



Within the tradition of free inquiry and suggestive reflection in which we have situated the work of Joan Fuster, his diaries are one of its prime examples. The *Diari* (1952-1960) appeared in published form for the first time in 1969 as the second volume of his complete works, although some fragments or thematic derivatives had been made available in books such as *Figures de temps* (Figures of Time), *Indagacions possibles* (Possible Inquiries) and *Diccionari per a ociosos* (Dictionary for the Idle).

The diaries are formed by an amalgamation of one hundred seventy four prose pieces of varying size. The structure is chronologically based and in some cases the essays are supplementary, in certain respects, with additions dated 1968. At no time did Fuster recount intimate details or bedroom confidences. It is a working tool, which in its freedom of genre is useful for writing down musings, without thematic or formal restraint. It is a way of writing, as the writer from Sueca himself says, "d'anar per casa," comfortably and without pretensions. Thus, no question is foreign; any aspect of human life can be judged and analyzed through the lens of this lucid agitator of ideas. The essayist, from his perspective, must be just that: "his place in the republic of letters--in society--is only justified by the willingness, the fickleness if you will, to agitate for ideas, and general ideas. The more general they are, the more valid the bargain will be."

One of the most-praised writings of our essayist is that concerning Erasmus of Rotterdam, dated February 23, 1956. Due to problems with the censor it was not published in *Indagacions possibles* (Possible Inquiries, 1958). Later, it was incorporated into *Diccionari per a ociosos* (Dictionary for the Idle), where it appeared in 1964. Even so, some time later it was re-integrated into the diaries, which according to Fuster was its original place and where it belonged. The piece interpreted Erasmus' situation as a symbol for Fuster's intellectual situation. In the essay, Fuster begins by questioning the current validity of the sixteenth-century thinker. It is, he answers, above all "a present and direct--living--reputation of exemplarity. The man, the man Erasmus, the intellectual attitude that is identified with his life, is what we continue to admire."

Erasmus, like any contemporary man of letters, saw himself as confronted by a world divided into factions. Thus Fuster renews the polemic established by Sartre in the introductory manifesto of the first number of *Les Temps Modernes*. From this moment a parallel is established between the drama of Erasmus in his activity as a writer and that of the intellectual of our times; the situation begins in the sixteenth century with religious revolution and in the twentieth with social revolution. We recall that the intellectual, every intellectual after the Second World War, does not just have the firm desire to descend to the public square--to put it in the words of Cesare Pavese--but to reflect on the role that he performs in society. Both sides clamor for Erasmus, but he desires a synthesis of the positive aspects of the two factions. Soon the situation becomes untenable, because the two sectors demand adhesion and submission from their supporters. Faithful to his convictions, the humanist of Rotterdam is eventually suspect from both sides: for the Church he is a subject, though heterodox; for the Lutherans he is an inspiration, but unable to break with the papists.

Taking the side of one of the two sectors means abandoning intellectual independence. The aspiration of both writers, however, whatever the epoch they find themselves in, save of course the distances of circumstances, is to preserve independence. A truly difficult position. Sartre left it very

clear: impartiality is impossible, since we always "choose." "Neutrality" constitutes a kind of "intervention;" to be quiet is also to speak. Pure illusion.

For the contemporary intellectual the key word is now liberty, and the situation is similar to that of Erasmus, who found himself besieged by the barbarities of one side or the other. This is this situation of the intellectual faithful to his convictions, who refuses to gamble with cultural freedom and demands of himself a precarious and difficult balance. Despite all the concessions--says Fuster--Erasmus was able to place himself as a writer outside of the Church and also outside of Lutheranism. "From then on, the European man of letters aspired to maintain his autonomy, to increase it, establishing himself in the face of power, injustice, and intimidation." The position seems utopian. No one, however, would deny the moral and psychological force of this conviction, or of Erasmus' role, not exemplary but rather "representative."

Our writer could not, cannot, let himself be "taken," because he is a rationalist, a skeptic. He formulated his moral humanism in rationalist and skeptical terms. Skepticism does not translate into inhibition or indifference: "Skeptics do not create revolutions, certainly. Sometimes they prepare them; sometimes they purge them. And nothing more. On the other hand, they do not induce their fellow citizens to hate, or resignation, or indifference." For this reason it is necessary to dismantle the machinery, whatever side it is on, that hinders inquiry, tolerance, and dialogue between human beings. Dogmas and doctrines are systems that harm liberty. One of his objectives was to tear down the lies and fanaticism that obstruct us, with the best of tools: the register of the essay, for its characteristic free exchange of ideas.

The position of the man of letters of the twentieth century underlines the situation we have seen in Erasmus. This is why Fuster promotes him so often throughout the diaries.

We would have to situate Fuster, without a doubt, in the family of Erasmus of Rotterdam, Rabelais, Lluís Vives, Montaigne, Voltaire, Thomas Mann, and Bertrand Russell, all beloved by him. These intellectuals are some of the most luminous members on the roster and clear examples of ideal humanist critics.

The diaries are a mosaic of notes that make evident the vastness of his intentions and the cultural scope of his writing. It is a work where we find each of the facets of the essay and all the thematic motifs of a modern intellectual, committed to himself, his country and his time, and as a result, the creative quarry of one of the pinnacles, without a doubt, of contemporary essay.

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