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For Max
with all food
wishes
Sof

GERHARD'S CANTATA

1) Gerhard, Carner, and King James 'The Conqueror'*

Geoffrey J. Walker

ROBERTO GERHARD's widow tells of how at some time in the early 1930's, when the Gerhards were still living in Barcelona, their friend Josep Carner—perhaps the foremost poet of the Catalan language in the 20th century and dubbed by his contemporaries 'the prince of poets'—complained to the composer that Gerhard had not yet honoured him by setting any of his verses to music. Gerhard readily accepted this invitation, couched as it was in the form of a mild reproach! It was Carner himself who suggested the text to be used, a specially re-worked version of a poem which had first appeared in a sort of pastiche medieval novel entitled *La malvestat d'Oriana*, written by Carner in 1910. The re-drafted poem and the new Gerhard cantata received the title *L'alta naixença del rei En Jaume (The Noble Birth of the Sovereign Lord King James)*.

Josep Carner i Puig-Oriol was born in 1884 of a prosperous Barcelona family. The cultural climate of that city during the years of Carner's youth was effervescent with the activities of the supporters of *modernisme*, a chaotic renovating surge which reflected the political turbulence of Catalonia at the turn of the century quite as much as admiration for the contemporary bohemianism of Montmartre. Artists were painting—M. Utrillo and the young Picasso were part of the scene—sculpture and architecture were blossoming forth in the works of Llimona, Gaudí, and others, and poets and writers like Maragall and Rusiñol were at their peak. Catalan musicians such as Albéniz, Granados, and Morera were also very much involved with the movement. For about twenty years from 1890 to 1910 Barcelona was spinning in a whirligig of festivals, exhibitions, concerts, experimental theatre, strikes, and anarchist bomb-throwings. But by the time Josep Carner had come of age a number of the young intellectuals felt that things had gone far enough and a return to order was now required for the advance of Catalan culture. The result was *noucentisme*, a new movement dedicated to a disciplined approach towards the arts and sciences. One of its major achievements was the founding in 1911 of the Institut d'Estudis Catalans (the Catalan Academy) where, amongst other tasks, the important work was begun of standardizing Catalan grammar and orthography, compiling a dictionary, and 'purifying' the language of the Castilianisms which disfigured it as a result of centuries of

* I am much indebted to Dr. R. Aramon i Serra of the I.E.C. for some invaluable bibliographical information—G.J.W.

cultural and political persecution by the Spanish. Carner accepted an appointment, perhaps a little unwillingly, as secretary of the new Philological Section.

Whether Carner was or was not a convinced *noucentista* is still a matter of discussion. He always remained somewhat apart from the centre of things, and one fine day in 1921, to the near disbelief of his admiring fellow citizens, it was announced that 'the prince of poets' had entered the Spanish diplomatic service and was about to leave for Genoa as vice-consul. From then on he spent most of his life abroad and died in 1970 in exile in Brussels, one of his last diplomatic postings before the rise of the Franco régime. True *noucentista* or not, it is clear from his work that the qualities, variety, extent, and precision in the use of his native Catalan language were matters which concerned Carner deeply, and throughout his writing both in poetry and in prose he was constantly striving to make use of all the registers of his linguistic instrument with all its ranges of tone, subtlety, and aesthetics. Carner was very much an artist of language. He even invented words if the ones he wanted did not exist. His poetry is not however self-indulgent in any sense. It is restrained and always elegant, hardly involved at all with his personal life or intimate recollections. Much of it is in a way 'public' poetry, sometimes almost 'occasional' poetry; all of it is full of attractive people and places ancient and modern, of plants and fruit, of colour, of humour, of wisdom, of irony, of warmth, and of compassion. While the *noucentistes* in Barcelona were building libraries, museums, and academies, and giving Catalonia the apparatus of 20th-century scholarship, Carner was building up for his readers a solid corpus of new poetry, displaying superbly the versatility of their language as revealed through the skill and the sensitivity of an extremely and consciously Catalan mind. Such, then, in the briefest possible terms, was the poetic achievement of Josep Carner.*

Carner found part of his poetic inspiration in the evocation of the past. He wrote, sometimes idyllically, sometimes amusingly, of people and traditions (some of his own invention), and he recounted in his own sophisticated way stories and legends from the history of Catalonia. His collection *Llegendari* contains many of these pieces, but some are also to be found scattered through his mock-medieval novel *La malvestat d'Oriana*. One of these latter is the work which concerns us here: his gently piquant version of the events surrounding the 'miraculous' conception of King James I 'the Conqueror' (1208-1276). The story itself is well known and it is related in three of the *Four Great Chronicles* of Catalan historiography. One of the versions is actually autobiographical since James I was himself the author of the earliest of the great chronicles, the *Llibre dels Feits*, where the story first appears, although there is also evidence of the existence of a contemporary troubadour poem on the subject, which is now lost. Carner's version of the story is based not so much on the king's own account of his conception, which is fairly brief, but upon the fuller, more elaborate ecclesiastical versions by Bernat Desclot and Ramon Muntaner, authors of later chronicles.

The historical facts are as follows. In the feudal disputes which took place in Catalonia and Southern France in the late 12th century the suzerainty of Montpellier was an issue for a short time. For various reasons Montpellier had had an irregular feudal past and the citizens wanted their 'Lady', Maria de Montpellier, to marry King Peter 'the Catholic' of Aragon, Count of Barcelona, so that they would have a regular, orthodox, and indeed royal line of succession again. Peter

* A short anthology of Carner's poetry (with parallel texts) was published by The Dolphin Book Co. Ltd.: *Josep Carner: Poems* (with English translations by Pearse Hutchinson), Dolphin, Oxford, 1962.

liked the idea of strengthening his diminishing power in the Languedoc and so he agreed to marry Maria. Now Maria, despite her youth, had already had two previous husbands: the first one had died, and the second had grown to dislike her so much that he had contrived a papal divorce. No sooner had King Peter married her than he too found her more than he could abide, and so there began another contrived divorce against her through emissaries in Rome (1205). The good citizens of Montpellier were horrified by this development because they foresaw the imminent failure of their plan for obtaining from their own stock a royal heir to their city. So, with the queen's consent, they devised a neat scheme. King Peter, since he had abandoned his queen, was in the habit of 'visiting' ladies in his realm, and when he was next at the castle of Lattes, in the area of Montpellier (1207), the crafty Montpellians arranged for the queen, still of course his wife, to be popped into the bed in the darkened bedchamber of the woman he had come to visit. Peter did not discover the deception until next morning, by which time, luckily, James was already conceived. It is reported that the king took the prank in good part—and went on his way! James I, who succeeded to the throne at the age of five when his wayward father was killed in battle, turned out to be one of the greatest kings of Aragon and Catalonia. He got the better of his troublesome nobles, conquered the Balearic Islands and the kingdom of Valencia from the Moors, and laid the foundations of his embryonic parliamentary state as a powerful medieval empire in the Mediterranean.

Carner's original poem consists of 246 lines and tells the full story, from the plotting of the Montpellians to the birth of the king: hence the title of the work, *The Noble Birth of the Sovereign Lord King James*. Yet although the shortened version of the poem given to Gerhard ends with the *conception* of the king, the title was not altered to fit more accurately the revised subject-matter in the Cantata. This suggests perhaps that Carner and Gerhard were intending to extend the work at a later stage. There is, however, no evidence that this was the case, and it is certainly true that the piece as it stands in the present version is effective as a work in its own right. The only difficulty therefore arises with regard to the inappropriateness of the title which, for reasons as yet unexplained, remained unchanged from the original.

The new poem, although it was shortened from the 246 lines which appeared in *La malvestat d'Oriana* to 104 lines, contains 32 new lines—9 in the *Divino* and the whole of the *Follia*—which were not in the original. There are also a number of individual words, and indeed whole lines, in other parts of the poem which Carner changed in the text given to Gerhard.

Josep Carner, then, re-wrote his version of the 'miraculous' conception of King James 'the Conqueror' in the following words, so that Roberto Gerhard should celebrate that auspicious event with a fine musical setting of them.

*L'alta naixença del rei
En Jaume*

1. Introducció i Lletania

Noble ciutat de Montpeller:
com ton Consell, cap no ho seria . . .
No hi ha dins ell un pec gormand
ni un cor defès de valentia.
El teu Consell vol un senyor. 5

*The Noble Birth of the Sovereign
Lord King James*

1. Introduction and Litany

Noble city of Montpellier:
your Governing Council could have no
equal . . .
Among its members there is not a
single witless 'bon viveur'
nor any heart lacking in valour.
Your Council wants a 'seigneur'. 5

A qui el demanaria?
Al llir, topazi traluzent,
gemma i espill, astre del dia,
Torre de Vori, Casa d'Or,
Dona Santa Maria. 10
Sonen les clotxes al cloquer,
i tota esglèsia s'aclaria,
que els canelobres són ardents
i en tot esguard la fe esplendia.
Oren prelats, oren ric-homs, 15
gent de cavalleria,
oren els clergues i els manants,
dames d'un alt paratge,
oren els vells amb els infants,
i tot el beguinatge, 20
i dones d'ordre en unió,
i homes de religió,
i dues ploroses, malanats
que han de captar per tota via
i donzelletes no sabent 25
com el miracle esdevindria.
Preguen set dies i set nits.

2. Divino

'Per set joies, O Maria,
que en aquest món heu gojat,
doneu-nos una alegria; 30
Verge, exaudiu-nos, si us és grat.

Nostra Dona de les Taules,
Vós que sou del món consol,
escolteu-nos tres paraules;
doneu remei al nostre dol. 35

Vós que fóreu Mare pia
d'un Fill Redemptor del món,
doneu-nos una alegria;
doneu florida al nostre born'.

3. Follia

—Si vostre enuig l'amor defuig, oleta! 40
quan no és amor defesa, olà!
si de la reina feu rebuig, oleta!
cercant una altra boca encesa, olà!
aquesta nit haureu al llit 45
la vostra enamorada, oleta!
que fins avui se us ha escondit,
de dubte embolcallada, olà!—

Deia així al rei el cavaller
que amb el Consell de Montpeller
havia fet conversa; 50
i el rei ja veia un cos d'abril
i una cabellera gentil
entre sos dits dispersa.

To whom could it turn to provide one?
To the lily, the translucent topaz,
the jewel and mirror, the day star,
the Ivory Tower, the House of Gold,
Our Lady Saint Mary. 10
The bells ring in the belfry,
and every church is filled with light,
for the candlesticks are aflame
and every face is lit with faith.
Priests pray, great men pray, 15
persons of quality,
the clergy and the oligarchs pray,
ladies of high birth,
the old men and the children pray,
and all the religious brotherhoods, 20
and groups of nuns,
and members of the orders,
tearful widows, and the wretched poor
who have to beg in all the streets
and maidens who do not know 25
how the miracle will come about.
They pray for seven days and seven nights.

2. Divino

'For the sake of the seven joys,¹ Oh Mary,
which you have enjoyed in this world,
give us one pleasure; 30
Virgin, hear us, if you please.

Our Lady of the Boards,²
you who are the consolation of the world,
hear a word or two from us;
bring a solution to our trouble. 35

You who were the Holy Mother
of a Son who was the Redeemer of the
world,
give us one joy;
make our broom bush³ flower'.

3. Follia

'If your displeasure eschews love, oo-la-la! 40
when it is not forbidden love, oo-la-la!
if you spurn the queen, oo-la-la!
in search of other torrid lips, oo-la-la!
this night you will have in your bed 45
a lady who loves you, oo-la-la!
who until today has hidden away from you,
so demure is she, oo-la-la!'

Thus spoke to the king the knight
who with the Council of Montpeller
had parleyed; 50
and the king already saw a youthful body
and delicate hair
spread between his fingers.

1 Franciscan tradition of a Rosary of the Seven Joys of Mary, known as the Corona.
2 Notre Dame des Tables, an image and church in Montpellier.
3 A Mediterranean broom (cytissus) which flowers in May, the Marian month.

- I aquella nit fou ordenat
que en aquell lit 55
que imaginava de pecat
el rei, roent, esmaperdut,
que la reina hi fos,
la clara dona de virtut,
amb llavi mut, 60
i embolcallant el cap, tan ros
de tenebrós.
4. Passacaglia
Són dotze consols al palau
mentre és el rei amb la regina. 65
Són dotze consols aplegats,
mantenedors de libertats.
Casca s'estira i mai somriu:
en llurs mantells passen, drapats
de fulla morta o vell caliu.
Vénen darrera d'ells, 70
triats en els castells
o en les botigues tenebroses,
dotze burgesos i senyors
de menes poderoses,
homes notables de consell, 75
passa solemne i gris cabell.
Hi ha dotze dames molt galans
amb una pau serena;
fan uns sospirs dolços i blans
de la tendresa que els emplena. 80
Dotze donzelles van seguint
amb la mirada empegueïda,
i cadascuna és bella;
la més ardidada
no gosa alçar la cella. 85
Hi ha dos notaris,
negre vellut de gravetat,
l'oficial
episcopal
amb dos canonges al costat, 90
i en seguiment, quatre homes d'ordre
que mig amaguen llur posat,
molt taciturns de santedat.
5. Coral
Tots s'agenollen lentament;
duu cadascu son ciri ardent. 95
—Fem ara, doncs, oració—
diu un canonge amb veu pausada.
—Que la folgança que hem parada
ens sigui causa de perdó.
Preguem, que l'hora és arribada, 100
com diu el llibre del Senyor:
'Cau la rosada
en la blancura del velló'.⁴
Amén.
- And that night it was ordered
that in that bed 55
which the king imagined to be a bed of sin,
raging and senseless with passion as he was,
the queen should be,
that innocent lady of virtue,
with her lips sealed, 60
and her head fair covered
in the darkness of the plot.
4. Passacaglia
Twelve are the consuls in the palace
while the king is with the queen. 65
Twelve are the consuls all in all,
guardians of the city's rights.
Each one walks erect and never smiles:
in their cloaks they go by, shrouded
in dead leaves or cold ashes.
Behind them there come, 70
selected from the castles,
or the dark little shops,
twelve burgeses and gentlemen
of powerful kinds, 75
eminent council members,
it is a solemn procession with grey hair.
There are twelve very gracious ladies
radiating serene peace;
they sigh sighs which are sweet and soft
from the tenderness which fills them. 80
Twelve damsels follow on
with eyes averted out of modesty,
and each of them is beautiful;
even the most passionate
does not dare to raise an eyebrow. 85
There are two notaries,
black in the velvet of gravity,
the judge
of the bishop's court
with two canons by his side, 90
and after them, four monks
who half hide their expressions,
very silent in their holiness.
5. Chorale
They all kneel slowly down;
each one has his candle burning bright. 95
'So let us pray now',
says one of the canons with measured
words.
'For the bit of fun we have contrived
may we be pardoned.
Let us pray, for the hour is come, 100
as the Lord's Book says,
"The dew falls
upon the whiteness of the fleece".⁴
Amen'.

4 Judges, 6:36.

2) A Note on the Music

David Drew

NO-ONE familiar with the Gerhard of the *Catalan Folksongs*, *Don Quixote*, or *The Duenna* should have any difficulty in guessing the authorship of the *Cantata*. Admittedly, its stylization of Catalan popular idioms owes a little to the declamatory writing of Falla's *Master Peter's Puppet Show*; but it owes very much more to the already typically Gerhardian tonal and free-tonal harmony of the folksong arrangements. The rhythm and modality of the opening flute solo, and of the soprano aria (no. 2) which is derived from it, are clearly of folk origin. But whether in its unaccompanied or in its dissonantly harmonized form, the theme instantly calls to mind the second of Gerhard's 12-note serial *Impromptus* of 1950.

Of the serial methods and the (intermittent) Viennese flavour of the Wind Quintet there is no trace whatsoever in the *Cantata*. The 12 'consuls', the 12 'burgesses and gentlemen', the 12 'very gracious ladies', and the 12 'damsels' of the Passacaglia's 'solemn procession' do, however, walk on a 15-note ground which omits only one note from the total chromatic field (and presents the other 11 without repetition after the initial 4). Until the final 'Chorale', the strong D_h tendency of the ground is restrained in every way—not least by the fact that the absentee from the 12-note set is C. Although traditional tonal functions are attenuated, the harmony of the *Cantata* is saturated with major triads, and at times uncannily anticipates some of the harmonic conclusions Britten was later to draw from Stravinsky.

The structure of the *Cantata* is arranged symmetrically around the central 'Follia', with the thematic links between the first two movements consolidated and completed in the last two. The very first page of the 'Introduccio' exposes the fundamental dialectic: on the one hand folk-modal monody, on the other, emancipated dissonance. In the ensuing 'Litany', Gerhard superposes the two modes with a starkly hieratic effect that seems to ignore the ironies to come, but actually serves to heighten them. The soprano's subsequent prayer for fertility ('Divino') strikes an altogether gentler note.

In the central 'Follia', the baritone solo plays Pandarus to the King in solemn accents borrowed from the litanies of the Governing Council of Montpellier. It is the orchestra that gives the game away with its breathlessly licentious accompaniment. But when the chorus describes what the King has in mind, the music turns to honour his spurned Queen in her courtly role as 'the innocent lady of virtue'. In this beautiful passage, Gerhard seems to be looking forward to the world of his *Don Quixote* and specifically to the Don's 'Vigil at Arms'. The movement ends, nevertheless, with a return to the King's amorous fancies—scurrying semiquavers, timpani heartbeats, two gasps from the solo viola . . . (4)

It is a nice conceit that the 'Passacaglia' pretends sternly to disavow such wantonness, while the 'Chorale' tries—though not too hard—to veil the poem's priapic imagery. Boccaccio himself could not have imagined a more perfectly equivocal conclusion than the serene D_h major of the final cadence, wherein the Passacaglia's chromatic theme at last achieves its quietus. Since history relates that the King was well pleased with the trick that had been played upon him, it is entirely proper that Gerhard's closing amens should celebrate, with wit but quite without parody, so devoutly desired a consummation.

With such mastery does the *Cantata* create its own time and space that the evidence of a stop-watch will seem incredible: the fact remains that the work lasts less than a quarter of an hour! Although Gerhard in the 1960's considered expanding the *Cantata* for performance by the Cambridge University Music Society—presumably with an eye to passages from the later sections of Carner's poem—it is easy to understand why the project came to nothing. The *Cantata* is manifestly complete in itself, and its completeness is an achievement that Gerhard was not to match again for many years. Though certainly a minor work by his later standards, it has presence enough to take its place comfortably in the repertoire, and in programmes that might also include a greater cantata—a Bach, for instance, or even a Webern. One hopes that the contractual problems which have hitherto stood in the way of its performance will soon be resolved.

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ROBERTO GERHARD

Albada, Interludi i Dansa for orchestra (1936)

Ariel ballet (1934)

El Barberillo de Lavapiés arrangement and orchestration of the zarzuela
by Fernando Barbieri (1954)

Cancionero de Pedrell eight songs for high voice and chamber orchestra
(or piano) (1941)

Canciones Toreras for medium voice and orchestra (1943)

6 Catalan Folksongs for high voice and orchestra (or piano)
(1928, orch. 1931)

Chaconne for solo violin (1959)

Don Quixote ballet (1950)

Don Quixote: Symphonic Suite No.2 for orchestra (1947)

Dances from Don Quixote for orchestra (or piano) (1954)

3 Impromptus for piano (1955)

Lamparilla operetta freely derived from *El Barberillo de Lavapiés* (1956)

Soirees de Barcelone music from the ballet (1938)

Spanish Light Music fantasias on and orchestrations of zarzuela material,
for orchestra, including **Cádiz, Gigantes y Cabezudos, and**
La Viejecita (all c. 1943)

String Quartet No.1 (1955-6)

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