

- 1947 Born in Barcelona.
- 1972 Degree in Catalan Philology. First stories published in different magazines.
- 1974 *Faules de mal desiar* (Ill-stowed Fables), Víctor Català Prize (1973).
- 1978 *Galceran, l'heroi de la guerra negra* (Galceran, Hero of the Black War) Joaquim Ruyra Prize (1978).
- 1978 *Carn d'olla* (Beef Stew), Fastenrath Prize (1980).
- 1979 Moves to live in Terrassa and works as a teacher.
- 1980 *El mirall i l'ombra* (The Mirror and the Shadow).
- 1984 *La teranyina* (The Spider's Web), Sant Jordi Prize (1983). Translated into Spanish (1984) and French (1985).
Fra Junoy o l'agonia dels sons (Brother Junoy or the Agony of Sounds) Prudenci Bertrana Prize (1983), Serra d'Or Prize (1985) and Spanish Critics' Prize (1985). Translated into Spanish in 1988. Hungarian translation forthcoming (2008).
- 1985 *Llibre de preludis* (Book of Preludes). Translated into Spanish (1989).
- 1988 Leaves his university professorship to write full time.
Writes the television series *La granja* (The Farm), the first long-running, state-wide television series. This is awarded the National Prize for Literature of the Government of Catalonia.
- 1991 *Senyoria* (Lordship). Joan Crexells Prize (1991), *El Temps* Prize (1992), Serra d'Or Prize (1992), Spanish Critics' Prize (1992) and the Prudenci Bertrana Prize (1992). In 2004 it was awarded the Prix Méditerranée de Littérature for the best foreign work translated into French. The novel has been translated into Spanish (1993), Hungarian (2001), Romanian (2002), Galician (2002), French (2004), Italian (2006) and Portuguese (2007).
- 1994 He writes the series *Estació d'Enllaç* (Junction Station) for Catalan television TV3. It was shown for five seasons, until 1999.
- 1996 *El llibre de Feixes* (The Feixes Book), a single volume consisting of the novels *La teranyina*, *Fra Junoy o l'agonia dels sons* and *Luvovski o la desraó* (Luvovski or Unreason). *Çl'ombra de l'eunuc* (The Shadow of the Eunuch), Ciutat de Barcelona Prize (1997), Serra d'Or Prize (1997) and Lletra d'Or Prize (1997). Translated into Hungarian (2004), Romanian (2004), French (2006) and Slovenian (2007).
- 1999 *El sentit de la ficció* (The Sense of Fiction), an essay on the creative process of writing.
- 2000 Appointed as a member of the Philological Section of the Institut d'Estudis Catalans (Institute of Catalan Studies).
Viatge d'hivern (Winter Journey), Serra d'Or Prize (2001).
- 2001 Premiere in the National Theatre of Catalonia of the play *Pluja seca* (Dry Rain).
- 2003 Awarded the Catalan Writers' Prize for his literary career.
- 2004 *Les veus del Pamano* (Voices from the River), Critics' Prize (2005) and El Setè Cel Prize (2006). Translated into Hungarian (2006), Spanish (2007), German (2007), Dutch (2007), Italian (2007). French, Romanian, Greek and Norwegian editions are forthcoming.
- 2005 *La matèria de l'esperit* (Material of the Spirit), an essay on literary reading.

Jaume Cabré: The Man Who Writes



Fotografia: LIC

Jaume Cabré

Jaume Cabré: The Man Who Writes

Simona Škrabec

Jaume Cabré (Barcelona, 1947) believes that apart from books, our times offer other possibilities of expression that the master of the pen can always use to his advantage. Cabré is a novelist but ventures into the domain of television scripts. The results have been the series *La granja* (The Farm), *Estació d'enllaç* (Junction Station) and *Crimis* (Crimes), along with several made-for-TV movies that have captured the attention of viewers for many years.

"Since I'm Landless Maurici, I had no obligation to History", says one of his characters. Rootless, with a scarred memory but too clear to become identified with one's own lineage, guilty of a multitude of disappointments – this is the space of the characters created by Jaume Cabré. His work constitutes a reflection on the place the individual occupies vis-à-vis History, with a capital H. Cabré is interested in the ideological divisions that endure from one generation to another and writes about the impossibility of preserving ideals in a corrupt and cynical world.

In Cabré's world, power struggles have been a constant since time immemorial and they always employ the same mechanisms. This is the focus of his novel *Senyoria* (Lordship, 1991). The title refers to the civilian regent of Barcelona, who was appointed to the post in the autumn of 1799, a few months before the turn of the century. Apart from offering a historical portrait of the period, the novel depicts, through a series of kaleidoscopic scenes, the spiritual condition of a fictitious character who does everything possible to spread his influence in the circles of power, and who has the authority to make others pay, even with their lives, for the errors he himself has committed. This focus on figures who abuse their authority who, in the past and through to this very day, shape the fortunes of many people has an unexpected twist. The abuser's passion for beautiful women will lead him to commit a crime. Thenceforth, he does not know what hell he has begun to enter.

In 1996, Cabré published *El llibre de Feixes* (The Feixes Book) a trilogy of the novels *La teranyina* (The Spider's Web, 1984), *Fra Junoy o l'agonia dels sons* (Brother Junoy and the Agony of Sounds, 1984), and the short novel *Luvovski o la desraó* (Luvovski or Unreason, 1985). Feixes, the city that appears in these novels, as well as in others, is a literary correlate of Terrassa, Cabré's adopted home.

Also in 1996, he produced another surprise, with an ambitious portrait of his generation in *L'ombra de l'eunuc* (The Shadow of the Eunuch), which consists of individual portrayals of characters who are unable to find their place in the world. Born not long after the Spanish Civil War, they bore the whole burden of the Franco dictatorship in their childhood and only woke up to adult life in May 1968, which was to have been the dawn of a better world. Some years later, however, the end of the regime did not bring the hoped-for changes. A farewell to revolutionary ideas and resigning to the fact that one must integrate into society closes this novel of broad sweep. The eunuch's shadow hovers throughout, personified in the main character, a man who is sensitive to beauty but unable to create it or to establish any kind of coherent relationship with a woman. The sense of failure, of a life that seems unable to bear fruit, brings with it pain that can only be assuaged with the abstract beauty of music and the other arts.

Apart from these works, which are the most translated of his books so far, one must also mention a collection of fourteen short stories titled *Viatge d'hivern* (Winter Journey, 2001). These stories of widely varying content and European settings, are pulled together by a web of themes, which might be summarised under one leitmotif: the struggle against oblivion and the summoning of the memory of Europe. The adventures and vicissitudes of the characters stimulate the reader to think about how to preserve both individual and collective memories.

The latest work in Jaume Cabré's prolific literary output is the novel *Les veus del Pamano* (Voices from the River), which offers a highly complex account of the Spanish Civil War. Like all wars that bring people who share the same space into confrontation, this one split them into two opposing sides, so that it seemed a society could only be represented by two colours. But Cabré shuns black-and-white portrayals and devotes all his attention to the shades of grey. He shows that personal motives, old wounds, character weakness and chance all draw the ideological frontier in a small Pyrenees village. The divide is so entrenched that it is not only used to justify armed conflict and persecution, but lasts for many years after the last shot is heard. Multiple narrative voices and a host of characters living in different periods enable Jaume Cabré to elaborate an impressive fresco of Catalan society after the Spanish Civil War.

Senyoria (Lordship, 1991)

“This novel, which reads like a classic, deals with the relationship between the individual and power, crime and punishment, and the infinite banality of the reasons that make people seek power. With the pretext of fiction, of a historical-detective novel, Cabré, a connoisseur of the depths of the human soul and gifted with an explosive sense of humour, presents the life that is constructed over the lies of an individual who has climbed to a high position, his secrets, his grubby desires, his vanity, his meanness, his corruption and his unscrupulous ambition. [...] This is how a contemporary classic is written.”

Európa Könyvkiadó [Budapest], 2001

“Don’t forget the name of this Catalan novelist because you’ll be hearing more of him. *Senyoria* is his first novel translated – and excellently translated – into French. The literary quality is extraordinary: a novel with learned intrigue full of tensions, long Proustian sentences alternated with dialogue, loaded with memories and inner monologues, with a masterly command of temporal movements and flashbacks, a knowing distinction between responses, giving life to some one hundred people, as Balzac did, and resuscitating, like Dumas, the feeling of long-gone times: Barcelona, from 1795 to 1800.”

Jean-Charles Gateau, “Vertiginous Barcelona”
Le temps [Geneva], 25 April 2004

L’ombra de l’eunuc (The Shadow of the Eunuch, 1996)

“[...] for me, more than anything else, it is the structure that makes a masterpiece of *L’ombra de l’eunuc*. In fact, Alban Berg’s *Violin Concerto*, besides constituting the leitmotif of the book and part of the action in Chapter Four, also structures the novel: two parts, two settings, two chapters, with titles borrowed from musical terminology, the same mixing of genres as the *Violin Concerto*, and musical quotations. All of this without forcing things and without the slightest hint of artificiality. In the end, a rather chaotic world crystallises with Bach-like purity and aching sincerity into true tragedy. This is not a requiem but a cantata, with a chorale as its finale, to the memory of an angel. What, then, is *L’ombra de l’eunuc* about? Berg? Bach? The past? Us? Our failures, our wasted opportunities, now lost forever? Or simply death? There is no convincing answer to this question just as we shan’t have one either if we ask about the theme of Alban Berg’s *Violin Concerto*.”

Európa Könyvkiadó [Budapest], 2004

“Morning applause on the radio after Schubert’s *Nocturne* ends. The composition is strange, almost simple. In only ten minutes, the pianist’s fingers shape sounds and silences that rise and fade, just as happens in Jaume Cabré’s novel. Teresa Planella achieves the heights of fame with her violin and, when the love story ends, fades away as if in a gentle fall. Good literature, like good music, means an emotional shaking up. After Schubert’s *Nocturne*, people shouldn’t applaud, says one of Cabré’s characters. Nonetheless, they applaud immediately, and lengthily, because they are afraid of their emotions. Thanks to the music, they feel something that has no immediate response. Responses are found in faith, while literature expresses man’s anxieties. The moment of anxiety can be one of beauty and the experience of beauty can be an instant of happiness.

Drago Jancar, “The Morning Nocturne”
Delo [Ljubljana], February 2007

Viatge d’hivern (Winter Journey, 2000)

“*Viatge d’hivern* marks a progressive transition from transcendent aestheticism to a kind of protest literature with a moral content in which the theme of evil is no longer expressed through the disharmonies of the musical composition but in fictionalised testimonies about war, or feelings of guilt. Cabré takes on classical themes as a conceit for personal reflection on ambition, realism and poetry.

Julià Guillamón, “Jaume Cabré and the Thirst for the Absolute”,
La Vanguardia, 6 October 2000

“Jaume Cabré’s characters always opt for the most artistic solution as if they were all ignorant of the practical and precise side of more humdrum reality, and as if the only vital aim were to hurl themselves into the blind, devastating power of their particular Absolute. All of them resemble the main character of “Pols” (Dust), the scholar who is shut away with his books who, in literary terms, deserves nothing more than oblivion, desperately seeking the page or the phrase that will unlock part of the secret of the universe.”

Ponç Puigdevall, “Pure Ideals”,
El País, 12 October 2000

Les veus del Pamano (Voices from the River, 2004)

“Cabré capably traces the inner evolution of conscience and develops his story with a subtle blending of gazes that are fixed in the past or the future. His characters are never to be found in the present. They are constantly reliving their past, always finding new variations and explanations.”

Felix Müller, “Macondo Is in the Pyrenees”
Die Welt, 22 September 2007

“With this novel Jaume Cabré offers an epic gesture, but one that is always well rounded with a dramatic sense so that it is hard to put this book down. The language he uses is that of everyday life but steeped in fine-tuned irony, while a living tongue echoes and vibrates in every sentence. Cabré writes in Catalan and, thanks to its nasal tones and elegant pronunciation, the language sounds like a smooth-flowing, velvet river. [...] There is no doubt about it: *Les veus de Pamano* is one of the great novels to have been published in Germany this year.

Roman Rhode, “The Wounds of the Dictatorship”,
Der Tagesspiegel, 7 October 2007

“With power, irony, pain and passion, page after page, recklessly playing with time schemes and switching narrative perspectives, Cabré takes you by the hand and plunges you into the labyrinth of his characters’ destinies. [...] His is story-telling of an intense and at times frenetic rhythm, sustained by an impetuous flow of emotions. This is a book that must be read with a naked and ingenuous soul. Only then is it possible to submerge oneself in its colours and images, to fully capture the voices from this river that sing to History, and against History, to God, and against God, their frail and harrowing dirge.

Giancarlo De Cataldo, *l’Unità*, 20 November 2007

“What marks the difference is Cabré’s incisive and poetic writing, the precision and rawness with which he deals with his frankly melodramatic “raw material” and, in particular, the way he shapes his storytelling into unusual and complex forms, judiciously organising the comings and goings of his characters between past and present, and criss-crossing memories, voices, suspicions and secrets, making them fit into different stories. This is a novel that one reads avidly and then goes back to start all over again, as always happens with good books.

Francesca Lazzarato, *Il Manifesto*, 7 December 2007

