The alloy between urbanity and the aesthetic avant-garde has been one of the most common binomials in the writing of the history of contemporary Catalan literary culture, as well as one of the most complex.¹ The problematic nature of this alloy comes not only from its constructed nature but also from the exclusions it entails, the most important of which is the implicit denial of non-urban space as a locus of research and disruption. This essay aims to first question the operativity of the city/progress and rural/tradition associations as applied to contemporary Catalan creation, and secondly to examine what the construction of the link between urbanity and modernity has excluded: forms of performative poetry that forge a new relationship with the non-urban space by re-using (or re-appropriating) its romantic aura to turn it into a scene of inquiry. The works of the poet and artist Perejaume, which unfold in the multiform realms of a new ruralism with avant-garde underpinnings, will be the testing ground for my reflections.

Early twentieth-century Noucentisme was viewed as an urban, citified current that strove for an updating of Catalan culture and society in contrast to the rural patriotism embodied by the late nineteenth-century authors of the Renaixença and Modernisme. In many writings on art and literature of recent decades, the city has been regarded as the natural place for the gestation and development of discourses of social protest and aesthetic experimentation. Thus, the underground poetry from the 1970s and the post-modern narrative from the 1980s, as well as the polypoetry that emerged in the 1990s,² have been viewed as intrinsically urban phenomena. In the 1970s, La Rambla and Plaça Reial, both in Barcelona’s old quarter, were the backdrop of mobilizations against the Franco regime and its aftermath, as well as the site of ludic actions by the heroes of the countercultural movements, such as
the multifaceted artist Ocaña and the underground illustrator and cartoonist Nazario. In the 1980s, Balmes Street, the main artery running through the bourgeois Eixample neighborhood, was the privileged setting of stories by Quim Monzó; the Bar Glaciar, right on Plaça Reial, witnessed the first polypoetic encounters held in the 1990s, in which authors like Carles Hac Mor, Josep Ramon Roig, Benet Rossell, and Xavier Sabater participated. On several occasions, Lis Costa has mentioned the “public poetry” that emerged in Barcelona two decades ago, a kind of poetry written to be performed live in front of an audience more than to be consumed in the traditional format of a publication on paper for private reading. In his words to present the first Proposta Festival, the polypoet Eduard Escoffet claimed: “Barcelona has established a very particular relationship with poetry. Despite being a minority sector, the audience gathered by poetry readings is always numerous; and more remarkable yet is the fact that it leaves vast room for what could be called ‘the risk practices’ of poetry... Far from trying to create yet another focus of attention which would stump the previous ones, what we pretend with [this festival] is to complement Barcelona’s poetry landscape.” The capital of Catalonia has thus become the prime venue for poetic performance – not just in Catalonia but in Spain as a whole.

The term “Barcelona model,” which authors like Horacio Capel in the field of geographic criticism, Manuel Delgado in anthropology, and Joan Ramon Resina in cultural criticism have used to describe the metropolitan urbanism of the capital of Catalonia and the contradictions of the social system it generates, can be applied to literature as well to some extent. According to Delgado, the city has become a kind of top model, always perfectly coiffed, trained only to seduce, “monumentalized” for events like the 1992 Olympics or the Forum 2004, which painstakingly hides the marginalization and inequality in which certain population groups live – what Delgado calls, not without some misgivings, the “real Barcelona” (17). Similarly, the promotion – and institutionalization – of street culture and the performance that characterizes it, which was particularly strong in the era when the Socialist Party of Catalonia governed the city, has absorbed and citified such a wide range of propositions as the poetry of orality, actions, and video-poetry, presenting them as a unequivocal symptom (and compact sign) of modernity. These propositions, represented by events like the aforementioned Proposta Festival and the Barcelona Polypoetry Festival, have been permanently linked to an urban avant-garde. The specificity of the non-urban setting in which some of these expressions have emerged is thus relegated to the background. Furthermore, all of this took place at a time when the very country/city dichotomy ceased to function precisely because of the omnipresence of the urban. It has been noted that the fall of the Ancient Regime (which ended the legal differentiation between the urban and rural population), demographic growth, the Industrial Revolution, and the symbolic destruction of the city walls are the forerunners of an unquestionable fact: today the urban has spread so far and wide that we can only talk