EDITORIAL

An international showcase for Catalan literature

The appearance of the second issue of Catalan Writing in this exciting phase of its existence—coinciding with the 2007 Frankfurt Book Fair at which Catalan culture was guest of honour—is a good opportunity to encourage readers to discover more about our literature and explore it deeper. Catalan literature and the great variety of works written in the Catalan language in its different territories—from Barcelona to Mallorca and from Perpignan to Andorra and Valencia—has a remarkably rich history, and has contributed a considerable number of men and women writers to the body of world literature from its beginnings to the present day. Starting with Ramon Llull, the first person to use a Romance language for literary creation and ideas, and continuing to today’s writers like Quim Monzó, Baltasar Porcel, Francesc Mira, Carme Riera and Pere Gimferrer—the five writers of diverse styles and genres who presented our wide-ranging literary programme at the Frankfurt Book Fair—Catalan literature has had a role in shaping European history. The early classics laid a foundation with the medieval novel Tirant lo Blanc and works by the poet Ausiàs March. They were followed by the modern classics by such writers as Josep Maria de Sagarra, Josep Pla, Mercè Rodoreda and Salvador Espriu, who were also at the Fair in literary events and, most significantly, with a greater profusion of works translated this year into German, English and other languages than ever before.

Catalan literature is one of the oldest of Europe, but, in addition to this glorious history, it has also maintained its essence of modernity, creativity and talent. High sales figures and an enthusiastic critical reception in recent years, and at Frankfurt in particular, of novels like Albert Sánchez Piñol’s La pell freda (Cold Skin), or Maria Barbal’s Pedra de tartera (Mountain Scree) encourage us to keep striving to enhance the international presence of the Catalan language and culture.

JOSEP BARGALLÓ
Director of the Ramon Llull Institute
**Interview**

Sergi Belbel: Director of the National Theatre of Catalonia (TNC) and the Catalan playwright with the most works in translation and performed abroad. He just returned from New York where there was a reading of his play Millés (Mobile), a work that has been translated into English, Danish, German, French, Italian, Polish, Spanish and Turkish. This season he directed Angi Jofre’s play Els pitjors (In Debt) at the TNC and October will see the premiere of La Toscana (In Tuscany), his own most recent work, which has been translated into German and Italian.

“I prefer to turn my own work first, and after that other works of mine are performed. What contributes more, the experience of directing your work, or working to directing?”

Directing is an apprenticeship for working, more than the reverse. Directing enables one to go deeper into one’s work. I like directing comedy, Shakespeare or contemporary works, for example.

“Which works are on your list for directing?”

I prefer the Racine’s Phèdre, Shakespeare’s King Lear. I’ve never directed any Greek tragedy—my play Aeschylus, or Sophocles or Euripides, for example. And that’s something I’d like to do.

Do you go about writing, all your plays in the same way?

You could say that the time you spend working the play happens, which has been examined the last years, is the only play they have in common. Of course, play goes on to say. I’m not sure if I think a lot before writing and others, like La Toscana, which wasn’t yet set down, I first start writing, I first think about to much, (smile). I just get into the process and I’m not longer, I just keep going. It’s like a river’s filling up and before it starts to spill over, it has to be converted. How are things in Catalan theatre at present?

It’s interesting, with many more new and popular audiences. We have public theatre, private theatre and alternative theatre. If you take this season’s list of premieres, you’ll see how many Catalan authors have been staged this year. This encourages the appearance of new people, who didn’t happen before. At the end of July and first of August this year, playwrights were rather out of it and most were regional as becomic actors were who had been transformed. There’s been a great change in the last few years.

In writing in Catalan is a limitation?

The language doesn’t affect the success of the project. What is theatre for you?

The language doesn’t determine the success of the project.

How would you like to achieve as director of the National Theatre?

Quality popular theatre, that everyone can see and where everyone can find something. It can be done. Shakespeare did it.

What would you like to achieve as director of the National Theatre?

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This play presents us with a portrait of contemporary Europe, a continent in transition and one replete with challenges and contradictions. Three men and two women are travelling through Europe by train. All of them hide desires and secrets they cannot confess and all of them will have to make decisions. The lives of these characters are interwoven and this means they will have to adjust their plans. The work is set in a remote village in Sweden and the plot is constructed around a curious time sequence. Carles Batlle is the director of the Obrador of the Sala Beckett in Barcelona, a space for experimentation, creation for the stagy, and where the theatrical review Pausa is based.

La vie en rose
Carles Batlle

Narcís Comadira

La teva extremitat (Enduring Life)
Edicions de l’Amandier

Josep M. Fonalleras

August i Gustau
Translation: Ed. Espai Naranja
2001

A solitary man, “without father nor mother nor genealogy” works in a museum. At home he listens to Tom Jones and works on jigsaw puzzel everyday. It is a reproduction of El Taller d’Apel·les, a canvas from 1870 by a Flemish painter. With this description of this painting, we face a man’s wominisme and obsessive story with the period after a present sensation of death. On All Saints Day in the bar “O pecado” he suffers love, enjoyment and goes from fantastic to delicious. In the same month, he meets two unique characters, August and Gustau with whom he shares his final days. August and Gustau is a play that seizes as much for its metatextual perspective as for its elegiac change in its anonymous voice that speaks with the personal simplicity of the Bible.

La vida de Aitana
Josep M. Benet i Jornet

Salambó
Editions de l’Amandier

A successful Californian film director is tackling his next project, from the security of his home. The work concerns his mother, his never-questioned nationality and the identity he has forged. Clinging to this certainty, he resists taking on another reality, one raised by people close to him, and in particular by a letter he does not dare to open because it is from his biological father whom he has never met. The play presents today’s great ideological debates: identity, cultural traditions, memory, and the destruction and preservation of nature. In this work, Benet i Jornet clearly sets out the consequences of oblivion.

Maria Barbal

Los dos niños del Centinela
(cannot find information)

A woman of about seventy years old and her youngest son, about forty, come together over lunch, and enter into an argument. In the course of their conversation, the spectator discovers the complex situation of this bourgeois family living in Catalonia in the mid-1970s. None of the mother’s children had the kind of life she considers proper and has wanted for them, especially her youngest. Also present is the memory of his husband who died twenty years earlier. The son resembles him, which disturbs the mother because when she had been confronted with the father’s scandalous conduct, she never forgave him and ended up destroying him. Comadira speaks of intolerance, lack of understanding, absence of respect for differences, lying and hiding the truth. Besides being a playwright, he is a poet and painter.

Montserrat Serra

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Jordi Calceran

El Mètode Grönholm
(The Grönholm Method)
Panorama plus Editions
Translation into Bulgarian by Neva Gueorguieva
2007

Four candidates, three men and a woman, show up for the final phase of a series of unconventional tests organised by a multinational company in order to select a senior executive. What are they prepared to renounce in order to get the job? El Mètode Grönholm is a caustic comedy whose humour is tinged with tension, intrigue and cruelty because Calceran takes a real-life situation to its limits, reflecting the conflicts of the workplace, its power struggles, the ferocious competition, and the abuses committed by companies. The play has been widely acclaimed by critics and audiences alike.

On Line

Teatre Nacional de Catalunya (National Theatre of Catalonia)
http://www.tnc.cat/ (website in Catalan and Spanish)

It is now ten years since Tony Kushner’s Angels in America (Angels in America) inaugurated the National Theatre of Catalonia, then under the directorship of Josep Maria Flotats. Over time it has developed a reputation of combining quality, a willingness to take aesthetic risks and the desire to provide first-rate service for the theatre-going public. The present director is the playwright Sergi Belbel.

Teatre Lliure
http://www.teatrellliure.com/ (website in Catalan, Spanish and English)

Created in 1976 by a group of professionals engaged in independent theatre, the Teatre Lliure was distinguished from the outset by its commitment to text-based theatre. With directors like Fabià Puigserver, Lluís Pasqual and Lluís Homar, key names in Catalan theatre circles, the Lliure was one of the founding members of the Union of Theatres of Europe. Since 2003, Àlex Rigola has headed the artistic direction of the theatre, which now works in concert with all the public entities and is located in a new venue, the former Palace of Agriculture on the slope of Montjuí.

Sala Beckett
http://www.salabeckett.com/ (website in Catalan and English)

The Sala Beckett theatre first appeared in 1989 as a space-cum-headquarters for the company, El Teatro Fronterizo, directed by José Sanchis Sinisterra. It has now become a benchmark for research-oriented proposals in the field of stage language and contemporary Catalan theatre in general. The present director is Toni Casares.

Misteri d’Elx (The Mystery of Elx)
http://www.lafesta.com/ (website in Catalan and Spanish)

The Festival or Mystery of Elx is a late-medieval reenactment of the death, assumption and crowning of the Virgin. It is sung in Catalan in the Church of Santa Maria in the town of Elx (in the Valencia region) on 14th and 15th August. The drama, in which the town’s residents participate, has been performed every year since the Middle Ages. It is the only performance in the world that has been declared a Masterpiece of Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity by UNESCO (2001).