

# The Unknown City



Jeroni Zanné

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“L’urbs ignota” [*The Unknown City*] (*Imatges i melodies* [Images and Melodies], 1906), by Jeroni Zanné (1873-1934)<sup>1</sup>, an important poet in Catalan Modernism (a belated version of the Aesthetic Movement overlapping with Art Nouveau) is a descriptive poem that can be labelled epic fantasy. Even though what Zanné tells about this ‘unknown city’ could refer to any urban area in our world, the author places his city in a fantastic dimension, a fully imaginary and even supernatural universe. This is suggested by the fanciful, markedly symbolic details, such as the image of the city in ruins under the purple tatters or the fact

that Autumn and its ghostly twilight glow are permanent. The pagan, byzantine architecture, and the list of vices of the physically refined dwellers, stress the decadent air of the city, following fin-de-siècle fashions. Nonetheless, the last tercet introduces true love as one more element in the city of hatred and envy, so that the unknown city itself appears to be simultaneously a physical and moral enigma. The unknown side of the city seems to derive above all from the contradictory nature of the human passions it harbours, sumptuously presented by Zanné within the framework of a sonnet.

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<sup>1</sup> The translation offered below is based on the following edition: Jeroni Zanné, “L’urbs ignota”, *Poesia original completa*, preface by Abraham Mohino i Balet, introductory study by Martí Duran i Mateu, Barcelona, Trípode, 2019, p. 274.

Jeroni Zanné

## The Unknown City

Living mummy of an ultra-real world, the City is.  
Gothic are the houses, pagan, byzantine.  
Trembling stand by miracle the ruins  
Covered in old tatters of imperial purple.

There, lust, envy and the dagger reign,  
Everywhere subtle narcotics and poisons slide in.  
The ovals are perfect, the hands long and thin;  
Matrons and maidens have a feral something.

The Spring does not laugh. A wilted Autumn  
And a grey, ugly sepulchre of long, strange life  
With their glow swamp forever the fatal City.

The hatred, the miseries, the cries faint  
With love, the melodies and kisses that bloom  
In the lips, are enigmas in the spectral glare.