

issues of Basque solidarity, and had (not unlike their Irish counterparts) reserves of sympathy “across the border” (that is, in Southern France). They were not going in for the delusions of misty Marxist utopias, but trusting to the grim persuasiveness which only a dozen midnight explosions, in a dozen little Spanish villages, could command. Above all, they had learned from all the propaganda techniques of the other European terrorists how to use the media, how to adapt their information strategy to the needs of the TV camera, to the deadlines of the newspapers, and indeed to the moral vulnerabilities of a free press desperate to be fair and objective.

“Why should I publish their *communiqués*, the way all of our other newspapers do?” shouted one Spanish editor from Navarre (who happened to be sitting next to me, having just got out of hospital)—“They pumped 29 bullets into me! . . .”

This was the most sensitive nerve of the Toledo debate. Could the new Spanish democracy afford the trained coolness of the BBC whose London political director (Mr Richard Francis) preached “neutrality” to them as between the police and the terrorists? Did an editor and journalist have a public responsibility to law and order, or only an

absolute commitment to get the story and tell it? What was the greater danger—the social chaos and anarchy of bombster successes, or the government’s insistence on press “cooperation” and even, perhaps, self-censorship?

ALL THEIR neighbours to the North, with decades and centuries of democratic reserves, had it fairly easy; Spain’s new open society was untested and now being sorely tried. The Spanish press was zealous for its recently-won freedom to report as it pleased, to “publish and be damned.” Spain’s freely-elected officials were deeply worried that their post-Franco democracy might prove damnably ungovernable.

The friends-of-the-terrorists whom I watched and listened to around the Toledo round-table seemed to sense that here was a nice opening that would prove very useful. For here, as everywhere else, freedom distrusts authority and the independent press is locked in a class struggle with democratic government.

“What’s wrong”, said one Basque representative to me, picking up fast the “dialectical” weaknesses of the open society, “with our learning how to use these contradictions? . . .”

Catch as catch can

Catch as catch can what’s asking to be caught
Or else be beaten to it by the bell.
Hardly a day passes without that thought.

Trammelled in tenses, snagged by could and ought,
The careful trekker cannot very well
Catch as catch can what’s asking to be caught,

For what comes gratis, and what must be bought,
And what the long-term cost is, who can tell?
Hardly a day passes without that thought.

Old knots defy untying; guy-ropes, taut,
Stay one securely. Anglers up the fell
Catch as catch can what’s asking to be caught:

To make a killing from an artful sport
They cast fine long lines like a subtle spell.
Hardly a day passes without that thought

As good scouts plod to their prosaic hell.
So can the weaver of a villanelle
Catch as catch can what’s asking to be caught?
Hardly a day passes without that thought.

Jonathan Price

Ruth Silcock

Christmas Shopping

Christmas. Two sisters shop together.
They always do. They always have.
They always meet at ten, and wave
And smile and rush and kiss and hug.
Both make complaints against the weather,
While each feels warm and safe and snug.

Then side by side, through crowds and snow,
Heads down, bags clutched, they push and shove.
Angels swing in the air above,
Stars clank on lamp-posts, banners beat
High over Selfridge's. Below
The sisters quarter Oxford Street.

From shop to shop, from store to store,
They pass through fashions, linen, toys,
Bedding, hats, carpets, men's wear, boys'—
Blazers, pyjamas, socks and ties.
The elder sister likes this floor.
The younger sister stops and sighs.

The younger sister's list is long,
For parents, husband, colleagues, friends.
She ticks and thinks and counts and spends
And asks Louise to hurry up.
Louise, the elder, stands among
Boys' sports, holding a football cup.

It always happens, every year,
When twelve has struck yet nothing's done,
When Jane (the younger) wants to run
Past counters, pluck up presents, pack
Her shopping-bag with Christmas cheer—
That Louise dawdles, drags, hangs back

To finger racks of flannel-suits,
To test a cricket-bat, to try
How school-caps look, to knot a tie,
To study badges, price a box
Of braces, measure football-boots
And touch the woollen football socks.

So, every year, they compromise.
Jane leads the way and clears her lists.
Then they eat lunch, while Jane insists
That now Louise's turn has come.
They swallow coffee and mince pies,
Then head for boys' wear, tea and home.

Loaded with packets, parcels, rolls
Of wrapping-paper for each gift,
They reach the lobby, take the lift
Down to the second floor, the racks
Of flannel suits. Louise patrols
Past jeans and shorts and anoraks:

She is a guard on sentry-go,
A scout, a fag, a midshipman:
Alert, a look-out quick to scan
Wide oceans; pilot, athlete, cox;
Wing, half-back, full-back, forward—so
Warm in striped white and scarlet socks.

Jane reads the paper, files her nails,
Does her accounts, takes off her shoes,
Remembers trains, pretends to choose
Shirts for a nephew, gazes out
At Oxford Street where sleety gales
Whirl stars and angels round about.

Louise cannot make up her mind.
She never has. She never will.
She hesitates forever. Chill
Mirrors of ageing women show
She is too late. But Jane is kind.
"Tea-time", she says, "before we go."

They always separate at five,
But first they have their Christmas tea.
With buttered fingers, they agree
How nice it's been. It always is.
Nothing must change. While they're alive
Each keeps the other safe by this.