

# Queralt in the light of philosophy

By Daniel Casas Llimós - B.A. in Philosophy

Translated by ANGEL MIROU

"...Manel Queralt, a philosopher in verse who wishes to put across to the largest number of readers possible an interpretation (tragically lived) of man and his reality, which will make them think and reconsider their "strange" lives, not to mention "alienated"; for Queralt writes to be a poet-philosopher and not just to express his experience."

They likewise venerate a god, whose name is Manure,  
and which they possibly have devised in the likeness  
of the king; he is a crippled creature, blind,  
rickety and of unlimited power.

**JORGE LUIS BORGES,**

*The Brodie Report*

Of all that is written, I love only that which  
someone writes with his own blood.

**FRIEDRICH NIETZSCHE**

*Thus Spake Zarathustra*

## A preliminary look into Philosophy and Art

When Heidegger was a professor at Marburg, it is said that he had his classroom crowded; students who weren't even enrolled for his course came to listen to him. Was such phenomenon common in those years? Even before he published *Sein und Zeit* (Being and Time), why had that young philosopher, follower of Husserl, attracted to himself such staggering number of students? Apparently what moved them to listen to him was a sadly paradoxical fact: that the philosopher talked in his lecture series on reality, of the current events in the world that was theirs to live; he gave them some guidelines, some expectations, from a philosophical meditation, for their future. Compared to other professors and philosophers from Germany at that time, Heidegger's philosophy aimed for true

thinking; he reproached, for one, his master Husserl that he had left existence aside, placing it into brackets (a phenomenological epoché), when indeed existence and Being must constitute the backbone of our investigations.

One may wonder perhaps what an "anecdote" like this has to do with an introductory prologue to the work of Manel Queralt. A lot, I think. In the world in which Queralt writes his poems, philosophy not only has its head in the clouds, as it has been wont to be, but for years has shot itself in the foot. Confronted with a science with predominant validities, it has retreated into some strange limbo in order to modestly ensure its own survival, or it has explicitly denied itself (some philosophers have argued that the only philosophy possible nowadays is a history of philosophy, while waiting for better days; others, like Vattimo, not without some satisfaction, talk of a weak thinking).

But I wonder, is it possible to live without philosophy? In principle, it would seem so. Those mixed-up meditations which are a part of our Western tradition, the polemics between opposite philosophic systems which didn't come to blows because philosophers rarely have armies at their disposal, have given way to science, a definitive way of knowing which, beyond the technological side it contributes, comes with a sort of "democratic" element. (The scientific method stands for the criterion to which all theories and hypotheses must submit themselves). I don't mean to question the value of science nor the knowledge of the universe it provides, or its usefulness.

I simply would like to point out that, given the inherent limitations of its modus operandi, it is incapable of providing an answer to the questions which relate to man and human society. What does man have then to guide himself in the world, since philosophy has forsaken him and science can't answer him? Must we still turn to religions? Whoever can believe, let him believe. In any case, personal beliefs aside, I should point out the danger of theological systems,

of implicit subjectivism, and look at the future perspective from a point of view which refers itself to a dialogic rationality. And in that respect literature might play a big part.

\*\*\*

The previous remarks call attention to a phenomenon which, conveniently but also unfortunately, we can perceive in today's culture: Philosophy, the ability and the need to think about the world and give reference for human living, has taken refuge in literature (and other arts, such as films). There it has found the right place, the only one possible, for a meditation on the place of man in a world as confusing as the present one. From all literary genres (novel, drama) and also from poetry, though maybe less so and in a more ambiguous way: That is not the case of Manel Queralt, a philosopher in verse who wishes to put across to the largest number of readers possible an interpretation (tragically lived) of man and his reality, which will make them think and reconsider their "strange" lives, not to mention "alienated"; for Queralt writes to be a poet-philosopher and not just to express his experience.

I wrote above "conveniently but also unfortunately". "Conveniently" is clear enough: literature, especially narrative is a communication medium which enjoys a vast audience; unlike other cultural products, such as philosophy, literature is still favoured by Mass Media, and this situation is used by those writers who use their work to raise awareness. But "also unfortunately" because all too often the writer is an amateur philosopher (or a pseudo-philosopher), or he just builds his work around three or four trite, extremely simple ideas, in no case delving into characters and situations, nor revealing a vision worth knowing. Manel Queralt, I must say, is a rarity in this unsuccessful realm. The depth of his analysis as well as his expressive powers are amazing, the truthfulness of his poems, the proof that life and intelligence needn't be at odds. There are others like him, for sure. But most are probably lost among the piles of unnecessary books which are published and others shall never see

the light in print. However it may be, we are lucky to have Queralt's work to read, and its quality as a poetic work aside, it deserves a philosophical reflection on the subjects it covers.

### **The work in the context of modern poetry**

A meditation like the one I mean to do on Manuel Queralt's work demands a preliminary distinction. Since his is a philosophical poetry, we might directly move on to the study of the philosophy which his poems convey. Yet an explanation of the contents of the work would imply a limited view of this task. A proper philosophical inquiry on the place of this particular poetry is also necessary, that is, on its meaning within the history of art and its function towards the social body which it exerts or intends to exert. Such considerations will lead us to see Queralt's work from the point of view of Aesthetics (of the philosophical meditation about art).

Ever since Romanticism ceased to be the paradigm of artistic construction, the cultural and axiological reference which encouraged a certain form of expression and allowed for a sufficiently singular communication, art has increasingly leaned towards Formalism, that is, towards an appraisal of the work for its formal, purely aesthetic aspects; in the case of poetry, taking music as a reference and looking for certain "open" connotations when it comes to meaning. So, in the late 19th century Walter Pater goes as far as claiming that "all art constantly aspires towards the condition of music". Or Mallarmé's poetry, which starts out from the very play between words and images, aiming at the ambiguous effect they produce under the lead of its musicality.

In the field of Art Theory, similar attitudes arise; Richards' main thesis, though this critic focused on plastic arts, is relevant when he claimed that "the form of the work is its content". True, after Symbolism and Modernism the avant-garde movements appeared with their destruction of form and their emphasis on an expressive

convulsion, broadly speaking. But the avant-garde should be seen more in relation to a vital attitude of rupture and social revolt, besides its contributions to art. It is true that after World War Two an important movement of poetic realism flourished, but it was a response to a need for addressing the trauma of the war (in Spain, the Civil War) and indicating the possibility of new commitments.

Romanticism contained a *project of poetry* in accordance with the Project of Modernity which the Enlightenment defined and tried to put into practice (Rilke, the last great Romantic poet, would be the one to define this project, setting -like Kant in his own time in the field of philosophy- its limitations and fixing the object, at least the starting point). With Post-modern art and Post-modern philosophy inspired by its *pathos*, the project breaks down, with respect to the assumptions of a fair society and a free man (the fall of Grand Narratives) and on the abandonment of the idea that art can create a vital and cognitive relationship with the world. The work of art can only manifest the silence, the gap or the abyss between the language of man (of the artist) and reality. If there is still a way for art, it is that of irony, an irony where art denies itself from art.

\*\*\*

According to this Post-modern view of art which calls for silence, Manel Queralt's poetry would be but a sort of *imposture*, a naïve attempt which many critics would consider outdated. But for an author such as Roland Barthes, the silence of form is no less imposture, and if we were consistent, we could only escape from it "through an absolute speechlessness" (*Writing Degree Zero*).

Isn't then "speaking" better than an art which denies its function and, moreover, dares to be made, taking the chance and allowing words, the artist's signs, to go on rummaging through the world, its alleged meaning, in order to extract at least a few scraps of truth? Certainly, the *project of poetry*, as well as the Project of Modernity, are

dead (to carry it out would surely lead to no communication, to the hermetically closed work, an indecipherable poem-object as a work of nature). Then it is necessary to try to create poetry; that the words speak out, regardless that they run the risk of being mistaken (about what? We might ask), neurotically repeating themselves or making fools of themselves.

Manel Queralt's poetry takes this chance willingly (most poets aren't aware of this, since they ignore the treacherous nature of language). It may seem a naïve poetry, but it is not so, simply because Queralt does not merely let his verses, his poetic words spontaneously and unreflectingly express his feelings and his vision of the world where we live, but he uses those familiar words, uttered a thousand times or more before (metaphors, imagery, resources repeatedly used by poets) to travel and illuminate all corners of existence with the intention of showing us its dialectics, the twisted moves of today's individuals, their restlessness, within such a complex world.

Although there are echoes of 19th century Romanticism in his poetry (his great poems bring to mind those by Keats, Hölderlin, Byron or Pushkin), in fact this resemblance is not due to a desire for imitation or that cheap romanticism which is inherent to poetasters. The true Romantic expressed the dichotomy between individual and Absolute, with the anguish of the former when facing the chasm which divides both. For Queralt, a 21st century poet, it would be ludicrous to take such approach. Rather, he concerns himself with "meaning" in the Existentialist way, a hot topic if bad-mouthed in this day and age. We will deal with this fundamental aspect of his work later on. I just would like to stress here that the dichotomy subject-Absolute shifts to the side of the subject: All that remains of Queralt's Romanticism is the wounded, shattered man, and if there is an Absolute, a minimum sense which prevents man from falling into nihilism, this remains in suspense. The Absolute simply must be taken for granted in order to go on living.

I would like to consider one more thing, before moving on, a preemptive consideration. Some mischievous critics, those who deign themselves to pore into the poetic works beyond their aesthetic tendencies, reading Queralt's efforts might argue that they are not original, that they do not contribute anything new to poetry since there has already been enough written about almost everything he writes about, and therefore his work is unnecessary, superfluous. Two arguments in response to such possible objections: First, perhaps all has been said or written already, and a writer's task would be none other than saying or writing it again. Borges, for instance, assumed such destiny, or Thomas Bernhard, a writer Queralt likes, who I quote literally: "All in all, everything that is said is a quotation".

If I may add my two cents, I would disagree with so pessimistic a vision of literary creation. No doubt, looking for new dimensions of poetic language which open the world to new, unknown meanings implies a serious danger: that of incommunicability, even more in a culture like ours, where dissemination prevails and which lacks, as a consequence, axiological and linguistic references minimally univocal. The second consideration is closely related to the first. "Originality" is often understood as "to create something new", when its primal meaning is that of "going back to the origin". The failure of modern art to reach "any" audience stems to a great extent from this misunderstanding: the artist wishes to create a new artistic object, a "work" which hasn't been made before. But "originality", we said, is "related to the origin", and this requires *repetition*. Heidegger saw it clearly, and before Heidegger, Kierkegaard, of whom the former takes this concept.

According to Kierkegaard, repetition is man's own dialectics as an individual, since existence is temporary (eternity would be, after all, the true repetition). The man who lives in the religious stage, the "knight of faith", is that who constantly repeats his religious experience from beginning to end, from the anguish to the certainty

of faith; as Mounier says, Kierkegaard's repetition of the experience of faith is a "constant conversion". Manel Queralt, if we subscribe to the previous considerations, is "to use a concept from Existentialism- an "authentic" poet. He is not trying to portray in verses a form which should innovate in the field of poetry already written; He moves towards reality, his own and everyone's. He sees it. He feels it dramatically, in order to finally analyse it and express it in an intelligible and moving way, without beating around the bush.

Like Kierkegaard's "knight of faith", Queralt the poet returns time and again, almost obsessively, to this Being which torments him, to speak to him even though there won't be an answer, even though this alleged dialogue is a monologue. Although that which he talks about has been said already, repetition will always provide a new point of view (perhaps, also, some thing which had remained covered up, silenced). And once this *conversation-monologue* has been put in words, he doesn't lock himself up in them, but returns once more so that he won't lose contact. The world, the Being (us *being*, I should rather say), shy away from us. We tend to lock ourselves in: the ivory tower, in the case of the poet, the consolation of poetry. That is why it is necessary to constantly move outwards. Otherwise, the Being is forgotten, as Heidegger denounced. This experience of the Being, or rather, of being, needs to be repeated. Therefore, it is necessary to repeat oneself.

## **Poet and Philosopher**

Once we have considered the poetry of Manel Queralt from an aesthetic point of view, as a work in itself, we must deal with that aspect of his work he values above all, that which actually prompts him to write: the content of his poems, what he wants to communicate. In short, his conception of the world and of life. As I wrote above, Queralt is a poet-philosopher. Such claim does not imply he is a professional philosopher, or one who loves to read



philosophical works and after some meditation or some readings sets in verse the abstract conclusion he may have reached, like for instance Schiller's philosophical poems.

Queralt's is poetry of existence, which does not necessarily mean he has binged on the books of Heidegger, Jaspers or Sartre before writing it. It is simpler than that: the coincidences we may find with such authors derive rather from the affinity of a way of existing and understanding existence. In any case, if there has been an external assumption of the existential *pathos*, of the absurdity of man and his wandering-lost- in the world, it has taken place broadly through the reading of writers such as Kafka, Borges, Cioran, Camus or Kundera, to name but a few, who breathe that same *pathos*. There is nothing strange or wrong about it: Of all the things we read, there are always some authors we prize above the rest because we see our own points of view and preoccupations expressed in them.

We will agree then, that Manel Queralt is a poet of an Existentialist tone; the philosophy his poetry reveals is, deep down, *Existential poetry*. Nevertheless, isn't Existentialism a dated philosophy, outgrown and disdained by the cultural lobby? Yes, it is true that Existentialism as a philosophy is over, nowadays no philosopher constructs such discourses. But Existentialism being *démodé* does not mean man no longer exists. If today's philosophy has neglected it, if it has given away the restlessness, loneliness and anguish which grip him to psychology, pushing him aside as someone "sick", such phenomenon must be seen as an intentional omission by intellectuals, or even worse, an attempt by the powers that be and their implicit ideology to push everything alien away from the consumer system and so promote integration within this system (Behaviourism would be the most appropriate psychology model: Its main thesis might go like this: the integrated individual is the mentally healthy one).

The two great themes Manel Queralt's poetry deals with, non-communication and the human condition, reveal the reality as lived by man nowadays, leaving aside the fact that sometimes his language and his approach may remind the reader of those of Existentialism. It is a mere coincidence, I think, a way of expression latent in the context of culture, which one cannot help but use when addressing certain questions. It is not, by any means, a matter of creating poetic texts in the way, for instance, true Existentialist poets did in the sixties, a hollow and falsely "lefty" use of Existentialist concepts.

In that sense, looking back on those years, Queralt's poetry resembles, because of the nakedness of its tone, Vinyoli's rather than Gabriel Ferrater's, despite the influence that the latter may have exerted on him. In Ferrater there is always a distance between the poet and that of which he speaks, and if Queralt pursues such distance too, it is also in order to better observe and explain. Nevertheless, when we read him, we feel a visceral implication which interrupts the intended objectivity and moves the reader emotionally rather than reflectively. It moves, but it does not drown in the emotion.

\*\*\*

I have said there are two essential themes in the poetry of Manel Queralt: The lack of communication and the human condition. There are others, of course, either subsidiary to those mentioned or somewhat autonomous in his books of shorter poems: *Xiscle*, *Miserere*, *Nicis* and *Atziacs* have more variety. It is in the long poems where an objective narrator conducting the orchestra is present, where they are "systematically" elaborated, if such term applies to poetic texts. The first two, *Ena menys una* and *Druda* mainly focus on lack of communication, whereas *Vacu*, *the Suffering Being* and *Ecs, perpetuum mobile* "analyze" (so to speak) the subjective dynamics of the individual in the world. *Trit* is another story. All in all, one thing leads to another: Lack of communication makes us individuals; by

closing the doors to the shared language, one that belongs to everyone and therefore is not exactly our own, we are forced to turn our gaze to what we are and what we are doing here, turning the dialogue into monologue, that is, reflection.

Nevertheless, it is necessary, before dealing with each of those themes, to consider a significant trait of Queral's poetry, in the light of the above mentioned contents, which causes a paradox that defines our times as compared to the past and its poetry. I sense in Queral's poetry an epic undertone, the will to transcend the mere expression of human trouble in order to create a sort of discourse which defines our society, providing guidelines for action, conceptions and values which may serve as reference. Epic, a literary genre fallen into neglect, told of legendary or historical events of national or universal importance, with the goal of summarizing and expressing the character or ideals of a whole people.

In spite of this definition the epic tone of his long poems tries, I think, to expose, either consciously or not, the lack of those shared values which made communication, a common objective, possible. Probably unintentionally, out of a poet's intuition, he devises some myths, some epic tales, which after all are not such, for the agony, the struggle of the heroic subject, is lost in the corners of a private existence. The agony is individual. It has no relation to the life of a people. The hero is alone, he is an anti-hero. He creates myths, true, but they are anti-myths, for they don't strengthen an order like the classic myths did, but show a clear tendency towards disorder, disintegration, both of the individual and society, due to the abyss between them.

We find in this an *irony*. The narrator, an epic poet like Homer, Dante or Milton, distances himself from his character, in fact himself. Despite the drama of the situation, an often black and morbid humour pervades, a product of self-patronizing which distance helps to encourage. It is as though the author told the

reader: "Look, this is me, but seen from the outside, and since there is nothing without me that explains myself, that justifies me, I write of me a tale which has a foundational character, like the Metanarratives used to have, and I laugh at it, for this is nonsense: an individual is never a community". Hence, *Vacu*, *Ecs*, *Trit* and all the rest are Queralt; what is said about them might be said of all his readers: in fact, that is the purpose of lyrical poetry, to express experience which we all may have lived and therefore can translate into our own code. But the fact Queralt transforms in these poems what is lyrical into epic provides a relevant nuance: loneliness, the isolation of the poet, a victim of a lack of communication who not only complains, but imbues the form of his poems with them.

\*\*\*

Despite the fall of the Grand Narratives, a typical and overused theme in post-modern discourse which Queralt portrays in the irony of his poems, that way showing us the paradox, it is surprising to notice the connection between his vision of the world and that of the first great Western epic poet: Homer. Generally speaking, with the Greeks' vision, heir of Homeric poetry. Queralt's characters act and suffer guided by destiny, a force above their will, mysterious and unexplainable. It is no wonder, then, that all the vicissitudes in their lives remain unexplained: things are what they are, and to be able to narrate them is enough. If anything, to make us realize what it is like, as a form of consolation or a feasible way out.

The dolls in *Ene menos una*, for instance, cannot escape from the rules of the game, these being visible, technological manifestation of some Moirai which have determined their destiny beforehand. Or *Vacu*, who ignores how or why he has ended up inside his passage: science and its merely phenomenological explanations will never be able to clarify that for him. In Queralt's universes, as in the Greeks', there is no guilt. The individual is not entirely responsible for his suffering; this is no punishment for his acts, as in Christianity, but

the product of a fatality. If the notion of "guilt" turns out occasionally, it is apparently because we are the heirs of a culture which has inculcated such pathological feeling in us. We search for explanations to the evils that life brings about and, since there are none, we make them up: Our evils come from within ourselves, we are responsible for them, when in fact they are a free gift from existence itself.

To admit such evidence implies the risk of nihilism, the denial of life, a temptation which Queralt's characters often suffer. But Queralt always rescues them from it, he rescues himself. Ordinary men, those who inhabit his poetry are neither good nor evil, simply men thrown into the world and doomed to live, to have to confront life carrying the weight of this tragic and at the same time ridiculous burden. It is them who suffer from the yearning for the absolute which shall redeem them, their conscience split from the world. Stuck to loneliness, to emptiness, they do not find themselves. Delivered to a time which leads nowhere but death, a wretched return to an origin where neither you nor I, nor anybody is. Existing isolated from the others, which does not allow us to obtain a scarce absolute through a communicative love. Tragic characters, neither good nor evil, as Aristotle claimed the characters in tragedies should be.

### **Vacu or Sisyphus according to Queralt**

Vacu, *The Suffering Being* (2004) represents the culmination, so far, of Manel Queralt's poetic work. It was written in just one month and published almost immediately after *Miserere*. The themes which in the latter were treated from a lyrical point of view of the poetic subject that expresses its anxiety before everyday things, acquire a philosophical dimension which, more than any of his previous long poems, shows in a clear and concise way the vision of man and the world, of man above all, behind his creative process. I believe,

therefore, advisable for the reader who wishes to delve into the poetry of Queralt, to start with this work, since together with the patent explanatory clarity of its protagonist Vacu's life experience, the core of the poet's existential conception can be found in it, solved with such dialectics its outcome transcends the limits of Existentialism, more in consonance with the vital difficulties of present day's man than with that of the man of the fifties and sixties.

It is inevitable, when we read *Vacu, The Suffering Being*, to be reminded of the interpretation of the myth of Sisyphus by Albert Camus, in the book of the same title, and in the important essay it includes: *The Absurd Man*. Sisyphus was punished by Zeus, who sentenced him to eternally push an enormous rock up to the top of a mountain. As soon as the rock reached the top it rolled down again, driven by its own weight and Sisyphus had to start all over again. Vacu lives in a passage within a rock where there is only a spiral staircase; his existence is limited to climbing it up or down, or to stand still. As far as we know, Vacu's imprisonment is not connected to some guilt; if that was the case, he might find an answer to the question why he is in there, which might come as a sort of consolation (the Christian conception, which both Camus and Queralt reject, justifies human pain by the original sin, and offers a way to escape it, but Vacu "does not believe in any hereafter" sunk as he is "in the mud of misfortune").

Unlike other mythological characters, such as Ixion or Tantalus, who were sentenced to Tartarus, the myth of Sisyphus interests Camus because it implies a time dimension on the sentence, and time inevitably reverts to the question of *meaning*. But this, the cause of so many efforts to get somewhere, does not belong to the world, which simply is, but to man. "The absurd stems from this clash between the call for help of man and the irrational silence of the world" (*The Myth of Sisyphus*). In this "temporality" which existentially locates the human individual, Camus does not recur to ways of escaping like Sartre (absolute freedom as provider of

meaning) or Jaspers ("the shipwrecked plank" of transcendence); the dignity of man is saved through acknowledging its absurdity and accepting it, with courage, but without denying the spirit of revolt (*The Rebel*). Queralt, in the poem of Vacu, assumes the temporary dimension of existence and its absurdity. Nevertheless, unlike the French writer, he *does not cheat*, since the transient process and everything it implies are seen from the inside, from existing within time itself. Hence, we can read:

Vacu always has pain by his side  
It is with and within him, beyond any  
Chance of observing it from the outside  
And therefore discovering its origin.

The objectivity of Vacu's pain, which will grant him a philosophical acceptance of his condition, is in any case seen by the narrator of the poem, Queralt himself, but not by Vacu. The solution to his suffering which he finds in the end has been the product of his journey through the time-staircase, the world-passage, for Vacu is not a philosopher (Queralt is), but merely a man set by the poet in a *limit-situation* (see Jaspers), in order to show the ultimate human condition. Seeing this, we might think that Manel Queralt merely makes another interpretation, deeper and more genuine than Albert Camus', of the absurd of man, creating a myth of his own (Vacu) instead of a borrowed one (Sisyphus). Yes and no. Or rather yes, but only partially. For Vacu's experience, the dialectics of the *unfortunate conscience* (to use a concept by Hegel) which Vacu's life and desires show provides a new and decisive element: *the threat of silence*. When Vacu's crisis properly starts "as a faint perception" (just like Hegel in *The Phenomenology of Spirit*), the "itch", "this new pain" which "will prevent his moving" or the possibility of a useless cry for the lack of answers, Queralt writes at the end of the strophe:

But he will get no words, just  
Silence and a pure, dreadful suffering.

Camus' absurd man could speak, define his condition and make a reassuring conscience out of it. Vacu, on the other hand, will sink more and more into silence and suffering, the silence of the world, of his reduced world to which he meant to make talk, by speaking about it, with the counting and recounting of the steps, the creation of routines and strategies (a metaphor of science, which cannot provide an answer about the essential). The absence of an answer to why, a lack which is a silence will imply the added anguish of losing a language which defines him, with the following failure of his identity as a subject:

He is in a way just a wound,

And if there is still something in this "emaciated bag of bones", they are the voices which he does not quite know where they come from, and which tell him of a pain which is not his, which is the pain of the world. But the supposed world outside Vacu is also silence. For the world, with its pain, is gratuitous. Then, Manel Queralt, in his poem *Vacu, The Suffering Being*, turns Camus against Wittgenstein. The well known adage at the end of the *Tractatus* which Queralt cites when the poem is finished, shows more clearly how the tragic experience is resolved, the way up the staircase which Vacu has followed and which has allowed him to become a philosopher, if one with a meagre philosophy, and find at last peace. "Whereof one cannot speak, Thereof one must be silent." (*Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*),

And so it is that on the most important  
And at the same time radical realities  
We hardly know a thing; there is nothing we can say.

Here Wittgenstein thought the same as Queralt does; he was a logician who meant to set the limits of language, but who faced his task with stoical drama: he realized that the things worth talking about (*Das Mystische*), the subject which viscerally mattered to man, are inaccessible.



\*\*\*

Vacu is the man set in a limit-situation in order to see the essence, to check the dialectics of intimate processes. Vacu's loneliness, his world so reduced and poor, are conditions established beforehand by the poet, in order to show us that the human subject is *nothing*, an absence of himself, a window open to reality behind which there is no one looking out. Without the world and the others who distract us and make us forget what we are, there is the pure I, projecting itself into a time which it cannot traverse by means of subterfuges, empty time, the minimum expression of which are the numbers which define the succession: in Vacu's case the mere counting of the steps which means a progress towards nowhere, unless it is the end of the staircase.

Man might hypothetically remain still in the instant, be like the animal that lives day by day in silence. While I don't agree with such hypothesis, for we are made of time, Queralt gives his character the ability to choose, the absolute freedom. By using it, he commits an imprudence which will send him back to his starting point: the denial of time and silence, to be a vegetable, like Ecs.

In any case, whether we agree or not with the alternative that closes the poem, the fact which Vacu's being highlights is the dejection of man, his being thrown into a world without knowing the reason:

A man, we said, arrived,  
How we cannot guess,  
In the midst of the darkness.

And dejection, the dejected state, as Heidegger says, inevitably causes the projection, that is, human existence as a project in time, which if true, shall reveal him as a being-for-death. This is what happens to Vacu, even though he hasn't read Heidegger. Existence is being-in-the-world (*in-der-Welt-sein*), that is to say, the world is

nothing without the existing which inhabits it, and vice versa, there cannot be a subject without world. Hence, we read:

This staircase exists because Vacu  
Inhabits it and while he is alive it will continue to exist.

But Vacu's world is a tunnel. What meaning could we ascribe to a world so reduced to its minimum expression? To understand it we should look outside the poem, and that is what we will do:

...Hope always digs  
Anguished but confidently  
Deep tunnels in the eternal nights

Those are verses of the poem number 2 from the book *Nicis* (Fools) "by the same author-, revealing verses, for they show that Vacu's world is a product of his hope: basically, of the unbearable anguish which makes him invent time. In brief, subject and object are closely related concepts. Vacu's world is so reduced because his subjectivity is reduced. He cannot escape from it:

Yet if he gets out ... it might  
Vanish, and face the ultimate risk  
Of perhaps never being seen again.

The voices which come from outside and which recur throughout the poem like a refrain:

Vertigo, queasiness, anguish and delirium  
Vision of dying children who scream  
Vertigo, queasiness, anguish and delirium  
Vision of men and women shouting

expose not a reality outside the tunnel itself, but aspects of the reality which Vacu's world-project exclude. A Phenomenology of an *unfortunate conscience*, locked inside a world of his own which is a world indeed, *Vacu, The Suffering Being* reveals all its possible moves,

the repetitions, to go backwards in order to move forward with the new discoveries which increase his suffering. Like the spiral staircase along which he climbs up and down and stands still, a spiral poem that ends in the silence where it started. But I, honestly, do not believe Vacu will be able to stay silent.

# Vacu, The Suffering Being

Prologue to the first Catalan Edition

By **Francesc Torralba Roselló**

Philosopher and secular theologian

Translated by **ANGEL MIROU**

"In Queralt's poetry, suffering becomes the keystone of human existence. The poet wonders what justifies existence, what is the reason why the protagonist, Vacu, wishes to go on being, to fight to stay a being. Vacu is the archetype of the man who responsibly faces his own emptiness and, instead of going off on a tangent, desperately searches for a reason which justifies his existence and guards him from the temptation of nihilism. Queralt places at the very centre of the poem the ultimate philosophical question: What is it that makes life worth living?"

If the task of writing a prologue is hard when it comes to an essay, it is even more so when the prologue must be the prelude to a book of poetry. It is not easy to put oneself in the shoes of the author and imagine the stream of thought and feelings which configure a work of poetry. The text is the exteriorization of an interior sphere which aims to make the reader complicit. The poet, rhythmically revealing the voice of his interior, projects to the exterior his deepest identity, shows us the essential core of his self. In that sense, the act of "poetizing" is an act of stripping bare, of unveiling, for the poet shows himself naked before the unknown reader.

The reader while reading the text may relate to that which beats within the interior sphere of the poet. When that happens, poetry ends up being part of our personal baggage. It stops being an intellectual or literary object and becomes a window to one's own subjectivity. Poets often know better than us how to express what we feel deep inside ourselves. They put into words our impressions, our feelings, our emotions. They help us speak to ourselves more accurately, even though we know too well that we never explain

ourselves completely, for the word is inadequate to capture the breadth of the human experience. Poets have the gift for words, the plasticity of imagery and the rhythm necessary for the work to have the desired harmony.

Poetry, then, grants us access to the subjective ocean of the other, even though this route always shows some obstacles. The possibility of missing the essential or misinterpreting the core of the work is always present when one sets out to expound the ideas of a poet. All in all, the effort is worth it, as each text contains unexplored possibilities and each reader makes his own findings. To read poetry is like setting out on a journey from which no return is planned. We do not know where it will lead us, nor what we will be like at the end of the journey. Often it is not a pleasant trip, for we discover spheres of our subjectivity and of existence we would rather not have seen, but a poet is not one who just shows us what is sublime in life, but also what is dark and mean. For this reason, reading poetry demands some fortitude of the soul, because the reader is not always willing to confront himself, nor the limits of his world.

The author of this book which the reader has in his hands has invited me to write a prologue for this poetic work. I feel both grateful and scared of the task involved as it is not easy to describe with an adjective the poetry of Manel Queralt. To start with, we are dealing with a mature poet who already has expressed in other accomplished texts his vision of the world, of man and human existence, who offers the reader a poetry of thinking, a poetry whose central goal is to make the reader think, to take him to unknown places and to encourage him in the act of thinking. But it is not a purely intellectual poetry for, though it is rich in philosophical concepts "full of metaphysical implications-, it is an intensely passionate poetry which makes the heart of the reader beat faster and induces moods which are hard to define a priori. Whoever is not willing to experience changes in his heartbeat had better not

read this poet, for his poetry is a torrent of ideas and feelings which do not leave the reader who comes near them indifferent.

Some poets you read and forget. But some poets you read and cannot ever forget, not only because they have struck a chord in our soul, but because they drain us and leave us out in the cold. Manel Queralt belongs to such a breed of poets. That is why I take the liberty of giving the reader the following warning: what he will find in the following pages is a philosophical poetry, a long poem of personal quest, an honest and at the same time crude exploration of the human condition.

I do not mean in the least to put in a different way what the poet expresses so beautifully in the poetry he presents us-I would not be able to do so anyway-, but to explore the territory he shows us from the point of view of a reader who had the privilege of reading his poetry before it was published as a book. When all is said and done, the purpose of a prologue is not to comment on the work, but to encourage its reading, to show the reader the value of the work he has in his hands so that he sets out to read it, or rather, to receive it and allow himself to be addressed by it. If this prologue achieves such goal, I will feel justified, for I believe the work is worth it.

In our cultural landscape, this kind of poetry is scarce. Poetry is too often used to rhetorically embellish a discourse or to make a social act more enjoyable, but Queralt's poetry lacks such purposes. It is poetry with a profound existential tone, which stems from a living anguish, in the most Heideggerian sense of the word, and which describes the darkest and most problematic side of human life. The poet rhythmically expresses the experience of the anguish before nothingness, before the confirmation that we are time passing, that we are beings-for-death. Queralt faces the experience of the void, he doesn't disguise how hard such experience is and he invites the reader to follow the same path he has trodden on his own. It is as if

the poet is looking for an accomplice, a friendly voice to share his own experience.

Before the chasm of emptiness it is usual to recur to distractions, to escape from things, to disperse into social entertainments. In our society we have at our disposal very strong mechanisms, both in intensity and duration, to keep us amused permanently. Very often poetry serves such purpose, but that is not the goal of Queralt's poetry.

The poet leaves us standing before the horror of the void and at the edge of the cliff he abandons us so that we consider where we are, who we are and what is to provide meaning to our lives. At the core of a culture full of noise and anaesthetizing messages, Queralt's poetry is in a way countercultural, for it does not inhabit the territory of frivolity, but the vast territory of earnest and existential gravity. It is very likely that the post-modern reader won't quite understand the drama of Vacu, the protagonist of the work. If that is the case, it is not the poet's fault, but that of the gap of experience between the poet and the world. But some readers, I am sure, will have bitterly tasted the emptiness which Vacu suffers, and in that sense they will partially identify with the world Queralt creates.

For all these reasons, it can be argued that Queralt's poetry demands a reader who is willing to travel far, willing to submerge himself into the metaphysics of the absurd and touch with his own hands the contingent and redundant character of human existence. We are, but we might not have been. We exist in a world where the magnitude of evil overwhelms us. In fact, the experience of the poverty of being provides a backbone to all the poetry of Queralt. The caducity of all things, the ineluctable passing of time, the contingency of the world and of people, the frailness of self and its links are the main questions in this poetic choice. Everything is perishable in Queralt's world, but the human being does not settle for such contingency, but feels profoundly uncomfortable and desperately searches for an

answer, a sign, a meaning for everything. The experience of this unbearable lightness of being, to use the words of Milan Kundera, creates a sort of suffering which is not corporeal, but of a metaphysical nature.

In Queralt's poetry, suffering becomes the keystone of human existence. The poet wonders what justifies existence, what is the reason why the protagonist, Vacu, wishes to go on being, to fight to stay a being. Vacu is the archetype of the man who responsibly faces his own emptiness and, instead of going off on a tangent, desperately searches for a reason which justifies his existence and guards him from the temptation of nihilism. Queralt places at the very centre of the poem the ultimate philosophical question: What is it that makes life worth living?

Vacu is a frail man, vulnerable, gripped by pain, disoriented within the great labyrinth of existence, opaque and separated from his fellow creatures. The poet forces us to open the window to emptiness, to look beyond what we usually do, and submerge ourselves into the radicalness of our own being. Vacu's Being does not stand on the eternal Being of a God who loves from eternity, but on the deepest Void. In Queralt's poetry there is no trace of that Presence which provides meaning in Golgotha. It rather seems to tell us that assuming that emptiness is the only way to liberation.

In this long poem, the author lyrically and pathetically expresses the experience of the void, of that which the Latin authors called *horror vacui*. The main character of the poem, Vacu, which probably stands for the poet, crosses the geography of the absurd and shows us his pains when he faces such experience. The possible dissolution into nothingness, the lack of communication with others, the experience of loneliness, the impotence before the magnitude of evil in the world are ever-present in Queralt's poetry. Needless to say, the reader may or may not share the poet's world view, but in any case, he will have to admit that the point of view which Queralt



offers us shakes our convictions and makes us think. If only for that reason, the poetry in this book is already of great value.

The poet says this about the big questions, those which truly hurt us deep inside and which move us, "not much is known, nothing can be said". Queralt's poetry shows, beside great artistic beauty, an intense metaphysical power, because far from moving in a superficial level, it confronts the reader with the great enigmas of existence. In that sense, it awakens us from the sweet dream of not-thinking.

I hope, dear reader, that you know how to savour this poetry which Queralt so kindly presents us. It exudes sincerity, intellectual honesty and a passion for truth. It demands attention and above all a listening attitude. To be able to assimilate its voice, you will have to make an effort to silence those voices inside your head, adopt a receptive attitude and let yourself be fascinated by the text. Bon voyage, reader!

# Vacu, The Suffering Being

By Manel Queralt

[www.manelqueralt.net](http://www.manelqueralt.net)

Translated by **ANGEL MIROU**

Versions of "Vacu, the suffering being" in: CATALAN (Catalonia), SPANISH, JAPANESE (by Yukiko Kimura), KOREAN (by Mihwa Jo and Singyu Kang), EUSKARA (by Jon Elordi - Basque Country), ENGLISH (by Ángel Mirou) and GALEGO (by María Cuiñas - Galicia).

.....

A spiral staircase with steps  
Of granite chained within walls  
And the not too high ceiling of a passage  
Scratched, drilled in rock,  
Where the eye cannot pierce the surface,  
Perhaps it rounds it, shapes it,  
But does not uncover its mysteries.  
One might speculate whether a breath  
Of energy blew on a speck  
Of primal matter and created  
A life and whether later on  
Such compound underwent  
Decisive and extraordinary changes  
To then become then an imprecise  
And braided evolution  
Which would lead us with some conviction  
Here, to this point of the story.  
Perhaps we would go too far if  
We suggested that they, henceforth  
To be known as living beings,  
Succeeded one another and did so

By selecting the fittest among them  
And casting aside the least adapted.  
Very ancient and indeterminate beings,  
Which we cannot even assure existed  
For no one ever saw them  
Nor have we any reliable trace,  
Even more, contrary to what might be thought  
About their rather unlikely  
Existence, without fear of straying  
Too far from reality,  
We might conclude that those creatures  
Drilled a stairway in the rock.  
Likewise we might set ourselves  
The tremendous task of trying  
To decipher a reason, small as it might be, the  
*Why* of beginning a feat  
Like the one we use here by way of an example.  
But the past presents itself to us as muddled  
And we are unable to ascertain  
What the reasons were and therefore  
We will have to bear on our shoulders  
The ignorance of those origins:  
All that appertains to the stairway  
As well as its beginnings elude us.  
We could not tell whether it is all dark  
Inside, we might be wrong  
For we are not quite sure, but  
Within a dim light lived  
Where it came from no one knows:  
An uncertain, unknown source,  
A radiance for centuries absorbed  
Through the pores of the stone.  
We may conjecture that once in there  
We would not know what might occur  
If one so reckless should decide,

-What for, we could never guess-  
To follow the tunnel and climb the stairs.  
Well, surely we would be surprised  
If we were told against all odds,  
Rather implausible but true,  
That someone lives within the rock.  
Hailing from who knows what distant corner,  
Oblivious to such starting point  
Something climbs up from the depths  
Of a darkness that is unknown to us.  
.....

«...Two hundred fifty three thousand and twenty-three  
Two hundred fifty three thousand and twenty-four  
Two hundred fifty three thousand and twenty-five...  
Careful there! Think think why  
Every time you reach this point you get lost  
And have to start the count all over.»  
.....

So we hear the voice of someone talking?  
No surprise, it confirms what we divined.  
But we do not think it is one  
Of those creatures mentioned earlier,  
Natural miners, whose hard task  
Proves they must have been a hardy lot,  
But one from a species  
More evolved and sensitive  
Which surely, soon enough we would  
Agree to call this early inhabitant,  
This being, a man.  
We then might think or fancy  
That one ill-fated day, or not,  
There are all kinds of opinions  
For we would never agree  
Over whether he willingly chose  
To come to a strange world,

A man, we said, arrived,  
How we cannot guess,  
In the midst of the darkness.  
He would have first opened his eyes  
Wide open to avidly suck in  
Images into his tiny brain  
And had we been eyewitnesses  
There, by chance, we might  
Have glimpsed his innocent smile.  
But as far as we are concerned  
We never heard the cries of a child  
Nor one of those guttural baby sounds  
We could not therefore speak  
Of a particular birth; as likely as not  
It is a man, but we will not repeat it,  
All we shall ever know is  
That he is weak, and if he looks into the abyss  
Of living, he will succumb in the end.  
Even now we cannot guess his name.  
.....

This staircase exists because Vacu  
Inhabits it and while he is alive it will continue to exist  
If he gets out, and only if  
He manages to do so, which we will not  
Confirm or deny, it might  
Vanish, and face the ultimate risk  
Of perhaps never being seen again.  
Therefore as long as he lives inside and keeps  
Counting the steps, he will always be able  
To climb up or down  
To wherever he chooses, but if he messes up,  
Then he might lose himself in the night.  
The behaviour of this Vacu is  
Like that of any other apprentice, he must  
Repeat ad nauseam

All actions related  
To climbing the stairs and knowing  
-Before thinking about other things-  
His whereabouts and, in brief, after  
A deep and sound digestion,  
To consolidate and make them his very own.  
And perhaps rather than too lightly  
He seriously might think  
He could cross that rough  
Yet even terrain not just  
In a special way but also  
Move up or down as much as possible  
And also count as he did so,  
Adding or subtracting one foot after another  
Keeping in mind the number  
And last but not least keep  
His eyes and ears always alert  
On the watch for any small  
Hidden or insignificant clue,  
Leaving no corner or contour  
Unchecked despite the constant  
Blackmailing of doubts in his mind.  
He should test how solid  
And sound this staircase was.  
With his hands time and plenty of patience  
And as if a ritual  
He might retrace the steps,  
Every fold, every opening, and stroke  
The smooth or rough surface  
Allowing these sensations to go  
Straight to his head.  
.....

«...Four hundred thirty two thousand and twenty-six  
Four hundred thirty two thousand and twenty-seven  
Four hundred thirty two thousand and twenty-eight...»

.....

He kept such routine because he sensed that  
This unwavering belief would somehow  
Check the march,  
The cruel, uncertain flight of time.  
During a break, sitting  
On a step and leaning his back  
Against the rock, his mind reminisces of  
Small bits of the past, of the path  
Walked so far and on the ground he ponders  
On the methods employed.  
There where we first saw him,  
At an indeterminate place in time,  
We think he already possessed some wisdom  
We could never identify  
And if from then until now we add up  
All the knowledge his reason  
May have grasped --which might be  
Very scarce and which he believes was  
Extremely useful --we can perceive  
That in most occasions  
He got lost through simple carelessness,  
A behaviour which we deem  
Rather than showing signs of intelligence  
An incredible stupidity.

.....

It starts as a perception, faint  
At first, and the next minute growing  
For sure it feels somewhat  
Like an itch and we cannot recall  
When it started or whether  
There was a time when it did not exist.  
Let us say simply that it will not go,  
That there is a pain which follows Vacu, it settles  
In his bones and never stops.

Let us imagine it is chronic and turns out  
It is particularly insidious  
For it always works in all but  
Complete and constant secrecy  
--Hell which smoulders his insides--  
And we do not know this but unfortunately  
It probably affects his body and mind.  
It might not be important but  
This new pain will prevent his moving  
To the point that climbing a single step  
Will cause him a string of sharp pains  
Excruciating and unbearable.  
He could silently scream against  
Such pain with which he's been filled  
Since time immemorial; he could  
Beg for mercy but it would do  
No good for these imperatives  
Are useless; even so  
There is an uncontrollable urge  
That prompts him to demand answers,  
But he will get no words, just  
Silence and a pure, dreadful suffering.

.....

He had seized one conquest after  
Another of the space of this stair  
He lived in and Vacu judged himself  
Capable of ruling it in all  
Its long and twisted span.  
Sometimes, though not often,  
He admitted feeling truly  
Proud and lofty, and with renewed  
Strength, for he thought he would  
Take hold of his recent  
Findings and new abilities  
And as he conquered the world



-At this point we should remember  
That it is limited  
To the passageway drilled in the rock-  
And he knew he also grasped  
Some of those simpler laws  
Which ruled it and hence increased  
The knowledge of the mouldy surrounds  
Through which, to put it in a less  
Pejorative way, he roamed.  
But it was also for this reason,  
That he could discern his own  
Limits, and he found himself increasingly  
Humbled before the mysteries  
That the stairways might still hold.  
He realized the delicate  
Situation in which he found himself  
He agonized over not knowing  
What further miseries would assault him  
Harsh and terribly up the stairs.  
What can one expect from such a frail creature?  
Then it was necessary for Vacu to choose  
Either to go on though ignoring  
The rather likely dangers  
And take on the pain that followed him  
Always so chronic and unavoidable  
--Constant torture of body and mind--  
Or to fall back and go down the stair  
And in a moment of great weakness  
To let go and fall, to judge it  
Not worthwhile and to leave it be.  
Hidden in the half-light arises  
The temptation to go back  
To find once more what is familiar  
And well known, just another way  
-The only way, we suspect-to feel safe.-

But if we did not wish to give  
Sufficient importance to his fragile  
Samples of memories it might turn out  
That Vacu had no history,  
It would be as if he never existed.  
But we will not contemplate that now  
For it would be a stupid waste  
Of time and what matters most  
Is to go on, not neglect the pace.  
An enterprising Vacu surrenders himself  
To chances unknown  
Merely glimpsed, to let go,  
To abandon oneself, to connect with the inner  
Emotional and sensory world  
Of the staircase? But it casts a sort  
Of chill or dread because  
The instrument of intuition can  
Release uncontrollable passions  
And fancies and troubles and pangs of anguish.  
If Vacu then wished to discover  
New places he should make his way  
Upstairs uncertainty teetering  
On doubt and deepening and taking part  
In one of many possible actions  
And then, having tested the new  
Action plan and achieved  
Certain clairvoyance, he should act.  
The actions he meant  
To follow he knew by heart;  
If they were proven correct he would  
Use them again in further sections of the stairway  
And reject them if they were useless.  
Later on, when the state of matters  
Demanded it, he would revert once more  
To the past strategy that

Allowed Vacu to face  
Very similar situations  
--such as the occasions  
Which we might think happen too often  
Due to his general tendency to fall  
Or stumble more than twice  
On the same step, an accustomed  
And well-known form  
To name incompetence--  
To overcome again the painful  
And troublesome obstacles of former times.  
He acted he went forward again always  
Worried and scowling awaiting  
The discovery, the final one  
Which would bring peace  
To his troubled mind:  
A monologue which triggers a voice  
Which turns out to be yet another  
Monologue in his mind... and so on,  
Deep within his mind, to infinity.  
What troubled him, what spurred him  
And where did the unease come from?

.....

«...Six hundred sixty-four thousand one hundred and two  
Six hundred sixty-four thousand one hundred and three  
Six hundred sixty-four thousand one hundred and four...»

.....

There is the inner energy which troubles him  
If he can't express and release  
The excitement he now undergoes  
It would end up increasing the uneasiness.  
He lies down and the steps dig into his head  
Back and butt, he closes his eyes  
And stops thinking about the passage of time.  
While his hand feels for his torpid member

He caresses the glans and the dirty testicles  
And imagines that someone equally naked  
--he could only see a creature like himself  
For he has no reference of anyone else--  
Threatens him with his erect penis,  
Stretches his legs above him and shoves  
The hard prick in his open mouth  
And pulls him closer so that he masturbates him  
Grabbing him by his hairs and moving  
His head for a better adjustment  
To the needs of his pleasure  
While Vacu grasps him by his buttocks  
To help control the thrust.  
The two are completely turned on for a long time.  
Slowly Vacu feels in his hand  
How that torpid member  
Wakes up with a will to grow and  
demonstrate the presence of desire:  
The outcome is thoroughly predictable.  
At the culminating moment the faux double  
Disappears and at the exact point  
Of no return arrives the thick mist  
Of orgasm and it flusters body and mind:  
All blood rushes into his sex.  
But suddenly he perceives an awful  
Stab as if now his penis was pierced  
Through with a thick needle.  
The two of them melting, this experience  
Of pain and pleasure together cannot be described:  
A protuberance of flesh  
Blood red and abnormally swollen,  
Until it explodes with ejaculation  
Until sperm flows and stains  
His hands and the thick brew spreads  
On the floor: an ending without appeal.

Afterwards, the body twisted by the torment,  
The heart regains its slow beating  
And his breathing becomes deep.  
His face leaning on a cold  
Step, Vacu recognizes the silence  
That comes after excitement.  
Pleasure is a gift which comes and goes  
And is always too brief; short-lived moments,  
But suffering has that great staying power,  
Everlasting throughout time.  
Vacu is forced to go on  
Learning to live with the pain.

.....

As days go by he sets himself the intimate  
Duty of constantly thinking  
About the stones, of never getting distracted  
For the slightest forgetfulness  
Might reopen his torment  
And become-at some point in the future-intolerable.  
Perhaps Vacu deceived himself by thinking  
He would learn too many things but  
In reality we do not know whether he would  
Be able to set his eyes upon  
The essentials and this might  
Prevent him from clearing his mind  
And having the right attitude  
Towards himself and the area around the stairway,  
The semidark atmosphere that surrounds him.  
If he moves forward the steps do not remain fixed, they disappear  
Always different, he defers understanding them.  
Vacu has been for a long time confined  
Between these two walls and has been forced  
To dedicate most of his efforts

Counting forward and backward all the steps,

But he still will tend to keep up  
This attitude even after  
Many years, when it no longer seems necessary.  
Finding himself absorbed just  
In the constant and repeated counting,  
He runs the serious risk of dedicating all  
His energy to this resolve  
And therefore hinder and impoverish  
The search for a reason for existence.  
Vacu thought he had never  
Bumped into any creature like him, nor unlike  
Him for that matter, but in brief,  
Somebody else and this made him feel  
A strange yearning which might  
Turn into sleepwalking.  
He talked to himself and did so by twisting  
His mouth as though he addressed someone  
Walking beside him but,  
It is plain to see, we know there is nobody else.  
Therefore, why the hell did he?  
Feeling round the paths of madness,  
Drifting, he gets lost in nothingness  
And the void which drags him shows  
A creature scarcely self-assured  
Bu with the minimum ability  
To live with all those nights:  
The darknesses he carries up and down.  
The most futile and pointless actions  
Torment him, we might  
Be sure that he obstinately  
Takes any tiny,  
Insignificant detail too seriously.  
If we examine him under a magnifying glass we will see  
A few instants frozen in time  
Which will not add up anything other than

A maimed body and his suffering,  
Deprived of any speech.  
We shall see his pains as a tempest  
Which violently breaks out confined  
In the casing of body and mind.  
Vacu always has pain by his side  
It is with and within him, beyond any  
Chance of observing it from the outside  
And therefore discovering its origin.  
Clenched teeth and frowned eyebrows,  
Angry stare and drowning eyes  
Sleet in the middle of the crazed pupils  
Short moans and a weeping asking for help  
From a body swollen with tremors.  
.....

When he reflected he could reach  
An approximate conclusion  
At least to a vague foreboding  
That despite his limited and minimal  
Knowledge he was looking as though  
By chance for an *absolute* which enveloped  
All that anguished loneliness.  
But he always reached the certainty  
That all those reasons worrying  
Him so much only brought him  
A substitute to which it was impossible  
To recreate its real name.  
Drenched in fear, the vacuity  
Of fearful *nothingness* possessed him:  
The feelings that stem from a vanquished  
Heart look out and fall to the bottom  
Of an abyss from which no one is reborn.  
.....

«...Eight hundred and forty-five thousand and thirty-five  
Eight hundred and forty-five thousand and thirty-six

Eight hundred and forty-five thousand and thirty-seven...  
If I fall now no one will come after me.  
What is the source of gall,  
The thick spittle, the black expectorations? »  
.....

He then fell silent at once and a white  
Haze covered his irises and quickly  
A blue lightning punctured the pupils  
And the dense fog invaded his brain  
Inside the voices reappeared,  
He knew well what this meant.  
.....

*Vertigo, queasiness, anguish and delirium*  
*Vision of dying children who scream.*  
.....

That state was like coming to  
After intoxication  
Provoked by the effect of a drug.  
Feeling the bad taste and the swollen tongue,  
Filling his body with the unpleasant  
Sensation caused by stopping  
After a long journey  
At the moment when the regular pace ends  
Causing enough silence  
To allow the voices inside to resonate still.  
.....

*Vertigo, queasiness, anguish and delirium*  
*Vision of men and women shouting.*  
.....

He always thought about something else  
As he climbed the staircase  
So as not to waste time, as if he wished  
To find some answer further on  
--He knows not what-- sublime or magnificent.  
He often corrected himself turning



His thoughts to that mystery,  
He then seemed to understand what he was looking for.  
Other times, his thoughts wandered,  
And he got lost in his reasoning  
Until he finally gave up the search  
For that name impossible to be uttered.  
But when he wished to push away these  
Thoughts so that they would not distract him  
From the other worries of which he might  
Profit, they started then  
To emerge untimely and stronger.  
Even if he tried his best  
To want to be perfect, he would not know  
How to strip himself of the condition  
Of his weaknesses which are  
The root of his insufficiency.  
There is a something unexplainable  
Which in Vacu's mind is born and slowly  
Arises: obscure images, lost  
Memories and a long standing debate.  
A too muddled whirl of greys,  
Showing no shape nor symbol  
Susceptible of translation or interpretation  
Reaches his consciousness.  
What emerges to the surface  
From conscience to claim  
The right to become real, tangible?  
Vacu is moved, he twists and rises  
From the steps and begins to wonder  
-Always climbing the staircase-  
Which behaviour might be this  
Which so hounds him lately.  
Why does he notice it now and not before?  
He wants to try making it crop up again  
And retraces his train of thoughts

Looking for the exact moment when  
This restlessness began.

.....

He always lives within the same atmosphere  
The dim light which envelops him,  
The dark silence that oppresses his temples?  
He believes again that if he retraces his way  
He will be able to find out the first cause  
Of the effect which brought him to this  
Present and which will have to guide him from now  
On. But after so long,  
The necessary strain is too  
Important for a creature like Vacu  
Who always fought without respite  
In the near dark of this passageway  
Carrying on his shoulders fears and darkness,  
So that from that moment sought for  
In the memories to this point there will not be anything  
Between the return path, he moves aside  
Any obstacle and any alien  
Thought, while he firmly closes his eyes  
And with clumsy hands he feels  
His face and body as though Vacu wished  
To tear off the barbed wire that entraps  
And entangles him with terrible pains:  
Which cut his skin and causes deep  
Wounds, to the limit of his suffering.

.....

*Vertigo, queasiness, anguish and delirium*  
*Vision of dying children who scream*  
*Vertigo, queasiness anguish and delirium*  
*Vision of men and women shouting.*

.....

It then seems that he focuses like never before  
So that no distraction will take him out

Of this state of critical pensiveness  
And he prepares for a new supreme  
Try, as though he wanted to rebel  
Against this anguish which weighs him down.  
But then, once more,  
He experiences again the void of *nothingness*;  
He stops and for a moment he thinks no more.  
Soon, and not knowing why  
He climbs up and down the stairs again,  
Several times as if he wished  
To retrieve the counting of the steps:  
The safety which a palpable world provides.  
He knows his journey through memory  
Has been a failure: It vividly brought him back  
The disillusionment and he felt more wretched.

.....

«...One million one hundred thousand and fifty-one  
One million one hundred thousand and fifty-two  
One million one hundred thousand and fifty-three...»

.....

This gallery that climbed up  
Burrowed inside the rock was full  
Of cracks opened in the walls  
Of which a purulent secretion oozed:  
Wounds of the skin of Vacu himself.  
That stair which never ended  
Had forsaken him half-way a tunnel  
Moving up and down towards an end  
Which never came, never was sighted.  
He ran and thought that sweat  
Was blood and pestilent pus which seeped  
From the gashed walls, thick blood  
Which slowly dripped down to  
The steps and soaked his bare feet.  
When the air became noxious,

Suffocating, the darkness encircled him  
And pressed on him as though a colossus  
Irate and irascible had seized him  
In his hands to crush him.  
Though he might shout and scream  
Asking for help, terrified,  
He knew no one would hear him.  
And when he could not move any further,  
Inert, he felt the pulse on his temples  
He wanted to stop his heart, calm it down,  
For it would never do so on its own:  
Free itself and help him rest.  
He was in constant danger. The border  
Between wake and sleep, between real  
And unreal, is a zone exposed  
To the possible obstacles, the pitfalls  
And chasms which at each new step  
Might open and, though it had never  
Happened to him, he was suspicious.  
And whenever he had such thoughts  
His legs trembled,  
Stumbling he slowly climbed up  
As though an abyss might jump upon him.  
In this life of his so machine-like,  
What will happen *tomorrow*?  
And what happened *yesterday* or *the day before*?  
Deep inside Vacu's brain  
All thoughts become lost.  
So, it turns out that trying  
To regain time is a pointless task,  
All efforts are useless?  
It starts with a slight imperceptible  
Weariness, like when one day  
We imagine we hear a distant  
Voice which whispers

In our ears and after paying  
Attention we forget about it because  
We do not believe it real, possible.  
One day, when Vacu no longer expects it,  
That *why* feints and pops its head out  
And everything starts to fall apart.  
He shivers like he is cold, he sits,  
And besieged by darkness, all alone, he cries.  
What is the point of bringing light to a wretch  
Life to those whose have bitterness in their hearts  
Who long for a death that does not come?  
.....

No, Vacu has never been wise in his  
Loneliness, he has never known what to make of it  
And does not believe in any hereafter sunk  
As he is in the mud of misfortune.  
Now, after so long, so much so he cannot  
Remember how long, he hardly has  
An instant of peace:  
In these stairs he is haunted  
By the gasps of the most hideous dreams  
It is then hard to mark the exact  
Moment when Vacu took the subtle step  
And his spirit threw in its lot with death.  
Restless and eager to know,  
If only he could look beyond  
Himself and raise  
His gaze above his own  
Fears, he would have the chance  
Of regaining the will to live.  
When one of those voices spoke to him  
A long time ago and managed to silence  
His torment, a new one recites it now  
And restarts the lament at the point  
Where it terrible stopped.

.....

*Vertigo, queasiness, anguish and delirium*

*Vision of dying children who scream*

*Vertigo, queasiness, anguish and delirium*

*Vision of men and women shouting.*

.....

And we are missing something, but what?  
What makes it worth his while, this remnant,  
To hold on to the staircase?  
Did he not learn from his tragic experience  
He will only find suffering there?  
He constantly makes an extreme,  
Solitary effort, and he knows that in this  
Awareness, this revolt  
He is challenging an answer.  
Vacu, an emaciated bag of bones, deformed,  
Wizened by the pains of body and mind  
Almost unable to move,  
Naked, filthy because of his incontinence,  
His skin and lips sore, torn, cut,  
He crawls sluggishly and? He will not make it.  
He coughs, chokes and vomits sputa  
But with his hands he claws steps  
From the stair intending to climb,  
Little by little, the weight of existence.  
After so many years of ceaseless pain,  
He is in a way just a wound,  
His character already inseparable  
From his suffering, an intimate union.  
Inside the stairway dim noises  
Can be heard a sort of murmur  
Made by someone walking, crawling  
An almost inaudible voice can be heard  
A wounded creature, but it is not  
Real words exactly, they resemble

The laments of an open wound.  
Then, all that can be seen and perceived  
Is compressed into a single image  
Which expresses a long metamorphosis  
Resulting from a prolonged suffering.  
He will eventually find out that agonizing  
May be considered his  
True destiny, where suffering  
Is his task, the only task.  
So perhaps now he might glimpse  
That even he, suffering so much, is unique  
And he is all alone, no one will  
Ease or suffer in his stead; there is  
Only one opportunity, and this  
Lies in how he bears it.  
Well, tough luck, but must he go on?  
We do not know. Vacu has nothing left  
To lose in this ridiculous life.  
And therefore we will quickly proceed  
To weave more or less consistent  
Artifices to save the rest  
Although we honestly believe  
That the chances for success  
Are very small. We shall see.  
.....

«...One million three hundred and four thousand and five  
One million three hundred and four thousand and six  
One mill... What? What is this wall doing here?  
It can't be, I don't understand I can't go on!  
The staircase ends and... there are no more steps?! »  
.....

Unable to accept in any way  
The situation, he uttered a terrible  
And horrific scream as if coming  
Out of one condemned to the worst tortures

Born out of the depths of his being  
-Even we are moved by it-  
A scream which has repressed rage  
And pains gathered and soaked  
For years, until now: an entire life.  
But what is this we see? What is going on?  
After all this suffering of his  
A feeling, a strange and quiet  
Sensation of peace invades him  
As though tender, unknown hands  
Caressed his wounds,  
The ones on his body and those in his mind:  
Breathing for a few imperceptible moments  
Without fearing the piercing consequences.  
Then the unthinkable: *Vacu smiles at us!*  
.....

We fall silent, at this juncture we are silent.  
Before a suffering creature which has managed  
To bear so much pain all this  
Time, we can only remain silent and watch.  
.....

(And so it is that on the most important  
And at the same time radical realities  
We hardly know a thing; there is nothing we can say.  
There is no yesterday or tomorrow. All is now.  
Does this ending reveal  
*Nothingness or transcendence?*  
Is the true and only way out  
Of the staircase precisely  
There where none is possible?)  
.....