

CATALAN WRITING

1

ON TRANSLATION

ACTIONS & VOICES

ON POETRY

ON STAGE

ON ESSAY

ON LINE

WORK IN PROGRESS

INTERVIEW

EDITORIAL NEWS

WHO'S WHO

FRANKFURT IN VIEW

The reissue of the new *Catalan Writing* is made possible by the joint efforts of Institut Ramon Llull and PEN Català

Chief editor: Dolors Oller

Editor: Carme Arenas

Editorial staff:

Oriol Izquierdo

Emilio Manzano

Ramon Pla i Arxé

Jaume Subirana

Carles Torner

Coordination and documentation:

Glòria Oller

Translation: Pauline Ernest

Design: Azuanco & Comadira

Printed by: Insòlit

Edited and distributed by:

PEN Català

Canuda, 6-5è

08002BARCELONA

T 93 318 32 98

pen@pencatala.cat

www.pwncatala.cat

winter 2007



Retaining its former title, but with a different layout and tone, *Catalan Writing* expresses our continuing desire to show that we are still very much alive and kicking. For centuries, our writers and their work have played their part in the creation of Europe's cultural heritage and through our Catalan language we consider ourselves to be the heirs of those foundational narratives which have contributed to the development of the European Imagination. The three great Catalan chronicles of the Medieval era guarantee our status as a nation after the period of the Carolingian Empire and the personal story of King Jaume I is testimony to an already highly sophisticated subjective voice which reflects our history and the per durability of a specific way of life. Like Dante in Italy, Ramon Lull was the inspired spirit who founded a Catalan which

was both literary and eloquently colloquial. He also managed to construct a literary space within the Western Roman Empire which has produced poetical, narrative, legal and social texts, all providing documentary evidence of the existence of a specific history which forms part of European history.

Today, Catalan is still a language which is alive in Catalonia, the Balearic Islands, Valencia, Andorra and also, to a lesser extent, in the Rosellon region of France and in Alguer in Italy. We therefore cover a wide linguistic domain and possess a language which goes far beyond states and their political interests. Despite its different forms and the varied denominations attributed to it by interested parties, our language offers an arena where our spirit can manifest itself and express our essential being, using a specific code and differential relations.

The aim of this paper is thus to be a channel for the literary manifestation of this spirit. However, although our tradition and vocation inevitably make us aware of our written heritage, this revised publication also responds to a specific contemporary need: the need to communicate, to become well-known, to publicise the work of the literary system within Catalonia, the society on which it is based and the individuals who work within it, while also establishing links with other voices and other aspects of the global and international literary system. We would like this new *Catalan Writing* to become a source of reference and information which is flexible, consistent and thought provoking, with a sound critical approach but also a sense of humour and an awareness of the intrinsic relative nature of all aesthetic phenomena.

The two institutions promoting and supporting this initiative: Pen Català and the Institut Ramon Llull trust that this new edition will be well received and look forward to a period of long term collaboration. They are confident that the active participation of all those involved in our literary system will guarantee the production both of the content and of the conditions needed to guarantee the continued success of *Catalan Writing*.



LITERARY SOCIETY

The creation of the new Grup 62, a result of the merger of the 3 publishing houses hitherto known as Planeta, Fundació Enciclopèdia Catalana and the former Grup 62, is an event which is extremely important for the future of Catalan publishing. The new initiative will include the following publishers: Columna, Planeta, Destino i Timun Mas (from the Planeta group), Proa, Pòrtic i Mina (from Enciclopèdia Catalana) i Empúries, 62 and Selecta (from grup 62).

It is hoped that the increased market potential generated by this venture will have positive effects for the whole publishing sector and we look forward to seeing the financial benefits generated throughout 2007, the first year of the new project. The new Grup 62 covers approximately 50% of the market quota, a percentage which clearly increases if we include the literary prizes controlled by the newly amalgamated publishing houses, in this figure.

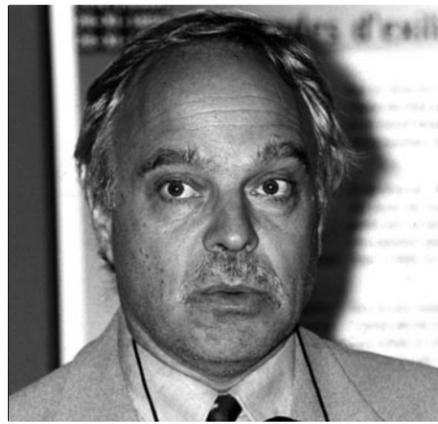
It should be noted that according to the Spanish ISBN Agency 9,460 titles were registered in Catalan in 2005. 7,703 titles (81.4 per cent) were in the original version and 1,757 (18.6 per cent) were translations. The most frequently translated languages were Spanish (658 titles), English (535) French (224) and German (228).

The amount of ISBN registers over the past 5 years shows a clear increase in the number of texts published in Catalan during this period: 2001 (7,682 titles), 2002 (8,068), 2003 (9,226), 2004 (8,855), reaching a total of 9,460 titles in 2005.

ACTIONS & VOICES

During much of the twentieth century, Catalan poetry was burdened by its position at the very centre of literary creation and cultural activity. Thus, after the initial efforts to normalize the use of Catalan with the creation of the Institute of Catalan Studies in 1907, it was primarily the poets who continued efforts to re-establish the language, the struggle centring on the verbal ingenuity of Josep Carner and the songs and ballads of Josep M. de Sagarra. Later, after the Civil War and during Franco's dictatorship, poets from Carles Riba to Salvador Espriu and Joan Vinyoli, became points of reference in the process of cultural resistance and civic disobedience. In the 1950s, this was highlighted even further by the consolidation of 'engagée' tendencies and direct political involvement from within literary society. Despite the complex situation, the virulent power of the poetry itself enabled it to prevail and as a result, the value of the language and its subversive capacity were re-established against all prejudice, both for society but also, and especially, for the individual. The renewed relevance, towards the middle of the century, of the work of J.V. Foix or Gabriel Ferrater and Jordi Sarsanedas, the explorations of Joan Brossa or the popularity of Miquel Martí i Pol, is perhaps another sign of the triumph of poetry at a time when the re-established democratic forces and growing social and cultural normalization processes were enabling it to regain its natural place in society.

The work of Francesc Parcerisas, Pere Gimferrer, Narcís Comadira, Maria Mercè Marsal, and Enric Casassas fits into this period, though offering greater breadth due to his inexhaustible interest in experimentation and poetical energy.



INTERVIEW

FRANCESC PARCERISAS:

Maturity, that wonderful extra bit

Jaume Subirana

Focs d'octubre/October Fires, by Francesc Parcerisas (Begues, 1944) has recently been translated into French, published by Écrits des Forges and will soon appear in Spanish. Parcerisas has recently published *Dos dies més de sud/Two more days of South* which has received excellent critical reviews and confirmed his position as one of our most important Catalan poets.

When and how did you discover your vocation as a poet?

I don't think I have ever felt a 'vocation'. I've always liked writing and little by little I found I was writing poetry. That was when I was a teenager, about 15 to 17 years old and mainly when I began university in 1961. My friends seemed to like the first poems I wrote and then older people I knew also started encouraging me and I immediately felt comfortable with the writing. Then, when I won the odd prize I didn't even question whether I really wanted to write something else, which anyway, would probably have been prose.

Many people who talk about you see you as an anglophile: in your work, how important for you are local Catalan and also international references?

I was lucky – it was absolute chance, by the way – to go to England at the beginning of the sixties when I was pretty young, to make friends and to get married there. The world that opened up for me was amazing and very much unknown. With lots of freedom and different points of reference. I had been brought up, like the rest of my generation, with France and French culture as our reference points. But English was like discovering another planet. I then lived in England from 1969 to 1972 and much later, from 1989 to 1990 I spent another year in London. And knowing the language enabled me to move over to the US, which I also know pretty well (my sons are half-American). I think that differences and distances are really important for all the new things they bring you and also because they give you a perspective and help you judge your own culture

You work as a teacher in a Faculty of Translation and you have done a great deal of translation yourself (including the work of poets such as Pound or Heaney): what do you think translation brings to ones own personal poetical work?

As has often been said, translation is the way you read most profoundly. Translation is a double operation: deep understanding and recodification in another language. It's both a microscope and a telescope at the same time, and that's how it should be. It would be good if all writers had to undergo the discipline of translating. I've learnt a lot from it and it's also helped me to be able to analyse other texts which I haven't had to translate.

What kind of relationship do you have to your own language, Catalan?

Language is the pith of literature and it's also a way of "seeing" or at least of "saying" the world. Translators are incredibly conscious of this. Catalan is the language I have heard at home (where we also speak Castilian, as my mother is from Asturias) and the language I've always associated with the world of culture and respect. I believe that the language is the backbone of the culture. But the situation of the language, in the Global world and without a state, is very weak. I sometimes wonder, and I've also expressed this in public, whether it will still be around in one or two generations from now. It's a question of survival, of critical mass, of ecology.

Your book *L'edat d'or/The Golden Age* was and still is a reference point for Catalan poetry of the eighties: what's happened in the period between *'l'Edat d'or* (1983) and *Dos dies més de sud* (2006)?

Well, more than 20 years and a whole lot of personal "maturing" have gone by. In *l'Edat d'or* the world is still positive even though it's coming to an end. In the latter books the viewpoint is more individual, more solitary and also from book to book, more complex because things are less certain. *L'Edat d'or* could probably be considered a book which speaks for a whole generation (those brought up during the Franco era, strugglers who, for good or bad, reached a point of maturity and responsibility during the Transition. *Dos dies més de Sud* is written more from the viewpoint of an individual faced with a personal and collective world which is frequently hostile and fragmented. But this individual is also lots of people: nearly everyone, I think, is like him.

The title '*Dos dies més de sud*' is from a line by Rilke

It's from a poem by Rilke translated by Joan Vinyoli. Interestingly, what I found most startling was the way Vinyoli was able to translate "south" as a qualitative noun. It's a free translation which isn't present in other translations and it's perhaps not exactly the same as the original. But the line and the whole of Rilke's poem talks about the need for a little extra dose of good will so that what is good can be "made even better". He's asking for a "little bit more of ..." and he goes on to say something like: 'If you haven't got a really solid base, you can't move on'. In this sense the book also manages to push home the point that whatever already stands unquestioned could be improved perhaps simply by hammering in any extra nail or offering just one more caress. For me, as a writer, 'south' is the need to be rigorous and demanding with ourselves.

ON POETRY

“If Robert Frost had grown up during a civil war he might have written like this. (...) Like Wordsworth, Ferrater endeavours to keep his reader in the presence of flesh and blood. But like other exemplary artists of his own century, he keeps his gaze steady and his faith in the staying of art, unyielding even when flesh and blood have to quail and fall.” (Seamus Heaney)

The reader

Among the objects of the world, among the few objects I have clung to, there is a paperknife: a short ivory blade, naked to my hand, which turns brown or pale according to the light of days and places. After twenty years I come across it in my pocket and don't remember who it was who gave me it. Its edge is jagged, many a time I've picked it off the floor in some room of mine or between feet after paying for a night in a bar. It has cut thousands of pages: memories, lies of other men (though hardly any women). And I don't remember who it was who gave me it. I cannot fabricate another memory, someone's hand.

El lector

Entre els objectes del món, entre el pocs objectes que he agafat, hi ha un tallapapers: un fulla curta de marfil, nua per als meus dits, que se'm torna rossa o pàlida segons la llum dels dies i dels llocs. després de vint anys me'l retrobo dins la butxaca, i no recordo qui me'l va donar. Ocat: moltes vegades l'he collit de terra dins una cambra meva, o bé d'entremig de peus després de pagar la nit d'un bar. M'ha obert milers de pàgines: records, mentides d'altres homes (però de ben poques dones). I no recordo qui me'l va donar. No puc fabricar un altre record, la mà d'algú.

Gabriel Ferrater, *Women and Days*, Arc Publications, 2004.

Translated by Arthur Terry. Introduction by Seamus Heaney

WORK IN PROGRESS



MARIA BARBAL

Born in Tremp (Pallars) in 1949, Maria Barbal has been living in Barcelona since 1970.

Since the success of her first novel *Pedra de tartera/ Fallen Stone* (1985), re-edited 50 times and translated into 4 languages (Transit Verlag will shortly be publishing the German version), she has published six novels and three collections of short stories and has won several important literary prizes. She is one of the most widely read writers in Catalonia at the present time.

Extract from the novel she is currently writing:

After I'd managed to push the key deep into the lock, I realised it had got stuck. I finally managed to see your Grandma's head as she cautiously opened the door and I realised from the expression on her face that she would have liked to close it again without hearing what I had to say. I suppose I must have stunk a bit; she let me in and I saw my big suitcase in the hallway: "Here're your things..." I asked her how you and Alexandre were doing. You were both OK and the way she looked at me showed that as far as she was concerned, I'd never be forgiven for what I'd done. The only possible way I could return to that house was by going back to how I'd been before. I'd have to forget my little 'adventure' and not leave the house, since I hadn't known how to use my freedom properly. You know I couldn't have accepted that, even if I'd been 12 years old.

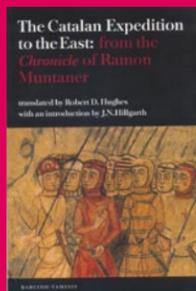
The next time I entered the building Francisco came out to meet me with the suitcase that I'd refused to take from your Grandma. He'd look after my post for me, he said, trying to make up a bit for the way he'd first said: "There's no-one in". At that time, I still looked clean; I had a room in a little hotel and I'd tidied myself up that day. It was the first time that he looked me up and down as if to say: now we're equals, you don't live here any more so if you want anything you'll have to pay for it! I told him he could keep the case.

At work I'd had to put up with Mr Toll's furious outburst. What the hell had I been thinking? That I could just go off without saying anything and come back when I felt like it? No, he wouldn't accept that kind of behaviour. People knew who I'd gone off with, too. He'd stood up and come close to me as if he wanted to check for himself that he didn't have a kind of wooden doll sitting in front of him. "I knew your father, Marina, and I'd never have imagined that you....."

My father was a serious man and I was the friendliest guide of all the travel agencies in town; I was Miss Guide, the Marina Desirée. When I'd gone into the boss's office it had reminded me of when I'd met Denis and unfortunately, when Mr. Toll started speaking I started day dreaming before I could tell him what I'd come to say: that I wanted to apologise and that I needed to go on working; I needed the job more than ever. I must have been smiling because suddenly I realised he had come up really close to me and was looking at me, in his matching trousers and jacket, through his thick glasses. His tie was the same green as the Mediterranean and when I looked at it I started smiling and daydreaming again. Marina Desirée opening a multi-coloured umbrella. And then suddenly I heard Mr Toll shouting, saying I wasn't well and needed to see a doctor; he wiped his forehead with a big, white, not very clean handkerchief as if this whole situation had meant him making an effort much greater than that needed for five board meetings one after the other. I'd always thought that Mr. Toll was the personification of what a calm person should be like.

I left his office and then, when I was going through Anna's section, she pretended she hadn't seen me and even though I'd been going straight to her table, I realised that I didn't have anything to say to her so I turned back. I didn't remember either, just then, that I had, in fact, come back to the office for another reason. And it was when Manel appeared - he'd help me - that I finally knew who was who. He smiled at me, his shining eyes inviting me out to lunch. I became the Marina Desirée again; in no time at all I'd be showing my tourists around my special, secret places, I'd be a success, I'd be at home, Àngels, in any street in the world

PUBLISHING NEWS



Ramon Muntaner

The Catalan Expedition to the East

English translation by Robert D. Hughes
Introduction by J.N. Hillgarth
Barcino/Tamesis
Barcelona/Woodbridge, 2006

This text by Muntaner, chronicler of the period at end of the XIII and the start of the XIV centuries, brings us soldiers, fighters, sea captains and merchants. It offers us all the ingredients to be found in current historical best-sellers, while simultaneously providing us with the authentic material of a classic of the medieval era who experienced the period first hand and recounts his tale in his usual sensitive and highly explicit style. Here, we see all the great historical places: Sicily, Constantinople, Greece, and Sardinia....a Mediterranean which is no longer with us but is accessible to us via the written word.



Eduard Marquéz

Silence of the Trees

German translation by Ilse Layer
Deutscher Taschenbuch
Munich, 2004

Written with an acutely sensitive ear, *Silence of the Trees* describes the siege of Sarajevo and the ways in which various characters find comfort and refuge in the arts: painting, music, literature, in order to overcome their fear of war. Through a series of letters, the author shows how the greatest human strengths can be expressed in a situation of the most terrible anguish and misery. Shocking, poetical, unforgettable images.



Ausiàs March

Pàgines del cancionero

Spanish translation by José M. Micó
Introduction and notes by Costanzo di Girolamo
Editorial Pre-textos
Madrid, Buenos Aires, Valencia, 2004

A bilingual edition of a work by an author considered to be 'the greatest lyrical poet of the XV century', perhaps because he was capable of expressing physical love in a manner more appropriate to our present time than his own. The Barcelona poet Josep M. Micó, a Classics specialist, provides a fine translation while the accompanying text by the Neapolitan professor Di Girolamo helps us understand the work of March, the great poet of the Medieval period.



Albert Sánchez Piñol

Nightlight

Dutch translation by Elly Bovée
Cossee Amsterdam, 2005

The strangest love story by Sánchez Piñol has now reached Holland. Let's hope the Dutch are ready for it! A detective arrives at a frozen desert island and meets a madman who has kidnapped a beautiful creature later to be rescued by her own species. Where is the line between reason and excess? Can passion and solitude exist alongside each other? Can we escape our destiny? Big questions for a novel that you won't be able to put down and you'll probably read from cover to cover in one go.

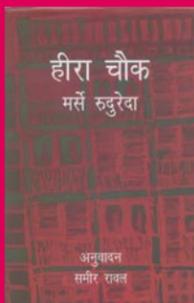


Jaume Cabré

His Lordship

French translation by Bernard Lesfargues
Christian Bourgois
Paris, 2004

Rafael Niassó, a member of the bourgeoisie living at the close of the eighteenth century, has just been appointed Civil Regent of the Barcelona High Court. Married to a devoted Catholic, his hobby is spying on young girls through his telescope. His first big challenge is to try and find the murderer of a French opera singer. The principal suspect? An idealistic poet. Through a variety of characters, the reader is led to question the impotence of the individual when faced with the indisputable forces of power. A contemporary theme, located in an ambitious, mean-spirited Barcelona made up of social classes clearly antagonistic to each other. This translation was awarded the 2004 Méditerranée prize.



Mercè Rodoreda

Diamond Square

Hindi translation by Sameer Rawal
Confluence International
New Delhi, 2005

This emblematic text by our most frequently translated author (invariably referred to in the masculine, of course) is now available in most bookshops throughout India. La Colometa thus relives her shattered love for Quimet and with the same desperate determination tries to rebuild her life, which has been destroyed by the war. A contemporary classic dealing with a universal theme: survival, seen from a balcony full of pigeons in the Gràcia neighbourhood of Barcelona.

FRANKFURT ON WIEW

A clear, determined institutional decision to showcase literature written in Catalan in Frankfurt 2007 cannot aim either to be a mirage or to conceal reality. Reality indicates that many Catalan writers have made significant contributions to the corpus of literature written in Spanish and moreover, that the latter constitutes the bulk of the work produced by the powerful Catalan publishing industry. A decision such as this is recognition that Frankfurt, a cyclical (and also ephemeral) shop window on the international publishing world, provides us with a unique opportunity to try and correct a serious cultural anomaly within the context of the reality which is Europe: the lack of knowledge of the existence of a past literary tradition and a present still very much alive today, in a Romanic language which is more than eight centuries old. Frankfurt must signify the reestablishment of artistic creation in Catalan, with the latter taking its rightful place as the language of a specific culture, and also the renovation of its position as a natural, cultural force in the eyes of the international publishing community. At the same time, Frankfurt must recognise and have the will to demonstrate that this creativity, whether literary, humanistic or scientific, extends much further than just one political administration. The domain .cat is open, multiple, flexible and crosses all frontiers. Frankfurt 2007 must show this to the world for a few days. The real work of restitution however, began many years ago and will continue for a very long time.

EMILIO MANZANO

ON LINE

Eight centuries online

<http://cultura.gencat.net/ilc/literaturacatalana800/>

'800 years of Catalan Literature' is the title of the exhibition that the Catalan Arts Institution (*Institució de les Lletres Catalanes*) has shown in 29 different countries over the past seven years. An elegant, synthetic version of this introduction to eight centuries of Catalan Literature is now available in digital format. Currently in English and Catalan it will shortly be available in 8 other languages including Spanish, French, Italian, Portuguese, Russian and Swedish.

Invitation to the Fair

<http://www.frankfurt-book-fair.com/>

This site, coordinated by the Ramon Lull Institute, provides introductory and updated information on the organising team, the timetable and press coverage of the Frankfurt fair. In Catalan, Spanish, English and German.

Translators, protagonists

<http://www.pencatala.cat/ctdl/>

The PEN Catalan Committee of Translation and Linguistic rights has an important portal focussing on the essential role of translators, which is divided into three sections: 'Translations of Catalan literature', 'Universal literature in Catalan' and 'Translators' corner'. In Catalan, Spanish, English and German.

"Lletra" in English and Spanish

<http://www.lletra.net> (english) <http://www.lletra.com> (spanish)

The portal on Catalan literature of the Open University of Catalunya (UOC) which has become a reference point on the Internet, is now also available in English and Spanish.