her textual nature, however, are a complete nonsense. The novel begins with an erotic scene (I) in a ship called *Temperatura* but, a few pages after the start of the novel, the beau disappears from it. We are made aware about him leaving the ship through a dialogue between Anna and the Author (V). Just afterwards Anna asks her husband for a divorce, to his dismay, because she realizes that he has called her *Annetta* instead

⁹⁵ See Baumrin, 'No longer in search of an author'.

⁹⁶ Trabal, *Temperatura*, II, p. 25.

of *Anna* since they were first acquainted. In her logic, two different names correspond to two different personalities or, better, characters and *therefore* he loves and is married to someone else (Anneta) but not her (Anna) (VI). Then, at the very moment the contested divorce is about to start, Anna leaves the novel temporarily because, to the outrage of the other characters, she suddenly realizes she had a right to holidays (IX). We have to imagine that she spent her holidays between chapters, then we find her in Enghein-les-bains, Paris, living with Monsieur Martel, the captain of the ship (X), whose sister, Hermínia, becomes best friends with Anna (XII) just to be hit and killed by a refuse truck (XII). A number of other ludicrous events keep happening throughout the book although they are continuously hindered by the intrusions of the Author in the novel. For instance, in a most dramatic moment, in a letter addressed to Martel, Anna is developing one of her philosophical argumentations on what life is, and the reader may think this is yet another moment of anagnorisis, and meant to be *yet another* turning point in the novel. To her despair, the Author sends her some books to help her in her endeavours through the bellboy of the hotel where Anna is staying. He lets us know through a footnote he has sent them in order to ‘reforçar els seus coneixements en la matèria per si de cas volia allargar una miqueta més el seu improvisat assaig i aprofitar-lo per publicar-lo apart’ [sic]⁹⁷ [reinforce her knowledge on the subject just in case she wanted to prolong her improvised essay a bit more and to make use of it by publishing it on its own]. Evidently, this action has completely the opposite effect to that which, theoretically, it is intended to create: it breaks the train of the discourse, as well as the writing of the letter, and deprives the moment of any solemnity or credibility it might have had, and if the moment was to lead to a major change in the novel, such an interruption thwarts any possibility in that direction.

In her turn, Anna too performs some intrusions in the writing process or shows reluctance or open opposition to act as planned, for example when she exits the novel to see the Author and complain about the chapters he has not yet written (V) —and that we will not read, as the discussion discloses, thus apparently making redundant, the most important features of this incipient chapter, As the Author claims he does not remember clearly what he had in mind for the following chapter, Anna has to remind him about the events and it is she who discloses them, quoting literal passages and dialogues of the unwritten chapter.

Moreover, there are even intrusions from external elements, from the Author’s level of reality, for instance when some journalists break into his office after the first section in order to get more details regarding the character, past and even future events (II). Finally, we have the Author’s ironic self-awareness and direct references to the writing of the novel, such as when he states he may write

97 Trabal, *Temperatura*, XXII, p. 254.

‘el que millor li sembi’⁹⁸ [whatever pleases him best] or when, in section II, he suggests he has already written other parts of the novel, not the section we have just read:

després d’escrit el primer capítol, que no és el primer encara que sigui el que iniciï l’obra que penso escriure, i que només és la presentació dels personatges a la meua manera – vull dir de la manera que a mi em dóna la gana –, si tan sols està escrit el començament del llibre ¿què sé jo del que vindrà després?⁹⁹

[after having written the first chapter, which is not the first chapter despite being the one that starts the novel I intend to write, and which is only the introduction of the characters in my own way – I mean the way that suits me best –, if only the beginning is written, what do I know about what is to follow?]

In this passage, we can clearly see how the Author exploits the contradiction between order of writing and disposition or composition. While contradicting himself, this disrupts the *reading* progression of the action. The reader is filled with uncertainty and is unable to ascertain whether the section that he or she has read (I) is the one to which the Author is making reference, and the adverb *després* takes on a particularly ambiguous meaning as it is unclear if it is meant in terms of story, plot or composition.

The novel reaches its peak with the sinking of Ireland (XXVII) and the emergence of a new continent called Annàsia (XXVIII) where Anna is the centre of a utopian society (XXX) until the Author loses interest in it and, after Martel is transformed into a giant double eleven domino (XXXI), returns her to the *old* continents (XXXII). Then she seeks refuge in the seclusion of Lake Esmeralda, in Chile. If the intention was to make the character real, the ending of the novel cannot be any more cruel: suddenly the beau, who has been absent since section V, descends from the sky as a Deus ex Machina into that *locus amoenus*, and eats her feet and the story ends ‘com acaben totes les històries’ [as all stories end]: they are happy ‘per segles de segles’[sic]¹⁰⁰ [for ever and ever]. With this reference to the Lord’s Prayer in Paradise, Anna’s story ends with one of the most conventional and formulaic expressions of Western culture. Furthermore, in this ending we can see another of the recurring features of Trabal’s art: the demythification and parody of myths.

However, the novel does not end there as there are still some more paragraphs where Anna

98 Trabal, *Temperatura*, IX, p. 88.

99 Trabal, *Temperatura*, II, p. 22.

100 Trabal, *Temperatura*, XXXII, p. 354.

receives replacement feet from Annàsia and the Author produces a final cheesy, romantic-novel-like statement about love and the meaning of life.

As we have already seen, characters in the novel appear and disappear with no motivation.¹⁰¹ Herbert/Alec, the beau, leaves the ship, Hermínia is hit by the refuse truck and Martel metamorphosed into a domino. The cases of Herbert/Alec and Hermínia are particularly remarkable as the reader's expectations on their role in future developments of the novel are high, but they disappear just after being introduced. And yet, in that regard, there is still an even more remarkable character: René Le Sueur de la Pomme, a dandy who first appears in section X and, charmed by Anna, tries to meet her, failing over and over again until after a completely irrelevant episode at the doctor. He finally leaves the *novel* at the end of section XIV without having played any significant role in the development of the plot or influenced the rest of the characters, as the narrator himself remarks: '¿I per què rediastre se'ns ficà en aquestes pàgines René Le Sueur de la Pomme? Deixem-lo en pau, com, segurament, ell ens deixarà a nosaltres'¹⁰² [And why the heck did René Le Sueur de la Pomme enter these pages? Let's leave him alone, as, most likely, he is going to leave us].

Further to this frank display of gratuitousness, Le Sueur de la Pomme is described in the following way: 'René Le Sueur de la Pomme passà revista a *tota* la seva persona d'un cop d'ull i, adonant-se que *tot* estava en ordre (Le Sueur, la Pomme, i René), es va tranquil·litzar'¹⁰³ [René Le Sueur de la Pomme inspected *the whole* of his being with a glance and, realizing that *everything* was in order (Le Sueur, la Pomme, and René), he calmed himself]. The character is, hence, openly made out of words and *nothing more* than words,¹⁰⁴ much like Anna when she divorces her husband because he calls her *Anneta*.

Trabal, in short, deploys a great variety of arbitrary procedures, metaliterary agents, which continuously attract the reader's attention to the literary device. Plot incoherences draw attention to its construction; the appearance of the author in the novel and the interference of the characters in the alleged reality stand as a permanent remainder of the writing process as well as destroying its temporal linearity, stressing the fictional, conventional, *hic et nunc*, and, furthermore highlighting the narrator's own textuality. Finally, the recurrent treatment of characters and events as mere

101 I use the term *motivation* as discussed and established in Tomashevsky, 'Thematics'. Motivation being what justifies the existence of any given motif.

102 Trabal, *Temperatura*, XIV, p. 148.

103 Trabal, *Temperatura*, XII, p. 124.

104 In his review of *Quo Vadis, Sánchez?* Armand Obiols already pointed out that there were no characters in Trabal's novels but 'masses de mots (...) amb un nom propi per vèrtex' [groups of words (...) with a proper name as a vertex]. Obiols, 'Condicions de la novel·la'.

words result in the awareness of the linguistic and textual nature of the novel, in the awareness that there is nothing beyond the text.

The central theme concerning *Temperatura* is, after all, the central theme of all of Trabal's literature, that is: all conceptualization, all literature cannot be anything else but conceptualizations and literature; and this stems from their very linguistic nature, as language is not the medium through which we can convey realities or ideas but, conversely, language is their mould. Thus, it is absolutely plausible to produce logically aberrant sentences or discourses because it is linguistically possible to do so. The author proves his point coining sentences, settings or reasonings that are completely impossible. At the same time, he shows how everyday language, as well as literary conventional language, already have a wide range of lexicalized expressions, which, if taken literally, would make little sense; and, yet, we use without being fully aware of the conventional linguistic procedures that make them possible.

From a more strictly literary point of view, his intention is to make evident, as Balaguer has pointed out, that a substantial part of 20th century literature starts from 19th century principles without any kind of critical perspective on the mimetic capabilities of language. Needless to say, such awareness of literature's capacity for deception is not entirely a 20th century characteristic as demonstrated by a rich tradition of antinovelesque novels such as Cervantes's *Don Quixote*, Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* or Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*. In this sense, we have to acknowledge a strong link between these novels and Trabal's ideas on literature. Mr Quijano and Mrs Bovary suffer from the same condition: they cannot tell properly between fiction and reality, they have internalized the language of fiction, chivalresque or sentimental, and they see the world, their fictional real world, through that lens, letting these pre-established ideas mediatize their lives, views and actions; hence, they have the same expectations in the real world that the novel reader would have in the novel. This feature of the novels, which might be the most appealing to our (post-)modern sensibility, can be found at the very core of Trabal's creative process but with one very substantial change. Although he stays within this tradition of the antinovelesque novel he challenges its language from within. He displays through narrative the distance between the reality narratively displayed, what would be Cervantes's rendering of 16th century La Mancha or Flaubert's depiction of 19th century provincial France, and the fictions which distort it, chivalresque novels or sentimental novels. Trabal directly lays bare the device continuously to show all its conventionalism and autonomy from the realities it is meant to convey. He does so to show a novel or any linguistic discourse is a distorting way to represent the world, be it La Mancha, provincial France or a ship crossing the Atlantic in the late 1940s. Furthermore in *Temperatura* we find a brilliant step forward in this pursuit which bonds the author even more to those novels because, actually, his approach is

opposed to that of Cervantes's and Flaubert's inasmuch as in *Temperatura*, an obviously fictional character tries to stop being fictional and, in addition, the narrator and the Author insist on that character's true existence and, yet, Anna, along with the rest of the characters, is at all times under the Author's rule, who, in turn, is also fictional and at the mercy of the author, Trabal.

It is difficult to disentangle such a paradox because of the novel's strong dialogic nature, that is, it affirms and denies itself at the same time. There are some plausible theoretical statements which are in their nature paradoxical because they undermine the novel's credibility and, if the novel is not credible, why should we trust in any way that statement in the first place? Readers are told that Anna is real and she clearly cannot be real. We are regularly forced to perceive the arbitrariness and textuality of her being and construction while, at the same time, throughout the novel her attitudes are in no way novelesque, conventional (she does not behave as we would expect a romantic heroine to behave) but only in a manner that is arbitrary and, in fact, anti-novelesque, unconventional. Consequently, we could produce a statement such as: *Temperatura* is not a novel and it cannot be anything else but a novel.

As we have seen so far, Trabal brings his literary ideas to the ultimate conclusion with regards to plot and character which, actually, leads to the impossibility of anecdotal or psychological empathy. In other words, it disables any human reading of the novel. Even though Trabal in his earlier works deployed a calculated ambiguity regarding this point and, in fact, he was able to exploit the tensions between traditional narrative elements and these other destabilizing elements to literary gain, in *Temperatura* the latter subdue the former in such a way that it is not possible to read the novel in a traditional fashion. In this light, the following statement extracted from the private correspondence of Joan Oliver, a friend of Trabal, who translated *Vals* into Spanish for him, will appear to be as precise as it is unfair:

No hi ha altre Trabal que el de *Vals*, li vaig dir: un gran sentimental amb molt de femení.
L'humorista no existeix; és sempre gratuït i forçat, extravagant i sense rels humanes.¹⁰⁵

[There's no other Trabal than the one from *Vals*, I told him: a great sentimental with a great deal of the feminine. The humourist does not exist; he is always gratuitous and unnatural, extravagant and without human roots.]

Nonetheless, we can relate such a statement with the following passages from *La deshumanización del Arte* by Ortega y Gasset which will illuminate the problematic reception of

105 Benguerel and Oliver, *Epistolari*, 9 January 1950, p. 186.

Trabal:

What is it the majority of people call aesthetic pleasure? What happens in their minds when they 'like' a work of art (...)? The answer is easy. A man likes a play when he has become interested in the human destinies presented to him, when the love and hatred, the joys and sorrows of the personages so move his heart that he participates in it all as though it were happening in real life (...).

By art they [the majority of people] understand a means through which they are brought in contact with interesting human affairs. (...) As soon as purely aesthetic elements predominate and the story of John and Mary grows elusive, most people feel out of their depth and are at a loss what to make of the scene, the book, or the painting.¹⁰⁶

The problem with readings like those of Guansé, Oliver or Oller, which ultimately favour the elements which put them in contact with 'human affairs', is not by any means a problem of lack of perception but rather a problem regarding their aesthetic prejudices which stop them reading the novel from the only readable point of view: they regard what is accidental as substantial and, of course, find it of little substance. On the contrary, they regard what is substantial as accidental and find it annoying.

It is in this sense that we might regard the following words taken from a 1929 interview with Trabal as prophetic:

Decidit a escriure una novel·la m'he trobat amb una dificultat. Un lector de novel·les d'aquí es posa davant d'un llibre amb una quantitat considerable de prejudicis. Tot el que no està perfectament d'acord amb els seus prejudicis l'irrita. *L'any que ve* podia salvar-se i de fet no es va salvar per la seva mateixa brevetat. Si ara hagués tallat, com llavors, els ponts s'hauria produït una autèntica catàstrofe.¹⁰⁷

[Resolved to write a novel I've come across a difficulty. A novel reader from here places himself before a book with a considerable number of prejudices. All that does not perfectly agree with his prejudices annoys him. *L'any que ve* could be saved and, after all, it wasn't saved for its very shortness. If I had now cut off the bridges as I did then, a true catastrophe would have happened.]

106 Ortega y Gasset, *The dehumanization of Art*, pp. 8-9.

107 Balaguer, 'Armand Obiols 'critica'' p. 53.

2.4 *Temperatura* as a political stance

One further consideration to be made with regards to the rejection of *Temperatura* by the Catalan cultural environment is that concerning its political stance: as Trabal himself put it in a letter sent to a then young J. Triadú, Catalan writers, and more widely all Catalan intellectuals had to ‘esforçar[-nos] en una continuïtat, fer allò que escriuríem si no ens haguéssim mogut de Barcelona’ [to make an effort towards a continuity, to produce what we would have written if we hadn’t moved from Barcelona] and even ‘deixar de perdre el temps escrivint sobre camps de concentració’ [stop wasting time writing about concentration camps].¹⁰⁸ This position seems to be rooted in a very early determination, born out of the weariness and loathing experienced during the first months of his exile, as we can appreciate from the words of the diary he wrote during those days:

Estem cansats d’haver de parlar de guerra. [...]

Papers blaus als vidres de les finestres, espelmes a les 8 del vespre, sirenes i màscares contra els gasos... Prou. Prou! Tot això ja no té cap interès.

En realitat m’importa molt més trobar company per a la partida de botxes que escriure aquests mots, que llegir els telegrames, que parlar del que pot passar i del que pot succeir-nos.¹⁰⁹

[We are tired of having to talk about war. (...)]

Blue papers on the window panes, candlelights at 8 in the evening, sirens and gas masks... Enough. Enough! All this is not interesting in the slightest anymore.

I’m actually more interested in finding a companion for my bowls game than I am in writing these words, in reading telegrams, in speaking about what can happen or about what can occur to us.]

This idea is repeated in a review Trabal wrote of *Le temps mort*, a 1944 book by Claude Avelin. In this review, although admitting the text is well written, he considers it to be of no interest for his generation because no digression about the war can be of interest, they are exhausted.¹¹⁰

In addition to these personal reasons, his literary position is perfectly consistent with his wider long-term political-cultural views, as summarily pointed out at the beginning of the chapter, both after and before the war.¹¹¹ Being part of the generation that was heir to Noucentisme they shared

108 Trabal, ‘Una carta de l’exili’, pp. 57-58.

109 Trabal, *Diari personal*, 24 September [1939]. Ms. AHS, AP 124/21.

110 Trabal, ‘*Le temps mort*, de Claude Avelin’, *La Nación*, 28 July 1946.

111 See. Campillo, ‘La construcció cultural’ and Balaguer, ‘L’acció a través de la cultura’.

the goal of building a national, modern, and *normal* culture (*normal*, however exceptional the circumstances might be: Primo de Rivera's dictatorship, the Spanish Civil War or exile and Franco's dictatorship). As a result of his activism, seen as ridiculously unrealistic and ambitious, and above all, too personal, his public image was severely affected and he was marginalised.¹¹²

His position on how to achieve a new normality for the Catalan culture in a new context of deprivation can be clearly seen both in the novel and in his contemporaneous writings. Pere Calders wrote a review of the novel where he expressed how remarkable Trabal's position was on this point: not a single trace of the 'catàstrofe' is shown, Calders goes on to praise the actual stance as a huge effort carried out by the author.¹¹³ With regards to *Temperatura*'s text, there are some references which could have been read as dismissive of the whole matter, for instance 'Jo passava una temporada en algun lloc d'Amèrica i l'explicació seria sobrera'¹¹⁴ [I was spending some time somewhere in America and the explanation would be superfluous].

Even though there is no reference to the Spanish Civil War, exile or the political situation of Catalonia, there is a reference to it in the final 'Acknowledgements' where he directly refers to the state of oppression of Catalan society and culture and directly blames the 'nacions lliures' [free nations] for allowing that to happen.¹¹⁵

Several critics and acquaintances of the author who have left any comment on the novel make reference to the fact that the Spanish War and its consequences are not present in the novel, neither by any direct reference nor by any indirect influence. Ramon Xuriguera, in a letter to Benguerel, refused to talk about the novel 'pel fet de tractar-se d'una producció seccionada, en el sentit de la funció immediata'¹¹⁶ [because it is a production cut off, in relation to its immediate function]. Manent, as seen before, regards this kind of stance as intrinsically negative. Guansé, notes that the trend then was that 'els escriptors sentien el pes d'una enorme responsabilitat. La novel·la es tornava testimoni transcendental i metafísica' [writers felt the weight of a huge responsibility. The novel was turned into transcendental testimony and metaphysics] while Trabal considered that literature had to be kept aside from 'reality'.¹¹⁷ In the earlier review of the novel Guansé, disapprovingly, repeated the idea that the novel was a light divertimento *like the ones prior to Vals*.

112 Campillo, 'Francesc Trabal a Amèrica' and Llopis 'Francesc Trabal a Xile'.

113 However, we have to acknowledge the fact that Pere Calders wrote such a positive review from *La Nostra Revista*. The Magazine was at the centre of *Temperatura*'s publishing house.

114 Trabal, *Temperatura*, II, p. 20.

115 Trabal, *Temperatura*, 'Acknowledgements' pp. [362].

116 Benguerel and Oliver, *Epistolari*, 13 February 1949, p. 124.

117 Guansé, 'Francesc Trabal: *In memoriam*'.

However, he thought the novel showed for the first time in Trabal's fictions a trace of responsibility, which he attributes to a 'sàtira sincera' [sincere satire].¹¹⁸

Although, as it has been shown, it is not operative to characterize this sort of literature as satirical nor is it clear where Guansé found it, a 'trace' of responsibility can be found in the book, indeed, and this lies in the absence of any reference to the political context, of any sort of transcendence or serious metaphysics. All of this actually *is* a remarkable political stance. The whole book can be seen, therefore, as a political stance for it is obvious, and not only because of the author's own posterior comments, that the marks of reality had been intentionally kept aside. This was his bid to continue the task intellectuals had set themselves during the first third of the 20th century, already foreseeing the day *that* normality could be recovered.

2.5 Conclusions

As we have seen, Francesc Trabal held a significant activity as a writer and cultural activist in Catalonia from the 1920s until the end of the Spanish Civil War. This activity was part of the concerted effort of Catalanist intellectuals to modernize Catalan culture. Later, in exile he followed that activity maintaining the same aim, even though the circumstances had changed radically. His literature was consistent with his activism both before and after the Spanish Civil War and were in accordance with modern European trends.

Although this modernity was appreciated by his contemporaries from his first novel, Trabal's literature was generally considered as minor and eccentric because of what was seen as light-heartedness and anti-realist arbitrary humour. Such a perception gradually changed as his works became more nuanced and ambiguous with regards to realist values. This is why with the publication of *Vals* he won general acclaim and why the publication of *Temperatura* was regarded by some as a regression to his previous *lesser* style. The image of a Trabal who, after becoming a worthy novelist, loses his literary touch in exile appears in later memoiristic texts and influences subsequent scholarly works.

Temperatura, however, is consistent with his long held political and literary views. In it he explores a central topic in Western modernism: the relationship between life and literature. This was achieved through diverse strategies which subvert literary codes. As we will see in next chapter Trabal's literature essentially and consistently parodic. His aesthetic stance was, at the same time a political stance.

118 Guansé, 'Temperatura', de Francesc Trabal'.

In short, Trabal's political and aesthetic principles led him, as he himself proclaims,¹¹⁹ to write the most radical and autotelic of his novels, maybe the most ludic and metaliterary of his works. Such an approach was deemed deeply untimely: if his arbitrary and snobbish literature was tolerated during the 30s, after the Civil War, in the new environment of exile, the 'frivolity' of purely addressing literary concerns and moreover in an outrageous humorous manner became unbearable for his fellow countrymen as pointed out by Guansé.¹²⁰ In this light, the opinions of Mercè Rodoreda and her own literary change of direction as well as assertions such as '*Vals*, una obra que feia anys li havia semblat bona'¹²¹, [*Vals*, a work that years ago seemed good to me] become much more intelligible: they do not only disclose the ageing of Trabal's literature, but a dramatic change in the context and, chiefly, the readers. This has had a knock on effect on later appraisals of Trabal's work.

119 Trabal, 'Una carta de l'exili'.

120 Guansé, 'Francesc Trabal: *In memoriam*'.

121 Opinion attributed to Joan Barat by Benguerel. Benguerel and Oliver, *Epistolari*, 16 January 1953 p. 366. Joan Barat i Creus (1918-1996), a minor poet and writer of fiction, was an active member of the group of intellectuals who published *Ariel*, a cultural magazine published in Catalonia without the authorisation of the Francoist authorities.

3. Of Course He Is Madame Bovary!

In this chapter I am going to analyse how Trabal constructs his texts around diverse parodic strategies. I intend to show how, with his approach to parody, Trabal is able to create a complex intertextual net that allows him to attack specific works, genres and ideologies and, at the same time it fulfils metaliterary aspirations. Trabal's parodic strategies fit a number of definitions of parody. I will use Aristotle's classical definition: a trivial subject narrated in an elevated style; and Tomashevsky's definition: the subversive use of motives producing an estrangement and laying bare the device. For Tomashevsky, parody can consist in the rewriting of a specific text, or a group of texts, in order to mock that specific work or group; this, he calls the parody of 'extraneous literary devices' as opposed to a second kind of parody he describes as being 'developed freely' and centred in the subversive use of more general fictional procedures.¹²² This second kind of parody, therefore, is not directly dependant on any specific source or sources and has more generally meta-fictional and playful aims. In the case of Trabal, both types are relevant. It is fruitful as well to consider Bakhtin's interpretations of the effects *laying bare the device* has: producing a dialogic text which would be asserting and denying itself at the same time in a narrative that is double coded.

Josep M. Balaguer has argued that parody is at the core of Trabal's metafictional and metalinguistic literature.¹²³ Moreover, he also argued that Trabal's parodies aim 'més que a models concrets, a la novel·la com a gènere' [at the novel as a genre rather than at specific models]. Although I do agree with Balaguer, his statement can misrepresent the relationship between some of Trabal's texts and parodic procedures. Trabal, like postmodern fiction

often employs genre or text parody not to parody a specific genre or text but to parody traditional literary-fictional discourse through metafictional devices. Any instance of genre or text parody is thus subordinated to larger metafictional concerns aiming to challenge literary-fictional discourse which often manifests itself in the conventions of realism.¹²⁴

Firstly, I will look at how, in Trabal, parody is 'developed freely' and aimed 'at the novel as a genre'. In order to do so I will use some of the ideas E. M. Forster expressed in his *Aspects of the Novel*, to show how Trabal challenges reader's assumptions on what fiction is.

122 Tomashevsky, 'Thematics', pp. 94-5.

123 Chiefly in Balaguer, 'Francesc Trabal i la paròdia', 'Francesc Trabal, narrador' and 'Calders i l'autor Déu'.

124 Korkut, *Kinds of Parody*, p. 106.

Secondly, I will analyse *Judita* and *Hi ha homes que ploren perquè el sol es pon* in terms of parody of specific texts, that of ‘extraneous devices’. The texts and genres they parody are a key element of interpretation.

* * *

Before starting to analyse parody in Trabal it will be useful to look into a short story which will clarify Trabal’s ideas about representation, through symbolic, linguistic means. In ‘El promès tímid’ a girl writes a letter to her boyfriend and ends it thus: ‘*qui t’estima d’una manera bàrbara, descomunal, brutal...*’ [the one who loves you in a barbaric, huge, brutal way].¹²⁵ The boy, aroused by such wording, decides the following ‘ja veuràs avui: seré tot un altre; a la que quedem sols la prendré pels braços i la besaré a cada galta i si riu la besaré al mig de la boca’ [You’ll see, today: I’ll behave in a completely different way; as soon as we are left alone I’ll take her by her arms and I’ll kiss both her cheeks and if she laughs I’ll kiss her mouth]. With determination, he calls at her place just to be told by the chambermaid she is busy. The chambermaid checks, nonetheless. Just after the chambermaid has made sure she is definitely busy and stated it for a second time, the girl shouts from upstairs: ‘No puc baixar ara. Qui et fa venir a aquesta hora? Faig dissabte’ [I can’t come down now. Why are you coming at this time of the day? I’m doing my weekly cleaning], to what he is lost for words, and she adds ‘Frego els llautons’ [I am polishing the brass]. This could be read as a satire on people who write such letters, as she does and, even more, to those who read them seriously, or literally; so, disregarding the communicative framework and its inherent pragmatics. But this is also a matter of representation. The girl represents herself differently in the letter than in person and the boy reads the first representation as literal. There is a double meaning in the language that goes unnoticed for both of them. This a subversion of the code and the communicative framework. In other words, this text is not only mocking the attitudes of the speakers but it is also mocking two very different, even antagonistic, codes: that of love-letter writing and that of familiar conversation, that of conventional passion and everyday social intercourse; and, in addition to this, the close coexistence of such modes involving the same speaker and receiver.

125 Trabal, ‘El promès tímid’, *De cara a la paret*, pp. 149-50. Originally in *Diari de Sabadell*, 1 February 1927.

3.1 E. M. Forster

E. M. Forster's *Aspects of the Novel* is the publication in 1927 of 'some lectures' delivered by him at Cambridge on the general topic of 'the novel' earlier the same year.¹²⁶ In his account on the topic, Forster is rather reluctant to postulate taxonomies and more keen on delivering a critical analysis of what a novel is, what it implies and what its conventions are. So, at the same time as he addresses what a proper novel is supposed to be, he also carries out a critical reading of these aspects. This situates him amongst those writers and critics who challenge what they consider as a naive approach to fiction and fictional procedures. Forster's essay is not an unchallengeable, up to date insight or methodology but a historical, intelligent discourse on what fiction is. Furthermore, *Aspects of the Novel* is a useful framework to read the works of Francesc Trabal.

Armand Obiols, a colleague of Trabal and the intellectual leader of their cultural circle 'el grup de Sabadell' wrote a review of *Aspects of the Novel* shortly after its publication.¹²⁷ This strongly suggests Trabal knew the text and also illuminates the perspective from which both Trabal and Obiols seemed to look at the problems raised by Forster. The stress in the review is on a single point: the arbitrary order imposed in the novel that gives us comfort, given the limits of mimesis. Obiols exemplifies it mainly from the chapter entitled 'People'. The conclusion he draws is that, on the one hand, 'the characters are a *description* of some aspects of the novelist' and, on the other, a reader must draw a definite line between *homo sapiens*, reality, and *homo fictius*, mimesis.

Obiols, in his reading of Forster, takes the characters as an example in order to clearly show the distance between the reality (*homo sapiens*) and the fiction (*homo fictius*), and this leads to the awareness of the convention. This convention of representation of reality creates the illusion of a congruent world; a sense of order where everything has an explanation. The arbitrary form of the novel, then, and the justification of all its elements relieves the reader of a disperse and meaningless reality. Although this is in Forster's texts, it is not precisely what he is more concerned about — he is more interested in how to agree 'humanity' or 'value' with the necessary artistic craft of the novel. However, he points out all these aforementioned aspects through his essay and it is, indeed, the main interest of Trabal as he challenges the ways of depicting human life (*i.e.* through mimesis, fiction) by attacking both the verisimilitude of the traditional and the realistic, making it obvious that either option is arbitrary in a novel.

In the following sections, I am going to focus on the elements which are more productive in comparing Forster's ideas with Trabal's praxis: characters and plot.

¹²⁶ Forster, *Aspects*, 'Note'.

¹²⁷ Obiols, 'Nòtules'.

3.1.1 People

Forster considers that fictional characters do not eat or sleep as much as human beings do or, rather, that literature has not found a place for the depiction of the physiological needs of characters.¹²⁸

Conversely, Trabal's characters go to the toilet and are in need of paper, wipe their nose at a most inconvenient and critical moment, and sleep and snore embraced in each other's arms.

I will exemplify this with two examples of *Hi ha homes que ploren perquè el sol es pon*: once the novelist has set the scene for us to think that the catastrophe is about to happen, that is, that the wife is about to find out that the husband knows that she knows about his infidelity and, therefore, the acknowledgement of the situation cannot be delayed. And yet this is disrupted by this sudden break before it happens:

— Què? Has vist res de Fausta i jo...?

Però pogué aturar la seva vehemència en el moment just d'anar a obrir els llavis. Se sufocà per dintre, es mocà sorollosament i girà la conversa. — ¿Em vols anar a buscar els guants? — I partí.¹²⁹

[— What? Have any of Fausta and me...?

He stopped his impulse just at the moment he was about to open his lips. He stifled inside, wiped his nose loudly and made a turn in the conversation — Will you get me my gloves? — and he left.]

Some chapters after this, at the very culmination of the novel, the point of no return, when first the teacher and the maid have sexual intercourse in a suburban hotel:

Fausta i Càrol no s'adonaren que el sol es ponia, perquè molt abans quedaren profundament adormits, nus, agafats l'un a l'altre, Càrol roncant a l'espatlla de Fausta, Fausta la boca badada, com morta, els peus morats, de panxa enlaire.¹³⁰

[Fausta and Càrol did not realize the sun had set, because before that, they fell asleep, naked, embracing each other, Càrol snoring on Fausta's shoulder, Fausta with her mouth wide open, deathlike, her feet purple, her belly up.]

128 Forster, *Aspects*, p. 47 and ff.

129 Trabal, *Hi ha homes*, III, p. 34.

130 Trabal, *Hi ha homes*, IX, p. 85.

With these two examples we can see how Trabal has used this depiction of aspects, which might be seen as unsuitable for fiction, used in the most conventional, traditional points of this novel, and how he gives a shift to the ascending tension through a realistic depiction, although the effect is of a vulgar and even grotesque display. For Tomashevsky traditional and realist motivation are often in tension as the literary idiom is renewed and the artist needs to choose between using traditional, conventional techniques, which as long as they are not excessively hackneyed tend to be invisible to the reader, or to choose a realistic, new motivation justified for its 'lifelikeness', which tend to feel *natural*, logical and verisimilar to the reader.¹³¹ In the cases we have seen, however, Trabal makes traditional and realist motivation clash, laying bare the device. The realist motivation is too vulgar to be considered verisimilar within the frame of the conventions of the realist bourgeois novel.

Another aspect of the characters in the novel for Forster is the degree of control and knowledge the reader has on them:

We know each other approximately, by external signs, and these serve well enough as a basis for society and even for intimacy. But people in a novel can be understood completely by the reader, if the novelist wishes; their inner as well as their outer life can be exposed. And this is why they often seem more definite than characters in history, or even our own friends; we have been told all about them than can be told; even if they are imperfect or unreal they do not contain any secrets, whereas our friends do and must, mutual secrecy being one of the conditions of life upon this globe.¹³²

In this same novel, *Hi ha homes que ploren perquè el sol es pon* an interval, a metaliterary chapter where we are presented a new character who is identified as the *author*. In this chapter, the Author expresses his worries for the novel — the very novel we are reading — to a friend he meets on the train, Calvet. His friend does not show much interest in the novel until the Author says that he was entangled in a 'capítol poca-solta' [nonsense chapter], 'inútil' [useless] and 'desencaixat' [out of place].¹³³ Then Calvet suddenly, unexpectedly gets interested and excited about the novel and starts cheering the Author but recommending him to stress the reasons behind the main character's acts and attitudes. Calvet is an inconsistent character — in the 'real world', we are not given any explanation for his behaviour — but he asks for consistency in the characters of the novel, laying bare the process through which characters are formed and their actions motivated.

131 Tomashevsky, 'Thematics', pp. 79-84.

132 Forster, *Aspects*, p. 47

133 Trabal, *Hi ha homes*, x, p. 94

3.1.2 The plot

Forster describes *plot* as an organic entity, without loose ends, where ‘every action or word ought to count; it ought to be economical and spare; even when complicated it should be organic and free from dead-matter.’¹³⁴ A character from *Temperatura*, René Le Sueur de la Pomme, would perfectly fit the definition of dead-matter in terms of plot, and as we have already seen in the previous chapter, the author makes an explicit display of the gratuitousness of the character: he is of no use in terms of plot and leaves the novel without even meeting the main character. We have seen as well that the novel *Temperatura*, actually contains many episodes which do not seem justified in terms of the logic of the plot: they are accumulative and contingent. Trabal had put into use this kind of procedure before, chiefly, in *L’home que es va perdre* and *Vals* where there is an accumulation of similar scenes, of losing random things in the former and of seduction of different girls in the latter. Conspicuously unnecessary plot elements are present in other novels but to a lesser extent: in *Quo vadis, Sànchez?*, there are several scenes where the main character is humiliated and in *Hi ha homes que ploren perquè el sol es pon*, there is a comic episode where Càrol dresses up as a postman to try to find Fausta’s whereabouts, which does not serve any demand made by the plot.¹³⁵

Discussing *L’home que es va perdre* during an interview, Joan Oliver, summarizes the problems thus:

es podria allargar fins a l’infinit, es podria reduir fins a cinquanta pàgines, [...] Això, naturalment, passa a totes les novel·les, perquè l’art de construir una novel·la consisteix, no a bastir-la amb elements útils, absolutament indispensables i necessaris, sinó a combinar una sèrie d’elements dispersos de tal manera que semblin útils i indispensables. El fet que en *L’home que es va perdre* no s’intenti de crear aquesta il·lusió no deixa de ser significatiu.¹³⁶

[it could be prolonged to the infinite or reduced to fifty pages (...)] Of course, this happens in all novels because the art of building a novel does not consist in building it with useful, absolutely essential and necessary elements, but it consists in combining a series of disperse elements and making them look useful and essential (...) The fact that in *L’home que es va perdre* one does not intend to create this illusion is meaningful.

134 Forster, *Aspects*, p. 88

135 Trabal, *Hi ha homes*, XVI.

136 Balaguer, ‘Armand Obiols «critica»’, p. 56.

For Forster, this plot logic is also true for the ending, which needs to be a logical culmination; it is because of this that ‘[n]early all novels are feeble at the end. This is because the plot requires to be wound up. [...] Why is there no convention which allows a novelist to stop as soon as he feels muddled or bored?’¹³⁷ Trabal, following the logic of subverting the Novel, takes a particular approach regarding endings. The critic Joan Fuster had already remarked on the particularity of Trabal’s endings. Fuster thinks Trabal is ‘impotent per donar una solució «versemblant» al seu relat’¹³⁸ [unable to give a verisimilar solution to his stories]. Some of these endings seem inconclusive, in *L’home que es va perdre*, Picàbia simply gets lost; in *Hi ha homes que ploren perquè el sol es pon*, Càrol just accepts his situation; in *Vals*, Zeni flees and embraces his foolish seducing spiral; in *Era una dona com les altres*, one of the characters is not satisfied with the simple death of the main character and needs to suggest she has been murdered by her husband; in *Temperatura*, the author shows contempt towards the plot and the ending by producing a most obvious and cheesy *happy ending*. The most remarkable ending, however, is that of *Judita*, where the title character starts levitating and explodes, which will be considered further within the analysis of *Judita*. These endings, the dead-matter, the interpolations of episodes, etc. Are in clear contradiction with what Foster says a reader can expect from a novel. They are, of course, typical examples of Tomahsevsky’s freely developed parody in the tradition of Laurence Stern.¹³⁹

3.2 Novels

For Tomashevsky, besides the parodies that are developed freely, one can parody a specific text or specific group of texts, or genre. Most novels by Trabal can be read as a parody of a certain genre, of a specific type of novel. For instance, *L’home que es va perdre* and *Quo Vadis Sanchez?* could be read as a *Bildungsroman*, and *Era una dona com les altres* as a confession novel. Where this is most clear, though, is in the case of *Judita*, which takes the form of a sentimental epistolary novel, and in *Hi ha homes que ploren perquè el sol es pon*, which takes the form of a novel of adultery. Nonetheless, at the same time they can be parodying specific texts, like *Julita* in the case of *Judita*, and myths, like the myth of Faust in *Hi ha homes que ploren perquè el sol es pon*. Sometimes this parody takes the language and the tone of a grave genre, or sometimes plot elements. The parody here comes from the humorous disproportion between these borrowed, extraneous, elements and the native elements, which tend to be ludicrous.

¹³⁷ Forster, *Aspects*, p. 95.

¹³⁸ Fuster, *Literatura catalana*, p. 266.

¹³⁹ Tomashevsky, ‘Thematics’, pp. 95.

I will now focus on two novels *Judita*, published in 1930, and *Hi ha homes que ploren perquè el sol es pon*, published in 1933. These two novels showcase with clarity the diversity of Trabal's parodic strategies.

3.2.1 *Judita*

Judita is an epistolary novel: it consists entirely of letters a nameless narrator sends to an equally nameless friend telling him the story of his obsessive love with Lídia, a Russian violinist. She has been taken unwell and, after her health improves, they go to live together on a deserted beach where she confesses she was concealing her true identity: she is a Jew named Judit. After a short surge in their passion following this revelation, he grows weary of her and, once they consummate their love, they become estranged. Finally, she literally explodes.

In this novel, we see that Trabal teases some of the usual motives of the genre. An obvious and trivial one is the fact that there is not a single letter drenched in tears, despite the abundance of tears mentioned in the novel. However, usual references to the physical element of the letters, such as duty stamps, or the actual writing of the letters with a typing machine are present.¹⁴⁰ The narrator sometimes addresses the friend: 'Per què contar-te la meua angúnia [...]?'¹⁴¹ [Why tell you my distress (...)?] or 'aquests instants en què sol t'escric'¹⁴² [these moments when, all alone, I write to you], but more often than not, the letters are just a continuous narration divided by the customary address 'Estimat amic:' [Dear friend:] which could as well not be there and, thus, the novel largely lacks the fragmentary nature of usual epistolary novels. Some of these letters, therefore, do not actually seem to be letters as, besides the fact that there is no interaction between the sender and the addressee, there are some inconsistencies in the point of view. On the one hand, there are some remarks which would actually better fit an omniscient narrator, such as time perspective and knowledge of the events: 'qui m'hauria dit aleshores que això havia de trasbalsar la meua vida?'¹⁴³ [Who could have told me that this was to upset my life?] and 'després d'aquelles [llàgrimes] mai més no en caldrien'¹⁴⁴ [after those tears there would not be a need for them forever more]; and also including long and detailed dialogues or speeches, for example, there is an instance of a particularly long one, taking more than three full pages, where Lídia tells the narrator the details of her

140 Trabal, *Judita*, IV, p. 46.

141 Trabal, *Judita*, IV, p. 43.

142 Trabal, *Judita*, XIII, p. 139.

143 Trabal, *Judita*, I, p. 15.

144 Trabal, *Judita*, IV, p. 47.

childhood with Iaixa.¹⁴⁵ On the other hand, the time sequence in several letters is unbroken and from one letter to the other, the time elapsed does not seem to be more than minutes. A remarkable example of this can be found in letters III, ending with the narrator leaving the room to have lunch, and letter IV, which begins ‘Estimat amic: quan vaig tornar a la cambra...’¹⁴⁶ [Dear friend: when I returned to her chamber...]. These are, again, ways in which the devices of epistolary novels are laid bare and stop being imperceptible, but are made obvious. However, there is an extra complexity to consider regarding these elements. All this has also to be read as part of the construction of an unreliable point of view of the writer of the letters, that constructs itself with novelistic devices, thus undermining their objective effect, by stressing that autobiography and self-perception are built on literary terms.

Moreover, there is no fictional editorial note at the beginning or the end informing us how these letters came to be gathered and published, nor any of the circumstances which are usual. There is however, out of the blue, towards the end of the novel a footnote to this sentence: ‘I una fam estranya ens ha fet devorar afanyosament el que abans no engolíem en una setmana’ [And an odd hunger made us eagerly raven what we would not swallow in a week]. The footnote reads: ‘Nota de l'autor: Això és absurd però no he volgut llevar-ho perquè m'he imposat de guardar una gran fidelitat en la transcripció’ [Author’s note: this is absurd but I didn’t want to take it out because I have imposed on myself to keep a strict faithfulness to the transcription].¹⁴⁷ It has to be said this is actually the fragment is not absurd at all and it is only the note that breaks our automatic perception of a mere colloquial exaggeration. Furthermore it is the *author* who signs the note and not the *editor*, which is the role the note seems to point at. The author is obviously betraying himself on purpose to create a statement that contradicts itself. It is what Bakhtin calls a carnivalesque discourse that asserts and denies itself at the same time.

All these elements which affect the verisimilitude of the letters can be already considered parodic of the epistolary novel and its devices. However, besides all this, we should relate the narrator of *Judita* not only to the general possibilities of fictionalised letter writing but with the actual sentimental and romantic tradition of epistolary novels. Two instances of the genre, certainly known to Trabal, will be enlightening. Rather than establishing tight links between the novels, what I am suggesting is that the narrator writing the letters in *Judita* is the same kind of narrator as in Goethe’s *The Sorrows of Young Werther* and Masera’s *Edmon*. The latter seems to be a

145 Trabal, *Judita*, V, pp. 53-7.

146 Trabal, *Judita*, III, pp. 39-40 and IV, p. 41

147 Trabal, *Judita*, XIV, p. 156.

descendant of Werther and our unnamed narrator seems to have been influenced by the two. All of them are extremely sensitive and they display a very similar passionate, extreme and obsessive love.

Regarding Goethe's and Trabal's heroes, they both feel similarly confused: 'It is not going to be easy for me to tell you what happened chronologically'¹⁴⁸ and 'Em costa molt d'ordenar les idees i seguir la narració'¹⁴⁹ [It is very hard for me to put my ideas in order and to continue with the story]. They both make a particular link between (their) life and art, as the two consider their relationship to be the cause of previous writings: Werther and Lotte believe the pseudo-Ossian has been written for them and our unnamed narrator and Lídia think that 'Kuprin havia escrit aquest poema [Ia tebià lublú] presentint-nos'¹⁵⁰ [Kuprin had written that poem sensing their future existence]. Werther and Edmon set the tone of Trabal's narrator up to the point that their utterances could be perfectly exchangeable. But, besides the fact they are madly in love, there is hardly any connection with the story.

Furthermore, it is not possible to link Lídia with Lotte. The former is healthy and only partly returns Werther love, whilst Lídia is sick and absolutely in love with the narrator. Irene, in the case of *Edmon*, is more similar to Lotte than to Lídia, despite the obsessive tendency both have to see feelings through Irene's and Lídia's green eyes. Here is where another major textual influence of the text is interwoven with Goethe's and Maseras's influence. *Judita*, and the title here is crucial, can be related to *Julita*. This influence was already pointed out by Sales: the naming of the novels and the main characters, the fact that they are both taken unwell by a mysterious illness and end up annihilated are their main common traits.¹⁵¹ The depiction of desire and the object of desire is most important, as well. Martí Olivella, in his article on the novel, referred to the romantic 'desig tanaterològic' active in *Judita* — and proposed Gautier's *La morte amoureuse* as a possible source,¹⁵² although a much closer text like 'Súcube' by Jeroni Zanné¹⁵³ seems even more feasible as an influence, with a more explicit erotic content and less of a supernatural influence. *Julita*, regardless of the possible influence of these texts, is, undeniably a referent.

Examples of this gothic treatment of Eros can be found throughout roughly the first third of *Judita*, and what prototypically in *Julita* could be 'Encara no se n'havia anat aquella blancor de marbre de la seva cara i de sos llavis'¹⁵⁴ [the marble whiteness of her face and lips had not left her

148 Goethe, *Sorrows of Young Werther*, p. 34

149 Trabal, *Judita*, IX, p. 95.

150 Trabal, *Judita*, III p. 34.

151 Sales, 'El centenari que es va perdre'.

152 Martí-Olivella, 'Trabal i Calders o la incorporació distorsionada del fantàstic'

153 Zanné, 'Súcube'.

154 Genís i Aguilar, *Julita*, X, p. 129.

yet] in *Judita* is brought further or given some mildly masochistic meaning: ‘el meu goig creixia de poder sofrir’¹⁵⁵ [my joy grew because I could suffer] or sadistic overtones: ‘sovint havia d’imposar la meua autoritat i amagar la tendresa que sentia per Lídia; no podia escoltar la seva veu que demanava misericòrdia per al seu cos aclaparat sota el pes de tanta roba’¹⁵⁶ [I often had to impose my authority and hide the tenderness I felt for Lídia; I was not able to listen to her voice asking for mercy for her body, overwhelmed under the weight of so much clothing.] which sometimes evolves to something closer to decadentism: ‘[l]a seva mà fugí de la meua i un estremiment suau del seu cos dins el llit em féu creure que sota els llençols hi havia una serp adormida’¹⁵⁷ [her hand fled from mine and a shiver in bed made me believe that under the sheets there was a sleeping snake] or to the oneiric point where the narrator eats Judita’s eyes as if they were oysters.¹⁵⁸

A most outstanding issue of *Judita* is the one referring to the ending, where Judita begins to float and bursts into pieces. The illness of the Romantic heroine is bound to end with her death. The problems come when the characters survive and then have to face everyday life. We have already seen that this ending can be read as a parody of general fictional procedures as well as those specific of genres and concrete texts, as happens with the ending of *Temperatura* ‘i van ser feliços pels segles dels segles’ [and they were happy forever and ever].

The ending of *Judita* has been received differently: Rafel Tasis i Marca referred to ‘l’obscur simbolisme que segurament entranya’¹⁵⁹ [the obscure symbolism that must hold]; Fuster claimed it was a ‘final sobtat per desinterés’ [sudden ending because of lack of interest]; Dolors Oller, in line with Fuster, considers that this ‘absurd’ ending shows an author ‘poc convençut de la seva pròpia obra’¹⁶⁰ [little convinced about his work]; however, conversely, Montserrat Prudon considers the ending as ‘la trouvaille par excellence de ce récit’ [the ultimate find of the story];¹⁶¹ on a different note, Carles Riba proposed an alternative ending in which the main characters get married and the author shall wait and see what happens.¹⁶² The ending, of course, is absolutely deliberate and, therefore, it is perfectly coherent with Trabals parodic and metafictional aims. It can be perfectly read as a free parody — the ending is unexpected and out of character with the rest novel. Carles Riba’s suggestion would be just as anti-conventional. The ending can be read, *in addition*, as a

155 Trabal, *Judita*, I, p. 18.

156 Trabal, *Judita*, II, p. 24-5.

157 Trabal, *Judita*, II, p. 24.

158 Trabal, *Judita*, I, p. 20-2.

159 Tasis i Marca, *Una visió de conjunt*.

160 Oller, ‘Pròleg’, p. 15.

161 Prudon, ‘Préface’, p. 6.

162 Riba, ‘Judita’

direct parody of Julita's ending, and we could quote some insidious remarks in the *Julita* as possible inspiration for the ending of *Judita*: '[Serapi:] la Julita és del cel, i no viurà gaire sobre la terra!'¹⁶³ (iv, 51) [Julita belongs to the heaven above and will not live for long on earth!], '[Clara:] si Déu la vol al cel, se n'hi anirà'¹⁶⁴ (IV, 52) [If God wants her in Heaven, she will go there], 'La Julita, com si l'esperit se li hagués evaporat pel cel, entre pensativa i distreta, mirava com s'hi estenien llestes unes bromes fosques i trencades'.¹⁶⁵ [Julita, as if her soul had evaporated into the sky, half thoughtful half distracted, was looking how some dark and broken mist was covering the land fast.], '[Els sers com la Julita] són forasters en la terra, ocells d'un altre cel, floretes d'altres jardins'¹⁶⁶ (XII, 145) [they are foreign in earth, birds from other skies, flowers from other gardens]. After this it seems that Judita has no option but to end up floating and exploding — whilst Julita will end up falling down a river.

Trabal's texts tend to be complex and multi-layered with references and intertextualities. There are still more texts which have a parodic relation with *Judita*: some of Edgar A. Poe's tales. These had been translated by Carles Riba into Catalan in the second decade of the 20th century and collected in 1918. The translation had a strong impact in the Catalan literary scene and a lasting influence. Their influence has already been identified or suggested.¹⁶⁷ In the case of *Judita* it is quite crucial. In the first place, the description of the relationship with imagery of the typical poisonous or toxic relationships depicted in Gothic literature and particularly in Poe's tales, which usually have as a title the name of the woman ('Berenice', 'Morella', 'Ligeia', 'Eleonora'). This four texts I suggest as a referent, although some parts of the analysis would also fit other tales of Poe's, featuring unhealthy and disturbed women and men.

In Poe, the narrators are partly the source of the supernatural. They are usually first person narrators talking to an unspecified listener or writing for an unspecified reader. Part of the literary interest of these narrations is to evaluate the psychological state of the narrator as they explain supernatural and traumatic experiences which, if they were to be explained by a third person narrator, would not be verisimilar. We can believe that what the narrators are telling is what they believe happened or what they perceived but we are invited to distrust that perception or explanation of the facts. Similarly, with Trabal's narrator: we are enticed to decide how close to reality his explanation of his experiences is. In this light, the episode of the eating of the eyes as

163 Genís i Augilar, *Julita*, IV, p. 51.

164 Genís i Augilar, *Julita*, IV, p. 52.

165 Genís i Augilar, *Julita*, VIII, pp. 102.

166 Genís i Augilar, *Julita*, XIII, p. 145.

167 Iribarren, *Literatura catalana i cinema*; Martí-Olivella, 'Trabal i Calders'.

oysters takes a different perspective, and they are much closer to the savage extraction of Berenice's teeth in her crypt while still alive than to generic unspecified surrealist sources.¹⁶⁸ Yet the most crucial relationship that can be established amongst *Judita* and Poe's tales are that of the *Doppelgänger* in 'Morella' and specially in 'Ligeia'. The names Lídia/Judit/Judita correspond to different personalities of the same person in a degrading progression; conversely, in 'Morella' the same personality corresponds to the same name. In 'Ligeia' the late wife of the narrator possesses the body of his second wife, Lady Rowena. The narrator finds his second wife an appalling companion, a bore. Lady Rowena falls ill and after suffering in bed suffers a transformation and Lady Ligeia appears in her stead. This is the opposite evolution of Judit, who evolves from being Lídia, a very ill woman, an object of gothic desire, to Judita a healthy and vulgar woman our unnamed narrator finds utterly annoying company. In Poe's case all these elements are a source of horror and bewilderment that unsettle the reader, in Trabal they become dehumanized and bookish, they are parodic. The narration and the narrator are essentially ambiguous, however and there is a Bakhtinian double code with a double message.

3.2.2 *Hi ha homes que ploren perquè el sol es pon*

At least since the troubadours invented love — understood as a mutual agreement between free individuals — and made such an invention the main theme of their literature, adultery was bound to become a major topic as well. The latter at least remained so for some 800 years within the context of Western literature. However, it was not until the 19th century that a specific kind of novel exclusively focused on adultery came into being. The most important of these novels might be *Madame Bovary*. This group of novels which have been conveniently called 'adultery novels' are a literary and ideological reaction against the previous sentimental novels, where passionate love and adultery are seen under a more positive light, as heroic or positive traits.¹⁶⁹ Despite the fact that the novel of adultery loses its popularity at the turn of the century, it is renewed regularly at least until the mid-20th century. As far as the main theme of *Hi ha homes que ploren perquè el sol es pon* is centred in the adulterous relationship of its main character, Càrol H. Ferreres, with his maid, Fausta, it seems useful to read it within the framework of adultery novels.

We must connect the fact that the novel is set in Tharbes, a provincial French city in south Gascony, with the subtitle of *Madame Bovary: moeurs de province*, the most conspicuous of

168 cf. Arnau, *Marginats i integrats*, 134 ff.

169 Overton, *Fictions of Female Adultery*, p. 5.

adultery novels.¹⁷⁰ Moreover, this geographical setting turns out to be much more meaningful when we realise that the city in the novel is actually Barcelona, and that its naming is an absolutely arbitrary affair. Even though Càrol studies in Toulouse and Fausta is from Ibós, a small city next to Tarbes, the book is crammed with Catalan references absolutely unlikely in Tharbes. One of the main virtues of this procedure is that it allows the reader to identify Tharbes as Barcelona at the same time as being a provincial French city and, among other things, pointing us towards the *moeurs de province*.¹⁷¹

Besides this, the characterization and attitude of the adulteress's spouse is remarkably similar to that of Charles Bovary. Maria is defined as unintelligent, trusting and utterly vulgar,¹⁷² absolutely incapable of satisfying or even understanding Càrol's feelings, emotional worries and interests. On the other hand, Càrol learned about love by reading novels — sentimental novels we might suppose: 'Aquell sentiment suau que lliga dues ànimes i que Càrol havia descobert en les primers novel·les que llegí en la seva adolescència, fins ara no podia copsar-lo'¹⁷³ [This soft feeling that bounds two souls together that Càrol had discovered in the first novels he read during his youth, he had not been able to perceive it until this moment]. It is particularly relevant here that this distorted perspective on human affairs, plus boredom are largely responsible for his infidelity.

It is quite doubtful whether adultery novels can be considered a genre. This is, whether we are dealing with a strictly literary matter which can be analysed in terms of motivation, or a socioliterary one only concerning some recurrences regarding the representation of adultery. Whatever the case, we can at least acknowledge that there are some clear examples of the adultery novel (*Madame Bovary* and *Anna Karenina*) which are in themselves able to raise a number of expectations. Trabal is clearly aware of these novels and their wider literary context and, with *Hi ha homes que ploren perquè el sol es pon* he is directly making reference to that framework and destabilizing it.

Bill Overton has described the characteristics of the novels of wifely adultery as follows: '(1) a married woman (2) from the middle or upper class (3) is seduced (4) by a man, (5) unmarried, (6) of the same class (7) and comes to grief'.¹⁷⁴

170 Tarbes, or Tarba, near Lourdes, or Lorda, is the capital of the French department of the Hautes Pyrénées. *Tharbes* is an archaic spelling.

171 In the next chapter, there are more details regarding this transposition, including a list of Catalan cultural references and geographical incongruencies.

172 Trabal, *Hi ha homes que ploren*, III, p. 32, unintelligent; III, p. 31, trusting; VI, p. 63, vulgar.

173 Trabal, *Hi ha homes que ploren*, VIII, pp. 75-6.

174 Overton, *Fictions of Female Adultery*, p. 3

In relation to this description, it is key to highlight the fact that *Hi ha homes que ploren perquè el sol es pon* hardly fulfils any these characteristics, except the second point, then, only partly, points five and seven. And it is key because these unfulfilled characteristics are the ones that make adultery socially inadmissible, at least in literary terms. Càrol is a man ‘pare de família i puntal de la llar’¹⁷⁵ [head of the family and the home’s support] and, thus, he should hold the patriarchal power he is due in bourgeois society. Therefore, his being unfaithful to his wife with an unmarried woman of a lower class should be absolutely irrelevant, and particularly so if we are talking of the maid. Actually, in the novel itself there are opinions which highlight the incongruence of it all:

[Càrol] Ha sabut resoldre fàcilment tots els teoremes que li han passat pel davant, i, en canvi, no ha sabut resoldre la seva vida sexual, amb tot i que veus marrecs de quinze anys que ja, en aquest aspecte, no tenen problemes [...].

Ara mateix, tota aquesta història amb la seva cambrera: [...] ¿no ho hem fet tots una vegada o altra? [...] Ara, el que no s’acudiria a ningú de dir a la cambrera: —mira noia, pst, els que siguem, i empènyer-la a la cambra. ¿Quants anys fa que tu tens el pis al carrer Faraó?[...].

Vull dir que el més elemental en casos així és dir a la noia: mira, en lloc de deu duros cada més, aquí en tens vint, i no hauràs de treballar, entesos? I la dona contenta i enganyada, ja ho diu la dita.¹⁷⁶

[Càrol has been able to solve all theorems that came his way and, yet, he’s been unable to sort out his sexual life, even though you see fifteen year old lads that, regarding this aspect of their lives, have already no problems at all.

Just now, all this business with his chambermaid: (...) haven’t we all done it at one point or another (...). Now, what wouldn’t cross anyone’s mind is telling the chambermaid: ‘look, girl, hey, the more the merrier,’ and push her to the bedroom. ¿For how long have you had the flat in Faraó street? (...)

I mean, what’s most elementary in these cases is to tell the girl: look, instead of ten *duros* every month, here you have twenty, and you won’t have to work, alright? And your wife happy and deceived, so goes the proverb.]

Even the vicar, Father Jonàs, tells Càrol that adultery is absolutely acceptable when it is handled correctly.

175 Trabal, *Hi ha homes que ploren*, II, p. 22.

176 Trabal, *Hi ha homes que ploren*, XI, pp. 98-9.

Jo sóc un clergue modern, liberal; res no m'espanta, senyor Càrol, sinó el pecat de l'escàndol.
—Pecat amagat, pecat perdonat, recordi aquesta sentència, i [sic] vostè ha semblat desconèixer-la.
No he vingut ací a increpar-lo, però sí a fer-li comprendre que no és pas vostè sol qui té passions
en aquesta vall de llàgrimes, i que, en canvi, hi ha molt pocs que no sàpiguen resoldre-les.

[I am a modern cleric, liberal; I'm not afraid of anything, senyor Càrol, but the sin of scandal. —
A hidden sin is a forgiven sin, remember this dictum, and it would seem you didn't know it. I
haven't come here to reprimand you but I have come to make you understand that it isn't only you
who suffer a passion in this vale of tears, and that, conversely, hardly anyone does not know how
to sort theirs out.]

The fact that all adultery novels are centred on the adultery of a married woman — up to the point that Overton, to make this more visible, has coined the term 'novels of wifely adultery'¹⁷⁷ — shows how clearly the code of these fictions is based on a double standard. *Hi ha homes que ploren perquè el sol es pon* clearly contradicts this. Male adultery is in fact a minor motif in some of the adultery novels, particularly in *Anna Karenina*. If Stepan Arkadievich's infidelity is important, it is, first and foremost, because of the identity of the lover, his children's former governess. We must establish a more direct textual relationship here as well, between Trabal's novel and this particular episode. Fausta and the Governess are both servants, and while serving, sexual intercourse has not actually occurred. With regards to Stepan and Dolly have lost two children, and this detail is key because of its meaninglessness, or in formalists' terms, because it is a free motif, and not a bound motif. Dolly is also vulgar and enjoys her motherly role while neglecting the duties Stepan thinks she ought to observe as a wife. Also, Stepan does not show any remorse but for the fact that his wife found out. One of the main coincidences is their shared attitude about the unhappiness of their marriage: they both reject the idea they are old and perceive love as the one thing that keeps them young.

Besides *Anna Karenina*, there are other novels dealing with the husband's adultery motif: *Fortunata y Jacinta* (1886-1887), and closer to the publication of *Hi ha homes que ploren perquè el sol es pon*, *Laura a la ciutat dels Sants* (1931) and *Teresa o la vida amorosa d'una dona* (1932). In all these cases, the consequences of the adultery are socially irrelevant and they are only important, inasmuch as they affect the wife, internally. This cannot but highlight the difference between male and female — or wifely — adultery.

At this point the novel departs from the source of inspiration for *Hi ha homes que ploren perquè el sol es pon*. The novel was inspired by the play 'Un pare de família' by Carles Soldevila,

¹⁷⁷ Overton, *Fictions of Female Adultery*, p. 3 ff.

published by *La Revista* in 1932 in their special issue in commemorating Goethe — The play is both a parody of Faust, the main character wants to be old as he cannot stand the modernity of his family, and of Anna Karenina's Sepan Arkadieievich episode, when he tries to flee with his daughter's piano teacher. But, in a state of panic, similar to that of Càrol, he returns home.

It is as a parody that we must read the reference to myths in Trabal's literature. Roser Porta has already studied that *Hi ha homes que ploren perquè el sol es pon* is a parody of Faust's Myth as established by Goethe and that in the novel there is a parody of three Biblical figures.¹⁷⁸ Regarding the latter, Porta basically establishes the links thanks to the coincidence of the names: Maria, who rejoices in her role as a mother; Herodes, Fausta's fiancé; and Jonàs, the vicar who makes himself the protagonist of a parable equivalent to that of the Biblical Jonah, a completely disproportionate, parodic, comparison. Going further that Porta does, we can see how the character's names make them richer and signal towards the role they have in the novel. Maria, who has a foreboding of her future maternity when she vomits, according to her husband after having eaten rotten cheese with worms — which might be read as an irreverent transposition of the Holy Spirit —, takes the role of being mainly a Mother; and of her little inclination towards sex. Such a role for Maria leaves Càrol, whose surname is Farreras [ironmonger], as a rather passive element of the family. Herodes, Fausta's fiancé, is primarily used as a threat to Càrol's happiness by taking Fausta away and thus taking away his youth with her.

Trabal uses yet another Biblical myth, not pointed out by Porta: that of Paradise Lost. Càrol's home, while Fausta was there, is described as a 'paradís de vidre' [a glass paradise].¹⁷⁹ Trabal had already parodied the myth in *Judita*, where the characters live in a 'urna de cristall' [a glass urn].¹⁸⁰ The lovers, after having had sexual intercourse, and therefore, their relationship has lost its innocence, are expelled from paradise when Elvira, an 'angel de l'alegria' [angel of joy]¹⁸¹ acting as a cherub, separates them.

Regarding Faust's myth, it completely pervades the meaning and structure of the novel. However, besides the lowered mythemes in the novel (Càrol is not a great sage but a Mathematics teacher in a provincial Lyceum, Mefistòfil is a ship called Satanàs, which Càrol is unable to embark), the really central element taken from Faust is the restoration of youth.

178 Porta, Mercè Rodoreda i l'humor, pp. 169-203.

179 Trabal, *Hi ha homes*, I, p. 11.

180 *Judita*, XII, p. 13

4. Regarding the interpretation of Paradise Lost in *Judita* see Campillo 'Notes sobre el tema'.

181 Trabal, *Hi ha homes*, XIII, p. 107.

It is in similar parodic terms that we ought to read the closure of *Hi ha homes que ploren perquè el sol es pon* where Càrol can only think of his past ‘Tota la meua vida només he anat darrere un Fantasma’¹⁸² [All my life I have only tried to reach a Ghost]. He feels useless and believes the future holds nothing for him. ‘hauria de viure aquells darrers anys amb la sensació que vivia for a de la llei’ [he would need to live those last years with the feeling that he was an outlaw]. And then two striking images. ‘Pensava: si ara et mors ni els cucs no se n’adonaran, i el meu cos jaurà sencer potser tota una eternitat’ [I thought: if you die now, not even the worms will realize, and my body will lie in one piece maybe for all eternity]¹⁸³ and then

‘és aquell moment del condemnat a la darrera pena que, a peu dret, ha d’escotar la sentència. Durant tot el procés tem el desenllaç; el dia del judici oral la imminència de la condemna esvaeix totes les esperances; al moment en què el tribunal comença la lectura de la sentència el cop ja és donat, però; però fins que la víctima no sent les paraules ‘a mort’, encara no s’ensorra. (...) Més tard, quan cau la guillotina la ganiveta només talla un tros de carn insensible’.¹⁸⁴

[it is that moment of the person sentenced to death who, standing, has to hear the ruling. During all the process he fears the end; the day of the trial the imminence of the sentence wipes out any hope; the moment the court starts reading the sentence the he has already been hit by the blow, however; but until the victim does not hear the words ‘to death’, still does not collapse. (...) Later, when the guillotine falls, the blade only cuts a piece of insensitive meat].

At this point the striking imagery of the poem of Ausiàs March has become recognisable:¹⁸⁵ ‘Així com cell qui en lo somi·s delita’ [I’m like a man who spends his life in dreams]. In the poem, the poet says that ‘e·l temps passat me té / l’imaginar’ [all my thoughts are captive to the past]. We also find the famous comparison ‘sí com aquell qui és jutjat a mort’ and includes a final appearance of the worms ‘quan amor és molt vella, / absença és lo verme que la gasta’, [whenever love grows old, / then absence chumbles at it like a worm]. The use of this moralistic, severe, grand rhetoric is, of course, in the context of the novel, absolutely disproportionate — as much of the tone of the novel has been.

3.3 Conclusions

To conclude, Trabal’s texts are very rich and complex. Much more rich and complex than their relatively simple narratives would lead us to suppose. Trabal challenges the capacity of language to

182 Trabal, *Hi ha homes que ploren*, FINAL, p. 202.

183 Trabal, *Hi ha homes que ploren*, FINAL, p. 204.

184 Trabal, *Hi ha homes que ploren*, FINAL, p. 205.

185 March, *Verse Translations*, p. 30-33.

neutrally portray and represent us, the other and the world. He is able to find a specific and coherent form for his texts which are composed of different layers of intertextuality. These layers sometimes run throughout the texts and constitute their backbone but sometimes more punctual intertextual elements fit into the narrative coherently. In one text, he can parody general fictional procedures (or with Tomashevsky freely developed parody) by undermining verisimilitude and laying bare the device in punctual moments; parody a register of specific genre, like epistolary novels in the case of *Judita* and adultery novels in *Hi ha homes que ploren perquè el sol es pon*; interwoven with these there can be mythological references, like the motive of lost paradise, or narratives, like Faust. Furthermore, these parodies achieve different objectives, on the one hand, Trabal produces playful texts which constantly question their reliability but, on the other hand, these texts, by parodying — genres, other texts and literary procedures in general — also undermine the ideologies which make the parodied discourses possible and the way we can actually represent ourselves.

4. Novels in Black-and-White: Written Language and Other Media

In this chapter, I will explore the presence of non-literary forms of art in Trabal's fiction. The argument I will sustain here is that although some of the techniques in his novels are inspired by other forms of art and there are constant intertextual references to specific paintings, musical pieces and films, Trabal regards novels as a specifically linguistic, written art form. The novel's expressiveness would be, thus, limited by its own linguistic, written nature. However, paradoxically, he intertextually integrates non-linguistic forms of art in his texts, and through this integration, he is able to comment on the uniqueness of each medium as well as to suggest an essential incompatibility among them.

In order to support my argument, I will first consider the way Trabal explores the relationship between language, a conventional symbolic system, and physical reality. Related to this, I will examine how he merges real cultural referents within his fiction in an arbitrary fashion. With the combination of real and fictional elements the author problematizes the relationship between language and literature, on the one hand, and reality on the other. Moreover, the appearance of authors and specific works, as well as the relation of Trabal's own public persona with his work further complicate delimiting the borders between life and art, author and work, text and object.

I will then analyse in a more *strictu sensu* the relationship Trabal establishes between his texts and other forms of art. I will start by exploring how paintings and sculptures appear in the author's work and how he plays with their attributes, for example, their two-dimensional nature or the fact that they are monochrome, polychrome, or still. Afterwards, I will examine the place of music, a non-figurative art form, in Trabal's works: first, how music is integrated in his metaphorical language as, for instance, using it to mock the ineffable; secondly, how he teases the reader; and, finally, the role musical references and techniques play in a reading of *Vals*, and even how musical techniques might have inspired or determined its form.

Last, I will analyse the relationship between film and Trabal's prose and how problematic it might be to determine the actual significance of such a relationship. A filmic reading of *Vals* can contradict its musical reading. Furthermore, I will explore how film and filmic language determine and inform the writing and reading of some of his fiction, as well as how sceptical and aware the author was regarding the possibilities of a multimedia novel, a novel that can integrate different media.

In this chapter, the main question I will address is not to what extent literature — and language, to a broader extent — can convey or use other forms of art. I am only indirectly concerned with the

possibility of interrelation between distinct semiotic systems. Although the matter will need some attention, it will be only in relation to Trabal's texts and praxis. In other words, the focus of this chapter will be on the extent the literature that Trabal proposes and practices, extremely self-conscious of its linguistic nature and literality, relates to other artistic languages.

* * *

In one of the earliest scholarly approaches to Francesc Trabal's literature, a very short yet seminal and perceptive text, by Dolors Oller considers that 'el llenguatge de Trabal és bàsicament cinematogràfic en les imatges, visual en les situacions i els moviments'¹⁸⁶ [Trabal's language is basically cinematographic in its images, visual in its situations and its movements]. This short statement presented with little context of justification due to the nature of the succinct article which 'pretens de ser bàsicament informatiu' [intends to be basically informative] is one of the earliest to suggest a relationship between Trabal's literature and non-linguistic media. However, what Oller actually means by describing the images in Trabal's language as 'cinematographic' or how 'situations' or 'movements' in a text can be 'visual', is far from clear.

More recently, Teresa Iribarren i Donadeu has produced a monograph on silent film and Catalan literature. In the book as a whole, and particularly in a chapter devoted to Trabal, she addresses at some length the relationship between these two different semiotic systems in a similar, yet more detailed, way. For Iribarren, once Trabal became aware that the arrival of film had changed the reader's gaze for good, he

entén que cal reinventar la literatura: les seves novel·les no són tan per ser *llegides* com per ser *mirades*. Són novel·les presidides per la màxima del "*show, don't tell*", que tanta fortuna farà tot al llarg del segle xx. Són novel·les adreçades al nou *homo videns*. [...] Totes [les novel·les de Trabal] exigeixen una lectura que, a més dels requeriments seculars com ara la intel·ligència, el bagatge cultural i la capacitat imaginativa, reclama una disposició del receptor més propera a la del *moviegoer* que no pas a la del lector.¹⁸⁷

[understands it is necessary to reinvent literature: his novels rather than being made to be *read* are made to be *watched*. They are novels presided by the 'show, don't tell' maxim, that will become so important during the course of the 20th century. These are novels addressed to the new *homo videns*. (...) All (of Trabal's novels) demand a reading that, on top of the secular requirements of intelligence,

186 Oller, 'Francesc Trabal, novel·lista', p. 40. The text is from 1973.

187 Iribarren i Donadeu, *Literatura catalana i cinema*, pp. 215-6.

cultural background and imaginative capability, ask for the recipients' disposition to be closer to that of the moviegoer than that of the reader.]

Despite it being longer and more elaborate, this statement is no clearer than Oller's. It is hard to see more than an unintended play on words or an unclear figurative use of language in the distinction between *mirar* and *llegir* a book. On the one hand, in its literal meaning, when watching a book you can see the covers, the pages and the typeface: it is only through reading that you might imagine some of what the author has written. On the other hand, in its figurative sense, the distinction becomes even more uncertain: what is the difference between a watch-reading and a read-reading? In addition, the cliché that Iribarren summons to follow up her point (show, don't tell), vaguely refers to a multiplicity of textual issues: from the desirable degree of authorial presence to the importance of action over description. In her following point, Iribarren argues that a radical change has taken place in the disposition of the reader who now needs to react as a moviegoer while reading. On this matter, I would suggest that imagining what one is reading is quite different from seeing what one is watching and that the former is an essential requirement for a reader and the latter an essential requirement for a moviegoer. Of course, Iribarren's argument is not baseless: the readers' cultural world has indeed been affected by their cinematic experiences and, in addition to new images populating their heads, their expectations regarding plot development and general motivation might have changed.¹⁸⁸ An author like Trabal can count on a reader to recall actors, scenes or frames from specific films as well as genres and cinematic clichés when they are evoked in a text. Imagination, on the other hand is not restricted to readers: moviegoers can imagine things they are not actually seeing on screen, but these things the recipient imagines do not need to be necessarily suggested through verbal language. An important part of the problem with approaches such as Oller's and Iribarren's lies in a seemingly excessive faith in the capacities of language. To use George Bluestone's classical distinction between literature and film, there is a substantial difference between a 'mental image' inspired by language and a 'visual image' set before our eyes: the former comes from a symbolic code, the latter is literal and presentational.¹⁸⁹ If we accept this is a plausible distinction, Oller's and Iribarren's contentions appear severely weakened.

This is not to say that we cannot recall specific images (be it a painting, a sculpture, a building or even a public figure) with a certain accuracy but that language cannot produce *literally* an image but a *literary* image — an image confined to the reader's mind, not to a frame. A text can make reference to other artistic devices, regardless of its medium, but it cannot change its very textual

188 I use motivation as described by Tomashevsky, as discussed in the chapter on parody.

189 Bluestone, *Novels into Film*, p. 1.

nature unless it actually contains other forms of art. In the case of *Quo Vadis Sánchez?* there are Valentí Castany's drawings for its first edition which illustrate the beginning of each chapter of the novel. However, these drawings were removed in the second edition of the novel in a decision that calls into question their importance as an integral part of the artistic object, and pushes them to a contingent, paratextual sphere.¹⁹⁰

In much more general terms, Wellek and Warren's classic handbook addresses the issues of the relationship between different forms of art:

the medium of a work of art (...) is not merely a technical obstacle to be overcome by the artist in order to express his personality, but a factor pre-formed by tradition and having a powerful determining character which shapes and modifies the approach and expression of the individual artist. The artist does not conceive in general mental terms but in terms of concrete material; and the concrete medium has its own history, frequently very different from that of any other medium.¹⁹¹

Trabal's awareness of this 'concrete medium' of the artistic object taking a specific form rather than being a random, 'technical obstacle', irrelevant in relation to the ideas a writer wishes to convey or 'express', pervades his texts. We can see a clear instance of this in the following passage, a journalistic report on Annàsia, a parody of a technological utopia in *Temperatura*:

En lloc de llegir llibres, els ciutadans d'Annàsia se'ls expliquen mútuament, a l'estil antic dels acudits. Abans de deixar Annàsia, vaig saber que el Subcomitè de Planificació Cultural i d'Hores Lliures va publicar les bases d'un concurs per a reduir a un màxim de cent paraules, en qualsevol idioma bàsic, les obres completes de certs autors considerats d'interès històric. Només s'hi feia una excepció per Proust, per a les obres completes del qual es fixava un màxim de cent trenta paraules. I hi havia un Premi per posar les obres completes de Dostoiewski en forma de mots creuats.¹⁹²

[Instead of reading books the citizens of Annàsia tell them to each other in the old fashion of jokes. Before leaving Annàsia, I found out that the Subcommittee of Cultural Planning and Spare Hours had published the rules of a contest to reduce to a maximum of one hundred words, in any basic language, the complete works of certain authors considered of historical interest. There was only one exception

190 Barcelona: Edicions de la Rosa dels Vents, 1937. This book series was created in 1937 and specially devised taking into account the war context. It was a continuation of the older *Quaderns Literaris*. Both were designed to make literature accessible to mass readership at lower prices. Neither series had ever included illustrations in any of its publications.

191 Wellek and Warren, *Theory of Literature*, p. 129 (XI).

192 Trabal, *Temperatura*, XXX, pp. 331-2.

for Proust, for whose complete works a maximum of one hundred and thirty words was set. And there was a Prize to turn the complete works of Dostoevsky into the form of crosswords.]

Here, Trabal challenges the possibility of paraphrasing any work of literature whilst retaining its identity: can a book be told, orally, as a joke and still be the same book? Can a one-hundred-word abstract substitute the complete works of an author? How can a story — let alone one of Dostoevsky's novels — be put into a crossword? These are all absurd questions which require no answer. As Northrop Frye would assert later, the meaning of an author 'is the integrity of his completed form'.¹⁹³ A novel is made up of each one of its words; a film, of each one of its frames; a painting, of every one of its strokes; and a sonata, of every one of the notes produced in a performance. Trabal, like many other authors from the inter-war period, was already addressing what, as we have seen with Bluestone, Wellek and Warren and Frye, would concern scholars after 1945.

4.1 The limits of language

Francesc Trabal shows an awareness of the distinctions between 'mental' and 'visual' images as well as of the diverse natures of different artistic media. The author seems to enjoy problematizing them as the following passage, in relation to visual images, shows. In the episode from the novel *Hi ha homes que ploren perquè el sol es pon*, two characters [Agustí] Calvet [«Gaziel»] and the Author talk about the very novel we are reading:

Bé, noi, això està molt bé. Això obre un camp vastíssim de possibilitats. Tens al teu davant una novel·la com una casa. I deies que no ho veies clar. Si jo ja la veig. La tinc al davant. És com si ja l'haguessis escrita. (...)

—Què hi veus tu?

—Què sé jo, el que hi veig?¹⁹⁴

[Well, lad, this is very good. This opens a very vast field of possibilities. You have before you a novel as big as a house. And you said you didn't see it clearly. I am already seeing it. It's set before my eyes. It's as if you had already written it. (...)

—And what do you see?

—What do I know, what I see?]

¹⁹³ Frye, *Fables of Identity*, p. 14.

¹⁹⁴ Trabal, *Hi ha homes que ploren*, ENTREACTE, p. 101.

What Calvet intends to say by stating that the novel is ‘com una casa’ is obviously that it is a *great* novel and yet we could deem this Catalan lexiconised expression as not entirely fit for purpose because a novel is not at all like a house, which, among other things, one could see, from the outside, at once. When someone looks at a novel as they would look at house they see a book, the covers and the pages, because one cannot actually *see* a novel, one actually *reads* it. It is, however, Calvet who forces us, with the help of the other character, the Author, to misunderstand him by inducing a literal interpretation of a mere colloquial expression stressing that ‘[I]a tinc al davant’ which justifies the question that follows ‘[q]uè hi veus, tu?’ The question, of course, cannot be answered in words because of the contradiction between a static element (a building) and a sequential one (a novel).

In his most radical excerpts Trabal problematizes language and mimesis at a very basic level: with the signifier, as theorised by Saussure. In a passage in *Temperatura* the narrator states ‘no faig sinó traslladar literalment l’ocorregut, la realitat p + a : pa’¹⁹⁵ [I’m only literally transferring what happened, the reality p + a : pa]. Here the narrator of the novel intends to claim his commitment to being faithful, *literal*, to the events and to do so evokes a common, mechanical, alphabetization exercise — where the pupil, by repeating this formula, is to learn that a *p* followed by an *a* is pronounced [’pa]. However, Trabal is mixing mathematical language (+) with linguistic, non-algebraic, elements. The sum of these letters is subsequently displayed in an arbitrary lineal order. In mathematical language ‘p + a’ could only equal a + p or a new letter to which we would attribute the value of the sum of both elements (say, *b*). In addition, instead of using the conventional sign for equal (=), Trabal uses a colon (:), which in mathematics is the sign used to indicate a division. Moreover, these conflictive conventional and arbitrary signs, when added together take a completely different meaning to the one they had on their own: *pa* (i.e. *bread*). This, of course, has to be read as a pun. However, it is a pun with serious implications as we are forced to consider the conventional nature of the linguistic sign. Consequently, the automatic perception of the language, as a system, is broken.

4.2 References to the cultural context

This conflict between an autonomous, imperfect language and the representation of reality has only a tangential importance with regards to other artistic media because music, painting, photography and film are not reality either; they are all artistic media and each one of them can be considered to

¹⁹⁵ Trabal, *Temperatura*, v, p. 43.

constitute a singular autonomous world of convention. However, before I proceed to analyse the use and influence of other media in Trabal's novels it will prove useful to see how cultural references, as well as works of art in general, are used and represented in Trabal's work.

Generally, in Trabal, there is a use of cultural and intertextual references — whether they are real, false or inaccurately quoted or descriptions of paintings, music or film — which are just that: a constellation of cultural references that merge external real artistic elements with the fictional world.¹⁹⁶ This kind of usage sets up a mental framework which in some novels, as in *Hi ha homes que ploren perquè el sol es pon*, help to build an incongruous, arbitrary, cultural space within the fiction.

The action of *Hi ha homes que ploren perquè el sol es pon* is set in a small inland city in south Gascony, Tharbes, which is effectively very close to the village of Ibos, the village where Fausta, the maid, comes from; H. Càrol Ferreres, the protagonist, studies in Toulouse, where he meets Maria, his wife. Despite the French setting, a number of contemporary Catalan cultural references appear throughout the novel: Càrol reads a prologue by Agustí Esclasans to a book by Joan Maragall, and also a copy of the *Estances* by Carles Riba.¹⁹⁷ He remembers a joke in one of Trabal's own books. *L'any que ve*,¹⁹⁸ and has two friends — who do not take part in the action and are only mentioned by other characters — one named [Joan] Oliver¹⁹⁹ and the other, a friend from the 'Ateneu', Julià Gual.²⁰⁰ A third friend, the poet Carles Sindreu, appears in the novel and actually takes part in a Chaplinesque episode.²⁰¹ There is a religious order of *Las Pasturadoras*, with its name and regulations written in Spanish; the Excelsior, a luxurious cabaret in La Rambla, is

196 In this section, I do not attend nor analyse the intertextual nature of these references as I am only concerned here with their existence outside the novel. Examples of inaccurately quoted or described pieces of art are a 'Simfonia sense paraules' [Symphony without Words] by Schubert, mentioned in *Judita*, XI, p. 125; in a different degree of falsehood or inaccuracy we find Riba's *Un nu i uns ulls*, which appears as a book in Trabal's *Hi ha homes que ploren perquè el sol es pon*. The novel was published in 1933 before *Tres suites*, from 1937, the book by Riba, actually containing a section or 'suite' entitled 'Un nu i uns ulls'. We have to add here Trabal's deliberate attempts to confuse his readership with fictional titles for non-existent novels advertised as if they were to be published.

197 Trabal, *Hi ha homes que ploren*, IX, p. 84. Agustí Esclasans (Barcelona, 1895-1967), writer and intellectual. He wrote poetry, short stories, novels and criticism. He published in some of the periodicals that published Trabal's works as well, like *Revista de Catalunya*, *Mirador* or *La Publicitat*.

198 Trabal, *Hi ha homes que ploren*, XIII, p. 120.

199 Trabal, *Hi ha homes que ploren*, XIII, p. 120.

200 Trabal, *Hi ha homes que ploren*, XI, p. 98. Julià Gual (Mataró, 1905-Perpinyà, 1964), journalist. The Ateneu [Barcelonès] is a private member's club.

201 Trabal, *Hi ha homes que ploren*, XVI, p. 162-64. Carles Sindreu (Barcelona, 1900-la Garriga, 1974), avant-gardist poet.

mentioned as well.²⁰² Furthermore, Càrol is able to go from his home to the port by tram,²⁰³ and attends a leisure venue packed with sailors.²⁰⁴

Therefore, Tharbes can be understood to stand as an arbitrary transposition of Barcelona. Such a transposition, however, goes further than traditional Realist toponymic transpositions with the intention to build a mythical and universal space — like, for instance, Narcís Oller's Vilaniu, Leopoldo Alas's *Vetusta* or Thomas Hardy's Wessex. Trabal's transposition does not admit a straightforward interpretation as the enlightened oriental allegories where the *other* is manifestly supposed to stand as the *us*, as in Voltaire's *Zadig*. On the one hand Tarbes, Ibos and Toulouse are real French cities. Barcelona might be the referent of Tharbes but even though Ibos may allow us to imagine a more or less mechanical transposition, Toulouse does not. We are presented with a deliberately incongruous geographical, social and cultural frame. The Tharbes of *Hi ha homes que ploren perquè el sol es pon* is a Tharbes that is a French provincial city at the same time as it is Barcelona, a Tharbes with a French school system, by the sea and populated by the Catalan cultural elites. It is possible for the city to be and not to be Barcelona at the same time that it is and it is not Tharbes because it is possible to utter it linguistically. This autonomy from the referential world does not only allow the author to pick a selection of characteristics from all the referents or signal towards a particular model or work of fiction, but also highlights they are fictional and arbitrary signs once they appear in a novel.

Furthermore, Trabal, in this same novel, enhances even more the confusion between the real and the fictional. In the 'Entreacte' [Interval] where the action of the novel is interrupted, the fictionalized Author in his first and only appearance, questions himself about the progress of the novel — of the very novel we are reading. As the 'Entreacte' unfolds, a series of real-world referents are displayed to give, allegedly, the impression to the reader we are in the 'real' shared context. In this way, the Author, which we tend to confuse with the actual author — Trabal —, talks to [Agustí] Calvet [«Gaziel»] on board the Paris express.²⁰⁵ In their conversation, besides mentioning a further real living person, the composer [Robert] Gerhard, who is travelling on the same train, they refer to a current affair mixed with some fancy: Calvet tells the Author he is going to Barcelona to unveil the fact that the Plandiura collection is false in its entirety. The Plandiura collection was an actual art collection purchased in 1932 by the Junta de Museus de Barcelona, a

202 Roglan, *La Barcelona eròtica*, p. 125.

203 Trabal, *Hi ha homes que ploren*, XVIII, p. 184. Tarbes is about 100mi away from Bayonne's harbour.

204 Trabal, *Hi ha homes que ploren*, XVII, p. 171.

205 Agustí Calvet «Gaziel» (Sant Feliu de Guíxols, 1887-Barcelona, 1964) was a journalist. At the time he was the editor of the conservative, pro-monarchy, Spanish-language newspaper *La Vanguardia*.

public institution. The purchase caused some scandal for what was considered its elevated cost of 7 million pesetas. However, contrary to what is suggested in the novel, historically, no concerns were voiced over the authenticity of the collection, but only over its real value.²⁰⁶ Therefore, Calvet's contention is purely fictional, even though it is based on a real controversy. In addition to this contemporary reference, the Author expresses his concerns to Calvet that he is afraid of not being on time to present his novel for the then prestigious Crexells prize. Trabal had actually unsuccessfully submitted his first novel, *L'home que es va perdre*, to some controversy, which the reader of his novels might still remember.²⁰⁷

And yet, as we have seen, these kinds of real-world elements do not only appear in the 'Entreacte' — the part of the book which is presented as a confession from author to the reader — but they also appear in the rest of the book — the part which is presented as fictional. For instance, as has already been pointed out, outside the 'Entreacte' there are mentions of the prologue by Agustí Esclasans to a book by Joan Maragall as well as to two books by Carles Riba.²⁰⁸ Although it is not uncommon for novels to include references to other books, these two appearances mention publications which were very recent or even still in preparation: *Hi ha homes que ploren perquè el sol es pon* was published in 1933, and the books mentioned are from 1932 — Esclasans — 1930 and 1937 — Riba. There is a further real-world appearance, which is all the more striking because it is a character taking part in the action of the novel — just as Calvet appears in the 'Entreacte', but this time in the fictional part of the novel. The real-world-character, Carles Sindreu, embarks with Càrol, dressed as a postman, on a silly, Chaplinesque scheme to gather information regarding the whereabouts of Fausta. This is Sindreu's only appearance in the novel. The 'Entreacte' is, therefore, another level of fiction — where the fictional Author and the fictional Calvet belong — but it is fictional, nonetheless. The fact that characters with the names of real people appear both in the 'Entreacte' and in the rest of the novel blurs the alleged difference between these two different levels of fiction. With these strategies, Trabal points out how arbitrary it is to include any element

206 Pinell, *Francesc Trabal i les seves novel·les*, pp. 71-2

207 The cultural magazine *Mirador* refers humorously to the controversy and remarks on how Trabal is able to use his failure to his advantage: 'Mirador indiscret: Propaganda moderna', *Mirador*, 1 August 1929. For the details of the controversy see Casacuberta: 'Gènesi i primera adjudicació'.

208 Trabal, *Hi ha homes que ploren*, IX, p. 84 for the reference to Esclasans's prologue to, it is to be assumed, Joan Maragall: *Himnes homèrics* (Barcelona: Sala Parés Llibreria, 1932) and the reference to Carles Riba: *Estances* (Sabadell: La Mirada, 1930) — the publishing house La Mirada was run by el Grup de Sabadell, including Trabal. Trabal, *Hi ha homes que ploren*, FINAL, p. 207 for the second mention of a book by Carles Riba, *Un nu i uns ulls*. A book with this title was never to be published by Carles Riba but it was to be a section of *Tres Suites*, (Barcelona: La Rosa dels Vents, 1937).

from the real world in one level of fiction or the other.

Moreover, in order to make his fictional universe even more obviously arbitrary, Trabal occasionally merges characters and elements from his previous works and makes them reappear, both as internal and external elements, producing a Trabalian intertextual net. On the one hand, internally, some elements of Trabal's novels enter other novels: for instance, when Sánchez, in *Quo vadis Sánchez?* finds money someone 'lost',²⁰⁹ which relates to Frederic Picàbia's mania to lose things in Trabal's first novel *L'home que es va perdre*. In *Temperatura*, Anna recalls that all her friends, the main characters of Trabal's previous novels, married in the basilica of Montmorency, in Einghein les Bains.²¹⁰ However, of the five characters she mentions, only Càrol is married, unhappily, within the novel *Hi ha homes que ploren perquè el sol es pon*; Zeni is not married at the end of *Vals* and the three female characters of Judita in *Judita*, Sílvia in *L'home que es va perdre* and Raya in *Vals*, all die unmarried before the end of their novels. Trabal's other books can also appear as books a character has read, like Càrol in *Hi ha homes que ploren perquè el sol es pon*, who remembers a joke from *L'any que ve*.²¹¹

As we have seen so far, all these cultural references have little to do with the expressive characteristics of different art media but rather with a conflictive relationship between the real and the fictional. Sometimes, these references are used mischievously or teasingly, for instance when the narrator scorns the prestigious intellectual Carles Riba by using his aforementioned poetry book *Estances*, 'un llibre qualsevol' [a random book], to trigger the exasperation of the main character in *Hi ha homes que ploren quan el sol es pon* who subsequently throws it away.²¹² Another example of a sneering artistic reference occurs in *Quo vadis Sánchez?*, when the protagonist is willowing wool with his *batuà* and uses the elongated tufts to excite his imagination, fancying they are fairies.²¹³ At this point the narrator compares the shapes of the 'estrafolàries filagarses' [bizarre shreds] with Picasso's *Baigneuses*, 'l'espatlla de les quals es confon sovint amb els turmells i la cabellera' [whose shoulder often becomes confused with the ankles and hair].²¹⁴ Yet a further instance of this mocking kind of reference can be found when atonal music is likened to the memory of an unconnected series of slaps to the back of Sánchez's neck: 'tota la simfonia que amorosia els seus

209 Trabal, *Quo vadis Sánchez?*, II, p. 29.

210 Trabal, *Temperatura*, XI, p. 115.

211 Trabal, *Hi ha homes que ploren*, xxx and *L'any que ve*, p. [xx].

212 Trabal, *Hi ha homes que ploren*, IX, p. 84.

213 A *batuà* (as written in the novel) or *batuar* is a machine used to cleanse wool and make it fluffy by passing it through a drum with metallic spikes, equivalent to a willowing machine.

214 Trabal, *Quo vadis Sánchez?*, II, p. 22.

records era una harmoniosa combinació atonal de clatellades'²¹⁵ [all the symphony that smoothed his memories was a harmonious combination of atonal slaps to the back of his neck]. In such disdain, we find an echo of commonplaces and prejudices against modern or high-brow art. The comment Trabal seems to be making is that Riba's post-symbolist poetry is obscure and incomprehensible; that Picasso's cubist figures are just random shapes and colours with not much logic; and that atonal music is amusical and just random noise. In short, modern art is depicted as a cold intellectual and meaningless exercise. These disdainful ways to refer to art are a way to deny high culture any kind of relevance for daily life or transcendence. They are a mockery of high modernist intellectualist pose. These references to high art are also a kind of deliberate snobbishness as they are made from extensive and deep knowledge of these forms. Jordi Pinell has already remarked on the fact that culture pervades all Trabal's narrative voices and that sometimes it is used ironically.²¹⁶ Such are the cases we have just mentioned, in the sense that they are not devised to comfort an everyman but to tease and amuse art lovers. They are devised to characterise the third person narrator and to unsettle aesthetic values within the fiction. They are, therefore, rhetorical devices aimed at an aesthetic objective.

Another use of contextual references in Trabal's texts, as has been studied by Iribarren, is how they allow us, in her words, to 'desentranyar les claus de la narrativa trabaliana' [disclose the keys of Trabal's narrative] because 'res no és gratuït' [nothing is gratuitous].²¹⁷ The 'key' she makes reference to in this particular instance is the naming of the protagonist of *L'home que es va perdre*, Lluís-Frederic Picàbia. The character's name is a reference to the French artist Francis Picabia. Iribarren convincingly argues that the naming, on the one hand, helps to characterize Picàbia with the features of his public persona. On the other hand, the naming sets both the aesthetic tone of the novel, relating it to Dadaism and the Avant-gardes and directs us towards the detection of intertextualities.²¹⁸ Neus Real detected a similar case in *Hi ha homes que ploren quan el sol es pon*, where Càrol is named after King Carol II of Romania.²¹⁹ In this case, however, it is only a matter of characterization both literal and ironic. The king was famous for his extravagance and for his scandalous affairs, while Càrol is a teacher who is inconspicuous in his vulgarity and the vulgarity of his only infidelity. The naming, thus, helps to characterize Càrol and at the same time it is an ironic remark on the vulgarity of his case and the disproportion with which he regards it. The cases

215 Trabal, *Quo vadis Sánchez?*, VII, p. 74.

216 Pinell, *Francesc Trabal i les seves*, pp. 70-1, 80.

217 Iribarren i Donadeu, *Literatura catalana i cinema*, p. 220-1.

218 Iribarren i Donadeu, *Literatura catalana i cinema*, p. 221-3.

219 Real Mercadal, *Mercè Rodoreda: l'obra de preguerra*, p. 258.

of Picàbia and Càrol accord very well with the importance Trabal gives to the naming of characters. It happens in *Judita*, where the character of Lídia/Judit/Judita/Juditeta changes with every name modification. In the case of Carol II/Càrol, the relationship does not go beyond the characterization of the protagonist and a remark on the disproportion between his predicament and the register being used in the novel.²²⁰ This is not the case with the naming of Picàbia where Trabal, in addition, establishes a complex relationship between the French artist, his works and his context and Trabal's fictional character and its textual surroundings. Balaguer has argued that Francesc Trabal conceives the work of art as a continuation or a projection of an author's own being or personality.²²¹ In the light of this, the effect the mere name of Picàbia/Picàbia has beyond the character is telling of the relationship between an author, his work and the world of fiction within it. An author's name is both contextual and intertextual because it invokes both the author's persona as well as his works.

Besides the importance of this feature in itself, it can also be related to the relationship between Trabal's persona and his fiction and how he knowingly exploited it. This connection is played out firstly in the appearances of the Author, a character in the novels *Hi ha homes que ploren perquè el sol es pon* and *Temperatura*. Secondly, it can be seen in the similarities between the internal narrators and the author, Trabal, mainly in *Judita* but also in *Era una dona com les altres*, too. Finally, we can find it in the similarities between some of the characters and the author, for instance Zeni in *Vals*. In all these cases the reader tends to consider, to some extent, the Author and the narrator to be fictional versions of the author, Trabal. This identification between the narrator/Author/author affects the fiction in a way that is similar to the conflation of Picàbia and Picàbia. The confusion of the real author and the fictional one allows Trabal to play with his own public image and his characters' and narrators' images. His narrators' and Authors' disregard for high culture, the mordant references to Riba, Maragall and Picasso, the very mention of the construction of the novel and considering the Premi Crexells as one of the worries of the Author alongside the 'tema i les figures'²²² [theme and figures] are all part of this strategy. Trabal creates narrators and characters, named *author*, which coincide with his fame for being a superficial, careless, *enfant terrible*. This image is sometimes assumed to be literal by his contemporaneous reviewers such as Carles Sindreu, who thanks him for his stand against 'la literatura pedant i torturada'²²³ [pedantic and tortured literature]; Agustí Esclasans, who states that although it is a 'passatemps sense conseqüències' [pastime with no consequences] it is 'producte moderníssim d'un

220 This disproportion is the basis of parody and will be further discussed in the chapter devoted to it.

221 Balaguer, 'Francesc Trabal, narrador' p. 22-3.

222 Trabal, *Hi ha homes que ploren*, X, p. 93.

223 Sindreu, 'Hi ha homes que ploren'.

esperit molt sensible i intel·ligent'²²⁴ [produced by a very modern, very sensitive and intelligent spirit]; or Domènec Guansé, who asserts he has found 'ressons autobiogràfics' [autobiographical resonances] in the depiction of *Vals*'s Zeni.²²⁵ These kind of autobiographical interpretations, more or less veiled, have reappeared periodically: for example, Pinell, an early scholar of Trabal's work, suggests the setting of *Judita* was inspired by Trabal's own life and, much more recently Julià Guillamon, a cultural journalist identifies a womanizing Trabal with one of his characters, the teenage seducer Zeni.²²⁶

It is not strange that critics have been a bit confused over the issue as we can see that Trabal contributed or instigated such confusion between narrator, Author, author, and his works. One way of doing it is by devising characters from Sabadell or a city the reader can identify as its transposition: the character-narrator in *Judita* is from an unnamed, provincial, middle sized, grey, industrial, city; the character-narrator in *Era una dona com les altres* lives in Sabadell; and Arrahona is Raya's home-town in *Vals*.²²⁷ Another way in which Trabal fosters the confusion is by creating narrators who have personal similarities to him, for instance, in *Judita* the character-narrator is the local contact for musicians touring provincial Catalonia, an activity that resembles the task Trabal carried out within the organization Federació d'Associacions de Música. This last example has a very interesting parallel to Aldous Huxley's 1926 'Two or Three Graces' where the character-narrator is, like Huxley, a musical critic and expresses similar musical tastes to those of Huxley.²²⁸ The parallel between Huxley and his narrator has been analysed by John Aplin, who suggests Huxley uses a similar strategy in the construction of Philip Quarles in the 1928 novel *Point Counter Point*.²²⁹ How close are the authors to the narrators? How much do Huxley and Trabal desire to be identified with the narrators? To what extent, therefore, can we assume they share the opinions over music expressed in *Judita* and 'Two or Three Graces'? And can we assume

224 Esclasans, 'Converses literàries'.

225 Guansé, 'Una novel·la eròtica'.

226 Pinell, 'Francesc Trabal i les seves novel·les' and Guillamón, 'Trabal, el reivindicat, torna a les llibreries' *La Vanguardia* (Culturas), 28 July 2018. An earlier similar suggestion to Guillamón's was made by Joan Oliver, see Oliver and Calders, *Diàlegs*, p. 18.

227 *Arraona* has been used, inaccurately, as the Roman name of Sabadell; *Arahona* is the traditional spelling before the introduction of modern spelling in 1918. Other novels present cities to be identified as Barcelona: such is the case with *L'home que es va perdre* and *Quo vadis Sànchez?*. We have already seen the more complex Tharbes/Barcelona in *Hi ha homes que ploren quan el sol es pon*.

228 The novella would be translated into Catalan in 1934 by Maria Teresa Vernet in Proa's 'A tot vent', four years after the publication of *Judita* in 1930. It is very likely, then, that Trabal had access to the text through other means.

229 Aplin, 'Aldous Huxley and Music' pp. 32-3.

they share the opinions over music expressed by Zeni in *Walz* and Quarles in *Point Counter Point*?²³⁰ The answer to these questions in the case of Huxley, Aplin argues, is that his characters have the same tastes as their creator, except when musical taste is used as an ironic comment on the character's personality.²³¹ If we consider the fact that all these texts are close to a form of autofiction the answers loses relevance. In the case of Trabal, the deliberate playful tension he creates between the real and the fictional adds a further layer of complexity. Therefore, I would argue that for Trabal, although the question is relevant and suggested by the text, the answer is not relevant at all: what is important is to detect he is fostering the confusion in a playful manner and that this confusion is deliberate and part of the fiction. This confusion has to be read in aesthetic, rhetorical terms, not in terms of its sincerity. In his journalism we already find a sarcastic fictionalized ego who jokes about important cultural figures, such as Beethoven, and praises contemporaneous French composers, praise we find too in seemingly less fictionalized newspaper articles.²³² These views are reproduced by young Zeni, who disregards Mozart in favour of Ravel²³³ — although, in another passage the narrator refers to his 'Bolero' with some scorn: '[Zeni] sentí una remor confusa que venia de lluny, de lluny, de molt lluny i que anava engruixint-se amb calma, talment el bolero de Ravel tocat per músics que s'adormissin' [(Zeni) heard a vague sound coming from far, far away; it slowly thickened, as though sleepy musicians were performing Ravel's *Boléro*].²³⁴ The case of Beethoven, Mozart and Ravel can be likened to the ambivalence with which Trabal treats Carles Riba, who was, in real life, a much respected friend of his.²³⁵

However, he did not only promote a careless, irreverent, anti-conventional, anti-cultural image within his fiction but outside of it as well, such as all the absurd *boutades* carried out with the Grup de Sabadell or the usual mischief and practical jokes he indulged in. For instance, in 1919 the Grup de Sabadell extravagantly paraded through Sabadell to a camping site with a donkey and umbrellas crowned by a baguette.²³⁶ Besides, more seriously he asserted in a letter from exile sent to Joan Triadú, that 'mai m'ha preocupat la qualitat'²³⁷ [I have never been concerned by quality]. The

230 Like the views exposed by Zeni in a discussion with Senyora Fàbregas over music that 'sounded pretty'. Trabal, *Vals*, 'I. PRELUDI', pp. 68-70; Trabal, *Waltz*, pp. 53-4.

231 Aplin, 'Aldous Huxley and Music' p. 33.

232 F. Trabal: 'Petita suite en Re: II' in F. Trabal: *De cara a la paret*. p. 192; F. Trabal: 'Cocteau, Satie & Ca.' *Diari de Sabadell*, 26 May 1927 quoted by Iribarren i Donadeu, *Literatura catalana i cinema*, p. 217.

233 Trabal, *Vals*, 'I. PRELUDI', p. 69.

234 Trabal, *Vals*, 'IV. VALS', p. 243; Trabal, *Waltz*, p. 185.

235 See Riba, *Cartes*.

236 Details about this sort of behaviour is extensively reported by Miquel Bach: 'El coro de Santa Rita'

237 Trabal, 'Una carta de l'exili'.

attitude made explicit by Trabal in his letter has been reported too by Joan Oliver in a text where he remembers his then already late friend and seems to try to undermine, quite systematically, the value of Trabal's work. He is rather remembered because of their friendship and comical exploits rather than his literary merits:

Fou aleshores [a vint-i-cinc anys] que en Trabal sentí la crida de la literatura. Vocació tardana i, de fet, ocasional, quasi sobreposada, empesa probablement pel modest i obstinat exemple d'alguns dels seus companys més pròxims. Puix que l'escriure com a operació intel·lectual pura o com a treball d'art no arribà a interessar-li gaire. Havia llegit poc i amb pressa. [...]

En Trabal escrivia les novel·les de raig, [...] sense refer ni corregir quasi res, en unes setmanes; la seva sola pretensió era de contar històries divertides o sorprenents. [...] Però no hi havia res d'això [de Bontempelli i Huxley]. [...] [E]l·l escrivia de dins a fora; era un cas típic de narrador «inspirat», intuïtiu, no pas un escriptor llibresc preocupat per escoles i problemes de l'ofici.²³⁸

[It was then, (when he was twenty-one years old) that Trabal felt the call of literature. Late and, actually, casual vocation, almost superimposed, probably induced by the modest and obstinate example of some of his closest colleagues (Oliver is referring to himself). Because writing as a pure intellectual activity or as craft never came to interest him much. He had read little and hurriedly. (...)]

Trabal wrote his novels in one go, (...) almost without reworking or correcting anything, in a few weeks; his only intention was to tell funny or surprising stories. (...) But there was nothing of this (of Bontempelli and Huxley). (...) He wrote from the inside to the outside; his was the typical case of an 'inspired' narrator, intuitive, not a bookish writer concerned about schools and the problems of the craft].

Domènec Guansé described him in a very similar, yet less cynical vein: '[e]l mal de Trabal és que la literatura no l'interessava gaire; no la considerava una finalitat, sinó un mitjà. Ell el que volia era intervenir, figurar, fulgurar, sorprendre'. [The bad thing about Trabal was that literature never interested him very much, he did not consider it to be an end but a means. What he wanted was to intervene, to be present, to shine, to surprise]. Such an image, was subsequently assumed by some scholars as well, although they justified it in aesthetic terms:

L'humor moltes vegades és donat per la manca d'interès, per part de l'autor, a continuar suportant el pes de l'obra un cop plantejada — actitud anticultural, de despreocupació per l'obra

238 Oliver, 'Francesc Trabal, recordat'.

literària en ella mateixa — , que fa acabar en estirabot un capítol o un plantejament per passar, de pressa a uns altres.²³⁹

[Many times, humour is caused by the lack of interest, on the author's part, to keep carrying the weight of the work once it had been laid out — an anti-cultural attitude, of disregard towards the work of literature in itself —, leading him to end a chapter or a situation with an abrupt joke in order to quickly move to other chapters or situations].

However, as we have seen so far, all these features attributed to Trabal are actually entirely deliberate and are a part of the fiction; moreover, they are an essential part of the sort of discourse Trabal intends to create. And yet, it is important to remark this strategy goes two ways, from Trabal to the novels, as part of their construction and merging of text and context, and from the novels to the author, in his attempt to construct a public image of himself. The latter was a complete success and has been able to significantly affect several readings of his works, both contemporaneous and posthumous. For our part, it will be enough to clearly circumscribe the operation to its aesthetic terms. Besides what has already been said, the ethos of the narrators and the Authors are what in rhetoric is known as a particular type of *recusatio* which consists of showing contempt towards elevated literature and works of art in order to justify the writing of (what is presented as) a minor piece. Scornful and defiant attitudes towards art are indeed present both in his writings and in his biography. These attitudes are also part of the complex, dialogic approach outlined in the preceding pages. Trabal asserts the autonomy of language and literature from reality but he does so by filling his texts with real-live figures and events. A similar paradox full of grey areas pervades his texts when it comes to the use of non-linguistic media within them.

4.3 Painting and Sculpture

It must be acknowledged that all forms of art are actual objects in the real world and that it is not always straightforward to tell when a specific piece should be considered just as a reference to an external object, like a watch or a car, or to a work of art, a piece of fiction with a meaning; in some cases, it can be both. Regarding the use of paintings and plastic arts not merely as a reference but in a more substantial way, we can often see that they are used in short physical descriptions of characters:

239 Oller, 'Francesc Trabal, novel·lista', p. 40.

Sota un arc de fum espès els seus ulls eren d'una dolçor tan clara com aquells ulls d'aquella
«Noia amb boina» de Kisling.²⁴⁰

[Under a bow of thick smoke her eyes were of a sweetness as fair as those eyes of that Kisling's
Young Girl in Beret]

una noia flasca com les que sovint pinta l'Obiols²⁴¹

[a wimpy girl like the ones Obiols usually paints]

It must be noted that Moisé Kisling did not paint *Young Girl in Beret*, which is actually a 1918 painting by Modigliani, who happened to live in the same building as Kisling. The problem here is whether the reader has to read this as the narrator's mistake, triggering the reader's distrust; a snobbish joke for connoisseurs, who would connect the two painters at once; or rather the creation of a parallel fictional reality where Kisling is the actual author of *Young Girl in Beret*. A further complication arises when we recall the painting's eyes, the relevant element in the description. In the painting, they are grey, non-realistic, monochrome eyes, with no pupils or irises. They do not seem, therefore, to fit the 'fair sweetness' they are meant to illustrate. This, of course, might well be ironic as Eliana, the character in the novel, is described as a 'petita fera',²⁴² [small predator], a 'bèstia ferida' [wounded animal]²⁴³ or as a somewhat vampiric supernatural being in the fin-de-siècle tradition, who 'prenia fortament Sànchez contra seu' [strongly pressed Sànchez against her] to lead him to her room where 'el seu cos, il·luminant l'aire enfosquit pel triple flam de cera' [her body, throwing light to the air, darkened by the triple wax flame] plunges Sànchez into the utmost confusion taking away his will.²⁴⁴ Therefore, uncanny empty eyes might be exactly what Trabal wanted for this character. However, we are confronted again with the essential ambiguity of Trabal's writing.

These particularly problematic issues aside, the appearances of a painting or a sculpture make us recall these works of art, just as the appearance of any given human existing in real life does and produces a mental image of them. But then, besides the fact that characters in a novel only exist in words, as soon as static works of art, such as paintings or sculptures, are used to describe a dynamic

240 Trabal, *Quo vadis Sànchez?*, IX, p. 96.

241 Trabal, *Hi ha homes que ploren*, I, p. 12. Josep Obiols (Sarrià, 1894-1967), artist.

242 Trabal, *Quo vadis Sànchez?*, IX, p. 96.

243 Trabal, *Quo vadis Sànchez?*, IX, p. 104.

244 Trabal, *Quo vadis Sànchez?*, IX, pp. 103, 104-6.

element such as a character in a novel, the static element is deprived of some of its constitutive characteristics, something Trabal acknowledges openly through one of his narrators:

T'imagines que d' 'Amor i Psiquis' de Gerard, les figures es moguin, i l' amorosa parella s'escapi del Louvre i cadascú per la seva banda se'n vagi al jardí o a la cuina, saltant de la tela, desfent l'encís que els fa immortals?²⁴⁵

[Can you imagine that in 'Cupid and Psyche' by Gérard, the figures move, and the loving couple flees from the Louvre and, each one of them following his path, goes to the garden or the kitchen, jumping from the canvas, undoing the charm that makes them immortal?]

This suggestion of two painted figures entering *our world*, or a fictional rendering of it, compels us to imagine them in motion, when their nature is to be still. It compels us to imagine them in different settings, when they belong to the specific and careful composition of the painting. Finally, it compels us to imagine them in a three-dimensional world, when they lack volume.

Another reference to painting which we can relate to the linguistic nature of the novel occurs again in *Quo Vadis Sànchez?* where we are induced to imagine a drawing intended to be a bicycle but resembling a cathedral: 'En Sànchez ja tenia el llapis als dits i féu una bicicleta que semblà més aviat una catedral'²⁴⁶ [Sànchez already had the pencil in his hand and produced a bicycle which rather resembled a cathedral]. This does not only raise the question of how a bicycle in a figurative, realist, drawing can actually resemble a cathedral but also the question of how much a line on a paper *is able* to resemble either of the two and what *resemblance* actually means. In addition, the reader can see that Trabal is able to formulate such a riddle because it can be uttered. He is therefore questioning a multiplicity of issues simultaneously. On the one hand, he challenges the ability of language to describe an image, at the same time he displays the power of language to describe impossible images. On the other hand, through language, the author challenges the ability of drawing to represent reality and, at the same time, he displays the power of drawing to depict impossible things. This is summed up by the words of the character who asks Sànchez to draw the bicycle, when he sees he is worried he tells him 'No s'hi amoïni, no, tant se val que no sigui ben bé una bicicleta, sap?'²⁴⁷ [Do not worry, it does not matter if it is not exactly a bicycle]. Here, Trabal confronts the nature of any symbolic representation: its power and autonomy — one can say a drawing *is* a bicycle and conjure up both the drawing and the bicycle through language — but he also confronts us with its limits and fragility.

245 Trabal, *Judita*, XII, p. 154.

246 Trabal, *Quo Vadis Sànchez?*, VIII, p. 82.

247 Trabal, *Quo Vadis Sànchez?*, VIII, p. 81.

4.4 Music

It is well known Trabal was very keen on music since a significant part of his cultural activism and journalism was carried out in the field. This too, was well known of his contemporaries, who found the numerous references to music in his fiction very natural. The abundance of musical references helped to foment the aforementioned confusion between the narrator, the Author and author, an actual music lover. As we have already seen, this is particularly true for *Judita*, where the writer of the letters that constitute the chapters of the novel, has a similar role in a similar organisation as Trabal had in a federation of local music associations.

Trabal mentions specific pieces, real or invented, and genres throughout his works as part of his broader references to culture. The least significant use of music, which does not go much beyond the mere mention of a piece, occurs when there is actually music in the fiction, intradiegetic music. For instance, when someone is playing, characters are attending a concert or playing a disc, as occurs in *Judita*, for example.²⁴⁸

A more significant and interesting use of music occurs when it is used to describe a speech an angry wife is uttering having lost control over herself. The narrator justifies not transcribing the speech because ‘és molt difícil en moments semblants de construir frases perquè puguin ser repetides amb èxit’ [it is very difficult in such situations to produce sentences that could be successfully repeated], and then identifies that speech with a symphony: ‘Tota la simfonia, aquell *largo en do major* amb què l’obsequiava la seva dona hauria pogut ser estalviat.’²⁴⁹ [All the symphony, that *largo in C major* his wife was presenting to him could have been avoided]. We are confronted here with the contradiction of a speech described as music. The contradiction lies in the fact that although both oral communication and music are basically air vibrations perceived through the ears, these two forms of expression are radically different, in as much as they create meaning in different ways, for instance, through phonological and morphological elements in the case of language as opposed to tone, and rhythm and harmony in the case of music. Of course, we can interpret this particular instance as a mere rhetorical device, *largo en do major* being the same as, for example, a slow, solemn, endless and boring speech; and yet the reader clearly acknowledges the most relevant element of the metaphor is incompatibility between music and language. The common elements of two terms of the metaphor, a *largo in C major* and Maria’s speech, might be that they are slow, solemn, endless and boring but what is more significant, less denotative, is the fact they are both entirely meaningless to Càrol. While being reprimanded, the unfaithful husband

248 Trabal, *Judita*, I, p. 14.

249 Trabal, *Hi ha homes que ploren*, VIII, p. 80.

‘no en sentí res ni s’adonà de res’²⁵⁰ [did not hear anything nor knew what was going on at all]. The breakdown in communication highlights the fact that language differs from music in its basic way of creating meaning.

A further example of the opposition between music and language as different semiotic systems is found when Sànchez hears some music and the narrator transcribes what he hears: ‘Un piano de maneta grinyolava un coblet popular i de tant en tant hi havia aquell refrà tan clàssic del: / *Pam, patapam-pam, pam, pam!*’²⁵¹ [A street piano squeaked a popular ballad and from time to time there was that chorus which is so classic, going: *pam, patapam-pam, pam, pam!*]. In this example, the written language of the novel cannot convey, to the reader’s frustration or amusement, the notes of the piano and, furthermore, the rhythmic *Pam, patapam...* can only be uttered melodically (lineally) but not harmonically (vertically) as a street piano could. Conversely, a street piano cannot produce such a phonetic (potentially significant in linguistic terms) utterance as [‘pam pətə’pam ‘pam ‘pam ‘pam]. Moreover, this example does not only flag the issues that arise with the interplay between music and language, but also the issues between the oral and the written language: had this music been sung, at least the melody could have been conveyed to some extent but the code of writing, the appropriate code in the transmission of novels, is not able to convey music at all, but merely to suggest, and only suggest, a rhythm.

One of the more remarkable uses of music and music technique is found in *Vals*. Its title already suggests a frame for the reader to interpret the text in a certain direction. Each chapter of the novel has the title of a musical form suggesting, therefore, it is a Waltz suite: ‘Preludi’, ‘Invitació al vals’ (actually the title of a ‘narrative’ piece by Weber), ‘Divertiment’, ‘Vals’ and ‘Final’. It is worth noticing the ambiguity of the title as a *waltz* refers both to a musical form and to a dance.

In the structure of the novel, the instances of spinning motions, and the character’s confusion and dizziness refer to the dance, while the reiteration of similar events refer to music, to a theme. For instance, Raya’s and Zeni’s amorous relationship, a theme already hinted at and prepared in the prelude with Zeni’s flirtations, first with Teresa and later with a number of girls. The theme is later developed: Raya’s and Zeni’s love, with variations, then Zeni’s subsequent love affairs with a considerable number of girls and women. And, yet, none of these elements is able to produce anything close to a musical — or dancing — effect. These effects still cannot be achieved when the narrator makes reference to an orchestra playing music — not as an intradiegetic element but as an external or heterodiegetic element as if we were *reading a concert* or as if it were a soundtrack accompanying the text — ‘I els violins semblava que a la fi es decidien a enfocar el tema’ [And the

250 Trabal, *Hi ha homes que ploren*, VIII, p. 80.

251 Trabal, *Quo vadis Sànchez?*, II, p. 28.

violins seemed finally to have settled on their theme].²⁵² The reader, of course, can only *read* these violins, but not *hear* them.

All this musical presence is, after all, a way to articulate the literary materials. As Carmen Peña-Ardid, discussing the relationship between film and literature, points out, the latter can only have a literary effect, even when it is using techniques of non-literary origin, techniques which automatically become literary in their new linguistic form.²⁵³ We have to admit after all that the novel does not really resemble a waltz.

Nonetheless, the title of the book, *Vals*, induces us to read the book in a certain light. There are references to Zeni's dance such as this: '[e]l vals havia començat. De cap a cap de dia, de banda a banda del seu escenari, Zeni no parava de lligar giravolts' [(t)he waltz had begun. From the beginning to the end of each day, from one side of this stage to the other, Zeni never stopped swirling around].²⁵⁴ The description of Zeni's dance makes us think of the novel not only as a dance but as a stage show set before our eyes, laying bare the artistic, literary device, making us perceive the characters as elements at the mercy of a demiurge or, at least, set music with, perhaps, an orchestra below. Furthermore, in other passages we see the protagonist changing dancing partners to changing tunes:

El so tzigan llanguaix fins a apagar-se... El "vals tendre, vals blonde" sembla haver exhaurit el tema insistent. [...] [U]na orquestra de jazz, galopant per arribar més de pressa, corrent la pólvora amb els saxofons i els banjos, engegant un *Vals brillant*. Elvira d'un salt s'apresta a fruir-lo [...].

[The Tzigane tune is beginning to languish and finally comes to an end... The strains of Dajos Béla's "Valse Tendre, Valse Blonde" seem to have run their course; this recurring theme has been exhausted. (...) (A) jazz band, galloping in an effort to get there faster, like an explosion of gunpowder with its saxophones and banjos, launching into a "Brilliant Waltz." With a jump, Elvira prepares to enjoy it (...).]²⁵⁵

The aforementioned theme and variations do not just point to the musical direction: also relevant is the insertion of proleptic short episodes which are to be repeated with modifications when we

252 Trabal, *Vals*, 'III. DIVERTIMENT', p. 192; Trabal, *Waltz*, 'III. DIVERTIMENTO', p. 148.

253 Peña-Ardid, *Cine y literatura*, p. 16

254 Trabal, *Vals*, 'IV. VALS', p. 257; Trabal, *Waltz*, 'IV. WALTZ', p. 195. There are intradiegetic music and dances as for instance in Trabal, *Vals*, 'II. INVITACIÓ VALS', pp. 98-9.

255 Trabal, *Vals*, 'V. FINAL', p. 307; Trabal, *Waltz*, 'V. FINALE', p. 232.

reach their chronological point in the story — see the episode of the kiss with Teresa.²⁵⁶ These repetitions can be related to the musical technique of hinting at a theme early in a prelude and fully developing it later. Another example of musical construction could be found in the regular premonitions of the incestuous relations between Zeni and Otilia. They are first mentioned by her father to her mother: ‘[j]a has previngut la nena?’ [(h)ave you warned our daughter?];²⁵⁷ later, by Otilia herself: ‘tenia un presentiment, algun perill devia haver-hi a prop’ [she had a presentiment of approaching danger];²⁵⁸ and, finally, by Zeni, her cousin, to her brother: ‘[e]stàs malejat, Víctor. Pensa que tens una germana’ [(y)ou’ve become perverted, Víctor. Don’t forget that you have a sister].²⁵⁹ These premonitions could be related to the Wagnerian technique of leitmotif.

Here again, we can draw a parallel with Huxley as he also tried to implement musical techniques, as the title suggests, in his *Point Counter Point*. This choral novel is constructed with the technique of counterpoint, inspired by Bach’s fugues, where each character’s point of view is intended to be a response, a variation, on the others.²⁶⁰ A parallel could be drawn here with *Vals*, to the extent that each of Zeni’s lovers provides a different point of view on him. In this regard, a parallel could be drawn especially with the first chapter, ‘PRELUDI’, where a multiplicity of characters provides different perspectives on each other, and in the subsequent chapters, with Zeni as a constant point of comparison. It is important to note here that most likely Huxley’s name had been mentioned in connection to Trabal due these sorts of similarities between *Point Counter Point* and *Vals*.²⁶¹ Huxley, had already experimented before with musical forms and literature, namely in ‘Two or Three Graces’ where, as the reader learns at the end of the story, the whole novella has been constructed in the image of the Arietta of Beethoven’s C minor Sonata no.31 Op. 111. The reader is, therefore, compelled to compare both the novella and the second movement of the sonata. In the former, the main character, Grace, passes through a series of musical movements and is condemned to repeat them *da capo*, indefinitely. The narrator shows some regret at the connection, seen as an unsatisfactory artifice: ‘if only the music of our destinies could be like this’.²⁶² Nevertheless, posterior attempts by Huxley to achieve what Philip Quarles, the writer in *Point Counter Point*, refers to as the ‘musicalization of fiction’ wanted to find of a mode of fiction capable of being more

256 Trabal, *Vals*, ‘I. PRELUDI’, pp. 42-3 and pp. 78-82 and Trabal, *Waltz*, ‘I. PRELUDE’, pp. 34-5 and 60-4.

257 Trabal, *Vals*, ‘I. PRELUDI’, p. 45; Trabal, *Waltz*, ‘I. PRELUDE’, p. 36.

258 Trabal, *Vals*, ‘IV. VALS’, p. 247; Trabal, *Waltz*, ‘IV. WALTZ’, p. 187.

259 Trabal, *Vals*, ‘IV. VALS’, p. 267; Trabal, *Waltz*, ‘IV. WALTZ’, p. 202.

260 See Roston, ‘The technique of Counterpoint’.

261 Some instances of this can be seen in *Vals*’s reviews: Montoliu, ‘Breviari Crític: Una excel·lent novel·la’; Tasis i Marca, ‘Francesc Trabal: Vals’; Montanyà, ‘Francesc Trabal’.

262 Huxley, ‘Two or Three Graces’, p. 241-2.

‘true to life’ — in Murray Roston words — than the conventions of realism.²⁶³ This aim would distance Trabal from Huxley as, rather than pursuing a realist goal, Trabal explored the relationship between identity construction and conventional modes of representation.

Virginia Woolf’s works have been analysed as well from the fugal point of view. In *Mrs Dalloway*, for instance, the fact that the reader has to connect a multiplicity of disconnected facts and characters has been related to the fugal form. At the same time, it is an appropriate way to convey modernist fragmentary modes of representation.²⁶⁴ A similar judgement could be made too, at least in part, about *Vals*. James Joyce’s *Ulysses*, in particular the Sirens episode, has also been related to music, from a multiplicity of perspectives: from fugue and polyphonic forms to leitmotif techniques and on to dodecaphonism and chordal homophony, in ways which, seemingly, as Zatkalik points out, are ‘disparate, even mutually exclusive’.²⁶⁵ The structure and composition of *Vals* could also be interpreted in such, or other, musical terms, with more or less precision, appropriateness and productivity, but this could not make it any more musical or any less novelistic.

In turn, when faced towards another direction, the possibility of narrative music, we find similar issues, as an article by Trabal explores, comparing Beethoven’s Quartet 10 Op. 74 with a Hollywood film. The main basis of the comparison, another instance of disregard for high culture, is the predictability of Beethoven: ‘em fa l’efecte de les pel·lícules americanes: des d’un començament sabem com han d’acabar i que han d’acabar bé’²⁶⁶ [He causes me the same effect as American films: from the beginning we know how they have to end and that they have to end well]. Iribarren, in her analysis of the article, points out the playful exploration of the interrelation of different languages.²⁶⁷ However, it is important to realize the arbitrariness of such a reading of Beethoven’s quartet. Undoubtedly, these two different languages have come into being with the inspiration of a particular score and the stiff conventions of a particular cinematographic genre. However, the kidnapping of the first violin by the second one and the alto, in agreement with the violoncello, or the appearance of the cavalry, or the inevitable move of the camera not to show the final kiss, bear no relation whatsoever to the arrangement of notes of the Quartet except for their coexistence in that particular interpretation, or, better, in that particular text.

This, of course, would begin to change when films start to incorporate sound and recorded

263 Roston, ‘The technique of Counterpoint’, p. 379.

264 Sutton, ‘Shell Shock and Hysterical’ p. 23.

265 Zatkalik, ‘Is There Music in Joyce’ p. 56. Levin, ‘The «Sirens» Episode as Music’ and Zimmerman, ‘Musical Form as Narrator’ compare the chapter to fugal forms; Herman, ‘«Sirens» after Schönberg’ consider the chapter under the light of dodecaphonism.

266 Trabal, ‘Petita suite en re’ quoted by Iribarren i Donadeu, *Literatura catalana i cinema*, p. 205.

267 Iribarren i Donadeu, *Literatura catalana i cinema*, p. 205.

music. We have seen earlier that sometimes music appears as an heterodiegetic element with much resemblance to the use of music in films to underline a particular pathetic element, to suggest chaos, to set a mood and to accompany the characters' dance. In *Vals*, the music is also intended to remind us that we are *reading* a Waltz.

L'orquestra parà tot d'una i només un violí, un violí acostant-se amb l'arquet a la funerala, anà apropant-se a Zeni, cada vegada més a tocar, cada vegada agegantant-se, cada vegada empetitint-lo. Com un crit, com un xiscle (Zeni rebé l'atac sense poder defensar-se), aquell tzigan ferí el violí i el vals es tacà de sang.²⁶⁸

[The orchestra stopped. Only a violin, a violin approaching with its bow pointing down, like rifles at a military funeral, approaching Zeni, ever closer, almost beside him, growing larger as he grew smaller. Like a cry, like a scream (Zeni was powerless to defend himself against the attack), the Tzigane wounded the violin and the waltz stained with blood.]²⁶⁹

This passage underlines the moment in which the main character, as well as the reader, gets to know the most important of his girlfriends is dead. It is worth noting the light ambiguity with which the music is treated here: it is primarily presented as a silent menacing violin/violin player rather than sound by referring chiefly to the physical instrument or the instrumentalist, viewed as a threatening weapon or aggressor growing in size. At the same time the size of the violin seems to suggest growing volume and/or pitch but, besides the scream, the first bow of the violin, there is no reference to any sound which makes us think of a literal interpretation of the violin growing in silence until this silence is suddenly broken. In the passage, the orchestra is accompanying the narration as an external element, at the level of the narrator, hence, in principle, it is not audible or noticeable by the characters. However, it is not clear whether the reader has to understand whether Zeni and the other characters can see the violin or not.

4.5 Film

Regarding the presence of film in Trabal's narrative we find issues similar to the ones we have found with sculpture, painting and music. There are references to film and film culture spread all over Trabal's work, some merely contextual (as with cars, Carles Riba and phones, as noted by

268 Trabal, *Vals*, 'IV. VALS', p. 271.

269 Trabal, *Waltz*, 'IV. WALTZ', p. 205.

Duran),²⁷⁰ even when renewing old literary clichés (in *Hi ha homes que ploren perquè el sol es pon*, the anagnorisis comes while watching film rather than a theatre play or an opera).

Trabal sometimes uses *cinematogràfic* as an adjective or *film* as a noun to refer to flashbacks or fast movement (resembling the use of music to highlight the frenetic behaviour of mood in the characters). However, the use of the adjective does not actually make an analepsis or movement cinematographic. Its use is to indicate that both procedures, in film and in novel, are conventional devices. Rather than stressing it as being cinematographic, the function here is to underline it is conventional, a technique, montage, that allows us to alter the chronological order of the story or to progress through it, selecting relevant moments rather than following the constant pace of life.

A more sophisticated use of cinematic syntax can be found in the opening chapter of *Quo Vadis Sànchez?* In it, a long dialogue, the action, and the narration, contextualizing and commenting on it, periodically interrupt each other. These interruptions work in a similar fashion as intertitles in late silent films do, giving a certain sense of suspense. However, along with this structural cinematic approach the typographic distribution of the dialogue has a clear kinetic nature. The text is aligned to the left, to the right or centred and it is, therefore, devised to be read on paper.

In this instance, *Vals* gives the best example of the influence of cinematographic language in Trabal's literature. The novel is structured in short fragments within longer chapters. These shorter fragments sometimes run parallel to the action or give us alternate simultaneous narratives following different characters, and could be read as cinematographic sequences. Furthermore, we are usually not introduced to the characters, the action or the setting in a descriptive manner, by the narrator, but these are rather set before the reader *in media res*. This way of organizing the novel's materials can be related to the cinematographic or multimedia novel explored by John Dos Passos in *Manhattan Transfer* and *42 Parallel*, particularly in its relationship with montage and fragmentary juxtaposition.²⁷¹ Moreover, as mentioned before and keenly suggested by Iribarren, the heterodiegetic music can be regarded as the soundtrack of the novel.²⁷² And yet, as we have seen earlier in this chapter, some of these same traits could also be interpreted as an attempt to use musical forms in order to organize the literary materials. If the origin of the form is difficult to pinpoint, the more important issue of how to read it is not any easier. How are these forms organized to produce a certain effect? It is difficult to decide with any certainty whether it is more

270 Duran, 'Francesc Trabal, contra el temps'.

271 Foster, 'John Dos Passos' use of Film' for an analysis from a cinematographic perspective; Pizer, 'John Dos Passos in the 1920s' and Spindler, 'John Dos Passos and the Visual Arts' for an analysis from a multimedia perspective. Trabal had already made some attempts at fragmentary discourse reminiscent of that of Doss Passos in the press in 'Notes d'estiu', *Diari de Sabadell*, 1 August 1920, narrating a Tram journey.

272 Iribarren i Donadeu, *Literatura catalana i cinema*, p. 205.

fruitful to read *Vals* as the dance of the characters on a stage, a musical suite, a film with a soundtrack, or any possible combination of the former. There are reasons to support or contradict any of the views: although music can be considered as a soundtrack it is able to intervene in the action and the musicians are sometimes present in the text, as if in a stage show; the characters sometimes are referred to as ‘marionettes’.²⁷³ Also, a number of issues could be related to Huxley’s and John dos Passos novels, for instance the organization of the novel in short fragments. It would seem reasonable to read *Vals* as a novel which consciously and contradictorily uses all these forms of art to address the reader, both to a shared iconic world and to distinct modes of convention but, moreover, in order to constantly lay bare the device and make the reader realize he is reading a constructed artistic object too.

In the chapter devoted to Trabal in her study about Catalan literature and silent film, Teresa Iribarren i Donadeu tries to relate, with uneven success, cinematographic language and particular films in the first and third of Trabal’s novels, *L’home que es va perdre*, from 1929, and *Quo vadis Sànchez?*, from 1931. Iribarren argues there is a systematic opposition between filmic flat characters, phantasmal black-and-white screen projections and real round, three-dimensional characters in both novels. Such a claim seems to be more based on a terminological coincidence than on the texts, as most times the arguments as to whether characters are flat or round could be put forward too without any cinematographic consideration. It would have been enough to consider whether the characters are built following conventional fictional traits or not. For instance, Carles Costa does not have any economic concern, which is, indeed a very common feature amongst fictional characters, as opposed to real people.²⁷⁴ This particular argument, furthermore, could also be used against her claim that Picàbia is a ‘real’ character as he does not have economic concerns either, which would be a much more striking fact if a realist explanation had to be sought for the innumerable and sophisticated atrocities he and his gang are able to commit. Indeed, the best pages of Iribarren’s study are the ones that actually analyse the texts without trying to force a reading relating the texts to film. Particularly revealing and valuable are her insights on the intertextual relationship between *L’home que es va perdre* and the *Divina Commedia*, and Blaise Cendrars’s *Le plan de l’Aiguille* and Poe’s *The Murders of Rue Morgue*;²⁷⁵ or when she analyses the test Sànchez undergoes in order to find the sport that fits him best, as a premonition for the rest of the novel.²⁷⁶

273 Trabal, *Vals*, ‘III. DIVERTIMENT’, p. 184 and Trabal, *Waltz*, ‘III. DIVERTIMENTO’, p. 142.

274 Iribarren i Donadeu, *Literatura catalana i cinema*, p. 244.

275 Iribarren i Donadeu, *Literatura catalana i cinema*, pp. 233 and ff. Dante’s work; pp. 268-72 for Blaise Cendrars’s work; and pp. 274 for Poe’s work.

276 Iribarren i Donadeu, *Literatura catalana i cinema*, pp. 312-5.

Let us turn our attention to an extremely useful text to understand the author's stance with regards to the relationship between different forms of art: 'Tres Arguments' [Three Plots]. The text was published in *Revista de Catalunya* in 1938. As the title suggests, it is a collection of three plots, each one aiming at a different art form stated in their subtitles: the first two plots are to be staged, the first one is a 'comèdia', the second one is a 'pantomima-ballet'; the third plot, most relevant for this section, is a 'film de dibuixos animats'. Their common characteristic is that, as they stand, they are impossible to convey in the form the subtitles suggest they should take. They cannot take the form of a comedy, a ballet or cartoons because they are full of imprecisions: '[u]na plaça pública o privada, una cambra de bany o un saló o qualsevol lloc on hi hagi gent' [A public or private square, a bathroom or a sitting room or any place where there are people]; verbal jokes: 'alhesores surten, o millor, entren els comics' [then the comedians come out, or better, come in]; colloquial expressions only fitting the narrator or a heterodiegetic voice: '[i] patac!' [(And) bang!]; or unrepresentable items: 'el silenci calla més que mai' [silence is silent more than ever].

Only in the last one, the 'film de dibuixos animats' can we really engage in imagining the form the plot could take when translated from text to animated images, something the reader might feel compelled to do by the subtitle. One could claim that, in this last 'argument', there are two very cartoonlike ideas in the text, the first one is of frantic characters working on building something the viewer cannot clearly see but that appears all of the sudden: '[q]uatre operaris (...) estan fabricant un tanc a tota velocitat (...) i zas! Vinga sortir-los una tartana cada vegada' [Four workers (...) were producing a tank at full speed (...) and bang! Over and over again a horse cart turned out]. A second cartoonlike idea is the that of humanizing objects as with this last where a *tanca*, a female tank, seduces and drives all enemy male weapons crazy, the gender of the noun being what decides the gender of the weapon: 'els canons estan atabalats mirant la tanca (...) els fusells tiren coces per la culata, només les metralladores (femelles) s'enfolleixen a tirar contra la tanca'. [The cannons were bewildered watching the she-tank (...) rifles were kicking with their butts, only the machine-guns (female) go mad shooting at the she-tank]. Humanized objects were a trait of early animation films like Pat Sullivan's 'Uncle Tom's Crabbin', a Felix the Cat adventure, which features a dancing stool.²⁷⁷ We can find similar cartoonlike ideas elsewhere in Trabal, for instance in *Temperatura*: 'En el mar Pacífic un vaixell, un vaixell a la bona de Déu, a la dula, navegava tot xiulant amb les àncores darrera l'esquena, com aquell qui no té deutes amb ningú.'²⁷⁸ [In the Pacific Ocean a ship carelessly, freely, navigated whistling with the anchors on its back, like one with no debts to anyone]. This image can easily remind the reader of the humanized means of transport, not difficult

²⁷⁷ Sullivan, *Uncle Tom Crabbin*.

²⁷⁸ Trabal, *Temperatura*, IX, p. 80.

to find in early animated cartoons: Walt Disney's 'Traffic Troubles', featuring cars on tiptoes to avoid getting dirty with mud, and specially Ub Iwerks's 'Steamboat Willie' with its flexible, careful and whistling steamboat.²⁷⁹ And here again, in Trabal's texts there are several elements that tie us again to the literal aspect of the text: the linguistic pun of attributing a gender to the objects according to their grammatical gender, or expressions which cannot be translated into any other medium 'com aquell que no té deutes amb ningú'.

4.6 The beholder

As we have seen so far, with film, as with music or any other non-literary medium, Trabal states the autonomy and particular arbitrariness of each art form highlighting their powerlessness to revive any other form of art or medium than their own. Paradoxically, he is able to make this comment on the nature of other arts while engaging in a dialogue with all these arts in literature, trying to render non-literary techniques in his novels or by means of intertextuality. A particularly revealing text in this regard is found in *Judita*:

No sé si coneixes aquesta peça de Szymanovsky ["La font d'Aretusa"]. Però no et podries estar d'ésser sentimental si, amb Lídia als teus braços, aquesta música lluités amb la teva fantasia, per tancada amb pany i clau que volguessis guardar-la. Hi ha sensacions que s'aparellen d'una estranya manera quan alguna força sensible ens atrapa desprevinguts: la flonjor de la galta de Lídia ran de la meua, en aquells instants, em produí la mateixa sensació que la primera vegada qua a París vaig veure, inesperadament, al Louvre, "La font" d'Ingres, i també la mateixa exactament que viag tenir, anys enrera, en descobrir aquell sonet de Petrarca que comença:

*"O cameretta, che già fusti un porto
a le gravi tempeste mi diurne..."*

Quan laixa ens oferia aquella melodia de Szymanovsky, per una associació indefinible revisqueren davant meu aquestes altres sensacions amb la mateixa força de quan les experimentava per primera vegada. I si en aquell instant arriba a caure un llamp o dos, I ens mata, per exemple, no hauria sabut explicar quan, en quina d'aquelles tres impressions, la mort m'havia arreplegat.

[I do not know whether you are familiar with this piece by Szymanovsky. But you could not help but to be sentimental if, with Lídia in your arms, this music fought against your fantasy, no matter how much you wanted to keep it under key. There are sensations which match each other in a strange way when a sensitive force reaches us unprepared: Lídia's spongy cheek, close to mine, in those moments,

²⁷⁹ Disney, *Traffic Troubles*; Iwerks, *Steamboat Willie*.

produced in me the same sensation I had the first time that in Paris, unexpectedly, in the Louvre I saw ‘The Spring’ by Ingres. And exactly the same sensation I had years ago, when I discovered that sonnet by Petrarca which begins:

*‘O camaretta, che già fusti un porto
a le gravi tempeste mi diurne...’*

When Iaixa was offering that melody by Szymanovsky, as for an indefinable association, these other sensations were revived before me with the same strength as the first time I experienced them. And if in that moment a lightning or two happens to strike us and, for instance, kill us, I would have been unable to tell, afterwards, in which of these three impressions, death had caught me.]

In this passage we can see how Trabal’s narrator pairs off three different pieces of art: a sonata, a painting and a sonnet for its effects on him at the contact with ‘Lidia’s spongy cheek’. At first it seems the effect is exactly the same, but, afterwards it is suggested that there might be a slight difference and that they have been ‘matched’ in a subconscious Proustian manner, the ‘associació indefinible’. However, when we scrutinise the nature and meaning of the different pieces of art more questions arise. Might the ‘spongy cheek’ relate to music that refers to a mythological narrative of a water stream, a painting depicting a naked woman pouring water and, finally, a sonnet where liquid references abound (*porto, tempeste, lagrime, bagna*)?²⁸⁰ With regards to the music, if it was really narrative music able to convey the sense of the original myth the title refers to, it would be certainly inappropriate for a love scene. In the myth, Arethusa, a nymph, is transformed into a stream in order to flee from the river god Alpheus, who wants to rape her. In the end, the god, transformed as well into a stream, succeeds: he reaches her and both water streams mix. If, on the other hand, we were only to regard the piece in its aural dimension, — besides the fact that the piano part is not being played — the dissonances and agitation of the second part produce a contrast with the love scene of the narrator with Lidia. As for Petrarch’s text, it would not be any more adequate: the poem revolves around self-discomfort and describes the preference of unpleasant

280 O cameretta che già fosti un porto | a le gravi tempeste mie diurne: | fonte se’ or di lagrime notturne, | che ’l dì celate per vergogna porto. || O letticuol che requie eri et conforto | in tanti affanni: di che dogliose urne | ti bagna Amor con quelle mani eburne, | solo ver me crudeli a sì gran torto! || Né pur il mio secreto e ’l mio riposo | fuggo, ma più me stesso e ’l mio pensiero | che seguendol, talor levommi a volo; || e ’l vulgo a me nemico et odioso | (chi ’l pensò mai?) per mio refugio chero, | tal paura ò di ritrovarmi solo. [O little room that once served as a port | from my fierce storms that blow throughout the day, | you have become the font of nightly tears | which in the daytime I hide out of shame. || O little bed that once was rest and comfort | for so much labor, with what grieving urns | does Love bathe you with ivory hands of hers, | so cruel only to me, and so unjustly! || Not only from my hiding place and rest | I flee, but more from my own self and thoughts | that used to take me with them high in flight; || I seek the crowd for me hateful, unfriendly | (who ever thought I would?) as place of refuge. | I’m so afraid to find myself alone]. Petrarch, *Canzoniere*, pp. 334-5.

places and people opposed to the horror of being alone in a loved and quiet setting where one must face oneself. Against these two works, Ingres's classicist painting of quiet and ordered beauty seems to be quite in contradiction with the other artistic objects as well as with the love scene in the novel. Ultimately, the connection has been made by the narrator-character, in a state of sentimental pollution, and it is he who establishes an equivalence which the reader can only see as a particular, arbitrary consequence of his subjective — and distorted — experiences. The character-narrator is projecting himself onto the works of art and these to his private personal circumstances in a relation of mutual feedback.

4.7 Conclusions

In this chapter I have explored how Trabal's self-conscious literature reflects on its own medium — written language — at the same time it reflects on its relationship with other media — painting, sculpture, music and film. Trabal, we have seen, displays the autonomy of language and fiction from reality in a playful manner: he forces the reader to break the automatic perception of language with puns and stops the suspension of disbelief by lying bare the device. Trabal also fills his novels with characters and cultural referents taken from real life at the same time includes elements and characters from his other novels. He is, thus, able to merge different levels of reality that, far from creating a sense of realism, create composites which are perceived as deliberate and arbitrary devices.

Trabal's playful use of actual cultural referents is sometimes scornful and tends to take a low brow bias, although from a snobbish position. This use of culture referents affects the ethos of the narrator which, in terms of reception, affected also the author's image. Trabal himself had instigated a confusion between him and his narrators as part of his strategy of merging facts with fiction. The confusion between author, Author and narrator opened the door to some more or less veiled autobiographical readings of the texts. It also induced some critics and scholars to identify Trabal's views with the narrator's or Author's attitudes, which are part of the fiction.

There is certainly an influence from other forms of art in Trabal but the texts tease the reader by both engaging with other artistic media and, at the same time, undermining their presence in the text. Music and Film structures and intertextualities are possible ways to read some of Trabal's books but these readings can be in competition with each other. Written language is flexible enough to include all these intermedial elements but always in tension with its own textuality. At the same time the perception of art is always subjective, absolutely private.

We find a much rather direct statement in *Temperatura* where the fictional Author states with

seemingly great clarity his position with regards to the possibility of transubstantiation between arts, and takes a stand on what a novel should be. This stand, however, is conflictive indeed. Not only is it conflictive due to the dialogic nature of the work and the unreliability of the Author and the narrator, but also because of its ironic character: ‘Ningú no podria, un cop escrita, adaptar-la a l’escena, ni al cinema i menys encara a la ràdio. Seria una novel·la-novel·la.’²⁸¹ [No one could, once it is written, adapt it for the stage, nor the cinema, and even less for the radio. It would be a novel-novel].

281 Trabal, *Temperatura*, II p. 24.

5. General Conclusions

In this dissertation I have looked at some of the core elements of Trabal's literature and how and why these elements were not accepted by his readership. This readership failed to see or did not care to see the radical modernity of Trabal's literature and its relevance.

First I have analysed some features of Trabal's last novel, *Temperatura*, which can be considered the most radical novel he ever wrote and the novel where he was least concerned about achieving a compromise with his readership. It is thanks to this features that the text can be read as a summary of his literary ideas and praxis in its purest forms where the traditional elements of plot, characters and setting are deliberately used to break the suspension of disbelief and to attract the attention of the reader to them as purely conventional devices. The fact that some strong criticism on the novel reproduced prejudices and readings already present in his earlier work (completely disregarding the deliberate use of narrative elements as conventional devices) has allowed me to present Trabal's biography as I reviewed his reception from his first book (1925) to the last one (1947) and to see how the critical contemporary comments influenced posterior scholarly approaches. Furthermore, considered *Temperatura* as a political statement and how, partly, the reception of the whole of Trabal works and particularly of *Temperatura* had more to do with a change of historical circumstances of its readership than to its value as an artistic object.

In the second chapter I have explored the use of parody in his novels from a multiplicity of perspectives. Trabal's parodic strategies are very varied and integrated in a multilayered way in single texts. Starting with the classical definition of parody—the recounting of vulgar events in an elevated manner. This relates as well to the parody as described by formalists, that of specific historical sets of 'conventional devices', those of romanticism, realism, naturalism. It is in this sense that Trabal parodied the epistolary novel in *Judita* (1930) and the novel of adultery in *Hi ha homes que ploren perquè el sol es pon* (1933). These two forms of parody relate as well the common definition of parody, the deformation of specific texts.

However, all these kinds of parody are not only aimed at the derision of their specific models but they are aimed as well the novel as a genre and wider fictional procedures. Through the expression of an idealist representation of the world using existing traditional models of discourse, Trabal shows how these discourses interfere in our perception of reality and questioning the faithfulness of any mimetic procedure. From this point of view all these forms of parody can be described in Bakhtin's terms as *dialogic*. At the same with parody Trabal undermines discourses and the ideologies behind them.

From this point of view the opinions describing Trabal's literature as satirical, for example in his depiction of the church and the bourgeoisie, would not be operative. Nonetheless, these satirical traits, overlapping with parodic ones, can be found all along his works. Trabal, like his friend Joan Oliver, although to a lesser degree, parody was, as well, a way to challenge ideologies.

In the third chapter I explored how Trabal's consciousness of the very linguistic nature of literature limits (and constitutes) its form and limits as well the possibility to convey meaning. Thus, other forms of art with a presence in the text can only achieve a limited presence and effect. Linguistic limits, however, have little or nothing to do with the physical world as language has grammatical rules of syntagmatic and paradigmatic combination with only linguistic (semantic, syntactic, etc.) restrictions. Therefore, literature, according to Trabal, has a conflictive relationship with human's aural, tactile and visual experience. Similarly, other artistic objects of different nature, trapped in its form and convention would be incapable to reproduce any other medium in it. And yet, while implying all this, Trabal makes an extensive use of other forms of art in his works either by mere mention or by appealing to the line of expectations of a given genre or by inspiring new literary techniques in musical or filmic ones.

To conclude, the general finding of this dissertation is that through a myriad of subversive, parodic, metalinguistic and metaliterary strategies Trabal was able to produce very complex and puzzling pieces of fiction which were innovative and challenged the assumptions and expectations of its critics and readers.

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