

CATALAN WRITING

4

EDITORIAL

ACTIONS & VOICES

INTERVIEW

ON POETRY

WORK IN PROGRESS

PUBLISHING NEWS

LITERARY SOCIETY

ON STAGE

ON LINE

WHO'S WHO

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III institut ramon llull

EDITORIAL

Languages in Dialogue

Throughout history, there have been various attempts to locate the characteristic that best defines human beings. It has been said that we are the only beings capable of producing new things, or of playing, or even of dreaming. And it has been said, of course, that we are the only beings who have consciousness. In any case, it should be clear that we would not be able to understand—or, in fact, consider—any of these characteristics if we did not have language. Because that which defines humans, in a more basic and more radical way, is the fact of having language at our disposal and of being, for that reason, capable of understanding many languages.

Language, however, does not only serve to communicate with others, but to help us find ideas and have feelings;

with language we can love and hate, we have plans and we regret many things.

Certainly, without language we wouldn't be human. Even better: without language we wouldn't know what being human means.

This year, 2008, has been declared the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue. It is important, however, in raising questions about citizenship, peace, economy or work, not to forget that human cultures are based in language, and that which has to be fostered in the first place is shared linguistic experience. For this reason it is good to remember that the UN has also declared 2008 the International Year of Languages. The preservation and respect for all languages is the first step toward authentic intercultural dialogue. In fact, there will only be true dialogue if this is expressed in all languages, if through this dialogue emotions, thoughts, and beliefs can be gathered and evoked, and utopias imagined, lived, transformed and imparted in every language.

Any dialogue is always, first of all, a dialogue between two tongues. Not only because there is no dialogue if one does not speak, but above all because there is no humanity without language.

JOSEP-MARIA TERRICABRAS



ACTIONS & VOICES

The mission of the Institut Ramon Llull (IRL) is the international advancement of Catalan culture, in all of its aspects, including literature, music, dance, theater, cinema, and plastic arts. It also coordinates the teaching of the Catalan language in more than one hundred universities on five continents.

To promote Catalan literature around the world, the IRL has an ambitious program of translation support at its disposal, and participates in more than ten international book fairs, such as those of Frankfurt, Guadalajara, Paris, London, and New Delhi. Over the years, it has developed a network of four hundred publishing companies and translators from every part of the world. It offers collaborative aid to book translators and provides scholarships for translators to stay in Catalonia (which become, in the case of countries with few Catalan translators, intensive training courses). It also participates very actively in the promotion of Catalan authors' books once they have been translated abroad. The highlight of the IRL's literary work was its participation in the Frankfurt Book Fair, where Catalan culture was the guest of honor in 2007. Frankfurt affirmed the work done by the IRL, for during 2007 alone 53 Catalan works were translated into German, including classics such as Ramon Llull, Salvador Espriu, and Mercè Rodoreda, and a wide range of contemporary authors. To orient its work, the IRL produces reports such as that recently prepared in collaboration with PEN International, directed by Esther Allen (it can be consulted at www.internationalpen.org). The IRL also collaborates on the website of the Comitè de Traduccions i Drets Lingüístics of the Catalan PEN (Committee on Translations and Linguistic Rights; www.pencatala.cat) and on the magazine Catalan Writing. Fruit of an agreement among the governments of the Generalitats of Catalonia, the Balearic Islands and Andorra, the IRL promotes the work of all the authors who write in the Catalan language. You can find more information at www.llull.cat.

CARLES TORNER

Head of the Science and Humanities Group
Institut Ramon Llull



INTERVIEW

WITH JOSEP BARGALLÓ,
director of the Ramon Llull Institute

CARME ARENAS

It's now been a year since you assumed directorship of the Institut Ramon Llull (IRL). What objectives have been proposed for the short term and the long term?

The IRL is a young institute, created in 2002. Its primary objective is to continue working to strengthen the Institute's three areas of activity: the Catalan language, promoting its teaching and propagation outside of the Catalan-speaking regions; Catalan literature, with emphasis on translations and guaranteeing the presence of Catalan writers at all important literary events; and, finally, Catalan artistic creation, ensuring that drama, music, and the other arts are widely known.

Catalan culture is fragmented among three autonomous territories of the Spanish state. How is the IRL working to minimize this territorial fragmentation and to help bring Catalan culture together?

All European cultures are spread over more than one state. Ours is found in four countries: Spain, France, Italy and Andorra. We aim to work together and, in this sense, the presence of Catalan culture as guest of honor at the Frankfurt Book Fair this year has marked a watershed for our ability to join our strengths. We are now finishing up agreements with the administrations of all these countries and communities, which will allow us greater visibility abroad, with a united voice and shared interests.

The existence of the IRL is for Catalonia the equivalent of the Cervantes Institute for the Spanish state. What relationship do the two institutes have? Does the IRL receive support from the Cervantes Institute?

We have a collaborative agreement with the Cervantes Institute for offering Catalan classes, and we plan IRL activities in branches of the Cervantes Institute, which has a duty to promote abroad the cultural reality of the Spanish state and its four cultures: Castilian, Catalan, Galician and Basque.

You assumed directorship of the IRL during the tail end of Catalan culture's participation as guest of honor in the Frankfurt Book Fair. What's your take on this experience? What would you change if you were to do it again?

I inherited the Frankfurt project at a time when it was already well underway, but perhaps badly explained. My interest was to develop clear objectives and statements: explaining our culture, situating our writers on a level field, encouraging translations of the authors to German or other languages, and promoting them through their participation in organized events during the fair. The outcomes have been very good. Success came, however, thanks to the tranquility of knowing that Catalan literature can stand side by side with any other European literature.

What large-scale projects are you currently planning at the IRL?

In 2008 we have the milestone of the Guanajuato Festival, where Mercè Rodoreda and Agustí Bartra will be honored. And for 2009, the Biennale in Venice.

ON POETRY

Blai Bonet (Santanyí, Mallorca, 1926-1997) is one of the most significant Catalan poets of the twentieth century. Born to a humble family, he studied at seminary, which he had to leave for fear of tuberculosis. There he discovered, with great enthusiasm, the Bible, Ramon Llull, and the Greek and Roman classics, and he began to write. A high awareness of languages combined with an ardent sensuality makes his work a continuous journey. The quotidian word is loaded with high tension: metaphors that strike like kisses, diction that caresses with incandescence, rhythms of thought that sing the great themes of the lone and common man. Poet in verse, story, essay, diary, and translation, his is the modernity of the mystics and scientists of the renaissance, who materialize a prophetic voice from the great ravines of mystery. A true lover of the verb.

Soledat oberta (fragment)

Em dol tot, fins la camisa,
A damunt el pit cremat.
I les paraules em nafren
Quan sonen damunt la llengua
Amb el seu significat.

No puc parlar de tant que estim... La parla
És sempre de baladres i sal grossa:
Un agre ganivet que em reboteix
Bavant-me sal i sang, i sal i sang,
Pel meu bosquet senzill de parla verda...

I no vull tanta parla que s'esquerda.
Mes, les meves paraules de «bellveure»,
«taronja», «llimonera», «estrella», «amic»,
les tenc, obscures, fent una plorada
al carreró banyat de La Gran Pena.

Open solitude (fragment)

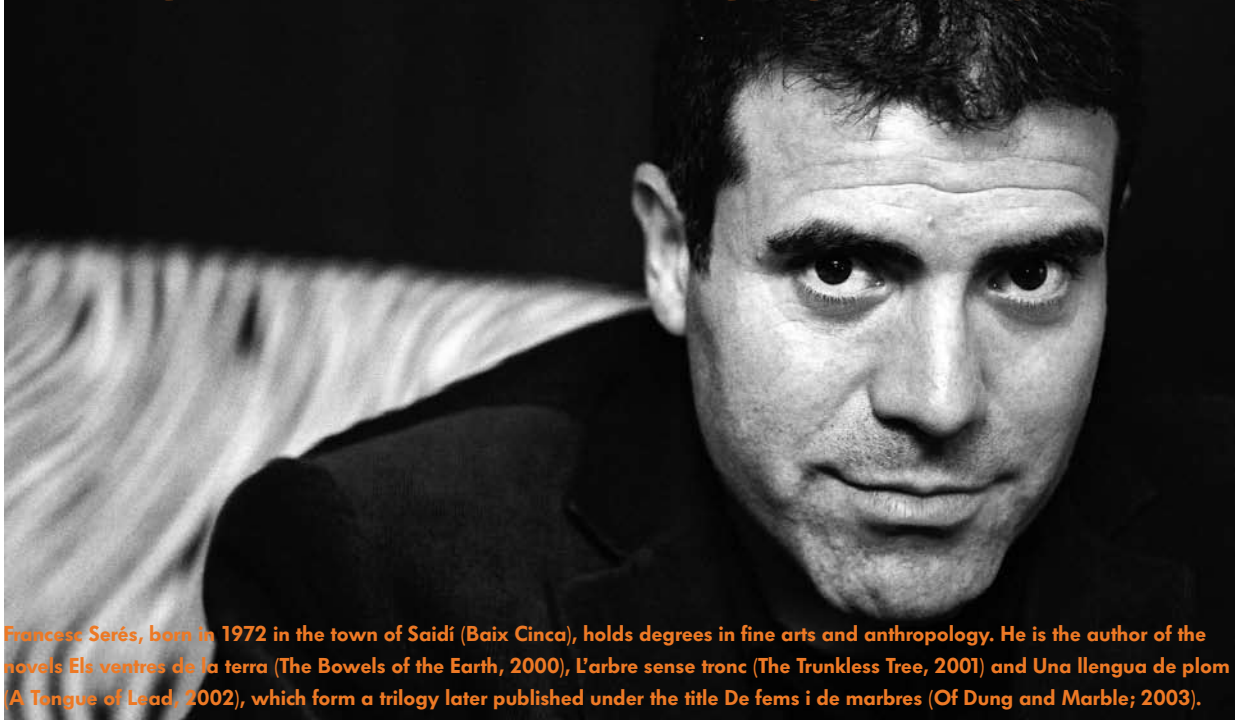
All this hurts, even my shirt
On top of my burning chest
And the words cut me
When their sounds rest on my tongue
With their signification.

I can't talk, I love so much... Talking
Is stuff of rosebay and rock salt:
A bitter knife that fills my form
Drooling salt and blood, and salt and blood,
Around my simple copse of green talk.

And I don't want so much talk it shatters,
But, my words like "summer cypress"
"Orange", "lemon tree" and "star" and "friend",
They're here, dark and uncertain, crying
Down the drenched alley of Sorrow.

Translation: Richard Mansell

WORK IN PROGRESS



Francesc Serés, born in 1972 in the town of Saldí (Baix Cinca), holds degrees in fine arts and anthropology. He is the author of the novels *Els ventres de la terra* (The Bowels of the Earth, 2000), *L'arbre sense tronc* (The Trunkless Tree, 2001) and *Una llengua de plom* (A Tongue of Lead, 2002), which form a trilogy later published under the title *De fems i de marbres* (Of Dung and Marble; 2003). Following these, he wrote the book of tales *La força de la gravetat* (The Force of Gravity, 2006) and the book of articles *Matèria primera* (Primary Material, 2007).

In 1999 he was a finalist for the Pere Calders award in Catalan literature for *Els ventres de la terra*, a work for which he also received the Pedro Supoto award for Aragonese letters, in the Catalan language category. In 2004 he was awarded the Octavi Pellissa award for the text of *Matèria primera*, which was published three years later. In 2007 he won the Crítica Serra d'Or award for *La força de la gravetat*, the same work that was honored with the Premi Nacional de Literatura given by the Generalitat de Catalunya.

The Soloist

In the last drawer of all the archives that the KGB has hidden, is hiding, and will hide, is the most well-guarded file of all the files drafted by the presidential offices.

No, this is not a list of Swiss accounts where our leaders hoped to carve themselves a hideaway. Nor of plans showing the biggest oil and gas deposits that anyone has ever dreamed of, nor even of subterranean bunkers where the Soviets were to hide in case of nuclear crisis. No, everyone knows that, it's all on the internet...

Ah, the file... I could read it because I had to write the last part, and if I'm alive to describe it it's because of the special nature of that event: leaving everyone alive was one of the conditions that both parties seemed to have imposed. The secret diary of the Kremlin from one day in November of 1958 explains how one of the most absurd vicissitudes of what we've come to call the Cold War came to a close. Oh, the Cold War, going to such trouble to go nowhere.

In fact, come to think of it, these documents must also be hidden in the bottom basement of all the Pentagon's basements, and they will probably be destroyed when they destroy all the documents that miraculously disappear before being declassified.

That's why, if it weren't for this confession, no one would know that Elvis Presley performed a concert in Moscow's Red Square.

Yes, a 1958 concert in Red Square. It was one of so many shows of force that the powers made during the Cold War. A stupid show, but a show through and through. A stupid idea that some Russian official defined as a great act of love between Mother Russia and the North American people, oh, the things they said! With the distance of time someone might have seen the first metaphor of perestroika in the words of the official: Elvis in Red Square left us pregnant with capitalism.

It all began on March 29 in 1957, when our Marshal Zhukov visited Berlin. He spoke with officials, gave conferences, and while he spoke with officials and gave conferences, could not avoid doing the same thing that all the Marshal Zhukovs who visited Berlin did: showed off, got cocky in front of CIA spies. Sometimes I think that the only goal of speeches made in Berlin was to give material to the double, triple, or quadruple spies that every country sent to be a nuisance in Germany. One member of the party told them not to send so many or there wouldn't be enough apartments, that Berlin was still a city in ruins and there were already enough people who complained they didn't have anywhere to go. What a horde of spies...

So, back to the file. Point seven of the report shows the marshal saying that, given an imminent rise in enemy tension, the Russian army had to be prepared to take the first step. Up to here, nothing new, same tune as always. The Pentagon also told their spies not to send so many reports, that the United States had limited territory too. The source, furthermore, was a useless spy, like most of them writing reports from Berlin: just to say something they wrote that the Aral Sea was drying up, that the Russians wanted to send a dog into space or some other nonsense, that everyone was hungry and cold in Berlin.

If it hadn't been for a second, still unclassified report that sleeps in the last hidden corners of the archives of both powers (there are so many last hidden corners that I don't know how they ever find the papers), it wouldn't have gone any further. These days everything is doubted, of course, it's so easy now to question everything, but in that moment, the second report passed from hand to hand until it arrived at the Oval Office. Since Washington and Moscow were mirror and reflection, the reports made by Russian spies also went up all the floors of the Kremlin until they got through the president's door. If the first report by the cocky Zhukov was completely inoffensive, the second was truly worrisome. It included a map of the United States with dots where the Russians had been able to bring in rocket-building material. The map was imprecise. Besides, since the American secret service had gotten underway, they had only been able to find one hideout, and that one might have been a false lead.

FRANCESC SERÉS

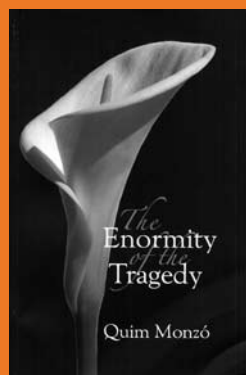
PUBLISHING NEWS



Joanot Martorell
Tirant lo Blanc

Fisher Verlag
German translation by Fritz Vogelgsang

A three-volume edition of the complete version of *Tirant lo Blanc*, one of the great medieval classics of Catalan literature and one of the original chivalresque novels. The work is full of intrigue and adventure, conspiracies and battles, with a central love story uniting the brave knight Tirant and the beautiful princess Carmesina. Medievalist Lola Badia writes: "Martorell sought to fill his book with prestigious literary information about all the things that could be of interest to the reader, taken from the most distinguished and illustrious sources of his times. He did so to flesh out the behavior of his characters and because he had an appreciative audience in mind. This audience was thirsty for literary culture, wanting both entertainment and models for acceptably cultured conversations."



Quim Monzó
La magnitud de la tragèdia
(The Magnitude of the Tragedy)

Peter Owen Publishers
English translation by Peter Bush

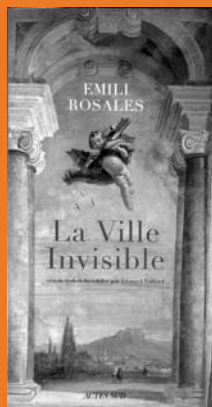
A trumpet player has finally gotten the star of the theater where he works to go out with him. During dinner, he drinks to work up some courage. He drinks too much, though, and then fears he won't be able to perform if they end up in bed. This night is the beginning of the magnitude of the tragedy for the character and also for the novel, a grotesque history full of lucid absurdities, loaded with irony and irreverence, and which treats themes as universal and essential as love, hate, loneliness, the march of time and the inevitability of death. Monzó published *La magnitud de la tragèdia* in 1983. At that time, it was a great success and has been through twenty editions in Catalan. In 2005 a new edition, revised by the author, was released. The novel has been translated into eleven languages.



Eugeni Xammar
Lou de la serp (The Snake Egg)

Berenberg Verlag
German translation by Kirsten Brandt

The journalist Eugeni Xammar arrived in Berlin during the winter of 1922. He found a Germany destroyed by World War I, and a nation where the power of Nazism was beginning to take hold. He experienced historical moments of major importance first hand, and from 1923 to 1925 coincided with Josep Pla, with whom he traveled in Bavaria and the Rhine valley. The book *Llou de la serp* collects the articles that Xammar wrote from Germany during the period 1922 to 1924. They are journalistic pieces of high, even literary quality that offer a lucid glimpse of that historic moment. Surely, Xammar is one of the outstanding names in European journalism of the first half of the twentieth century.



Emili Rosales
La ciutat invisible (The Invisible City)

Ed. Actes Sud
French translation by Edmond Raillard

In the eighteenth century, Charles III wanted to construct a city in the image of Saint Petersburg on the delta of the Ebro River, in southern Catalonia. The monarch abandoned the project without explaining why he did so. But in the beginning of the twenty-first century, an art gallery curator, Emili Rosales, finds the memoirs of the architect who planned that invisible city. It's a mystery novel, full of historical enigmas, and is a personal adventure. With this work the writer and editor Emili Rosales won one of the most prestigious literary prizes in the Catalan language, the Premi Sant Jordi, in 2004. In Catalonia the book has been a commercial success, and it has also widely awoken international interest: *La ciutat invisible* has already been translated into twenty languages, most recently to Mandarin. With this French version the book was a finalist for the Prix Médicis in 2007.



Jordi Puntí
Animals tristos (Sad Animals)

Isbn Edizioni
Italian translation by Patrizio Rigobon

Animals tristos contains six stories with today's Barcelona as a unifying nexus, and a whole mosaic of characters who are victims of the fragile balance of love and the shocks hidden by a couple's life: illusions and resentments, terrible memories and therapies against loneliness, latent failures and muffled existence. Establishing an ironic and tender gaze, Puntí paints a portrait of the sadness that inundates these characters when love is gone. A movie adaptation of the book has been made by Ventura Pons, called *Animals ferits* (Wounded Animals). The moviemaker takes as a point of departure three of the stories that appear in *Animals tristos*: *Icones russes* (Russian Icons), *Bombolles* (Bubbles), and *El gos que es llepa les feridas* (The Dog Licking His Wounds).



Llorenç Villalonga
Bearn

Piper Verlag
German translation by Jörg Koch

A German reissue of *Bearn o la sala de les nines* (Bearn or the Room of Dolls), a book that has already become a classic. Villalonga reflects poetically on passionate love and conjugal love, through the relationship of Don Toni and his niece, Dona Xima, including a scandalous escape to Paris and a later reconciliation with his wife, Dona Maria Antònia. Through the writing of his memoirs and punctuated by the reading of Proust, the protagonist wants to show that there is no other paradise than a lost paradise. The critic Jaume Vidal Alcover pointed out that this novel enters into the minute motives of daily life and surrenders to psychological study at all costs. *Bearn* has been translated into eighteen languages.

MONTSERRAT SERRA

ON STAGE

ON THE BORDER BETWEEN POETRY AND DRAMA

Years ago, Carles Santos closed one of his shows with this image: while he played the piano hysterically, the actors, without ceasing their movement on the set, constructed a wall on the edge of the stage. Brick by brick, a wall separating them from the audience was built. When the wall exceeded human height and no one could be seen from the stalls, the piano stopped.

The metaphor of the covered stage suggests various meanings, but most important is the pleasure that emerged from a show abundant with images, signs, gestures, movement. A show that did not tell a story—Carles Santos never does so—but that explained us to ourselves through perceptions: instinct, feeling and music (Santos comes from the world of classical music).

It was just a matter of time before Carles Santos would rediscover Joan Brossa, the great Catalan poet who played so much on the border between poetry and drama. Santos has always found inspiration in Brossa's rigorous imagination. Brossa lobrossot desbrossat, the title already a game, brought Brossa's world to the theater, distributed among images, music, and words. He does justice to the poet and does justice to this theatrical language—innovative, creative, metaphorical, rhythmic, impregnated with humor—that connects to the essence of human experience without awakening it, so that each spectator must answer its questions.

This is something similar to what Joan Brossa did with his visual poems, with his theatrical poems, with his strict poems. Universal and rooted, this show is pure poetry.

PATRÍCIA GABANCHO

ON LINE

Catalan Writers' Web Pages

In this edition we highlight some of the personal web pages of contemporary Catalan authors:

Vicent Alonso

<http://www.vicentalonso.com/>

Ada Castells

<http://webs.ono.com/adacastells/> (in Catalan, Spanish and English)

Joan Margarit

<http://www.joanmargarit.com/> (in Catalan, Spanish and English)

Joan-Francesc Mira

<http://www.joanfmira.info/index.php>

Quim Monzó

<http://www.monzo.info/> (in Catalan, Spanish and English)

Vicenç Pagès

<http://www.vicencpagesjorda.net/>

Francesc Serés

<http://francescseres.net/>

Màrius Serra

<http://www.mariussera.info/home/home.php> (in Catalan, Spanish, English and Italian)

These are two of the most important "collective" resources for information about Catalan authors:

AELC Authors' Web Pages

<http://www.escriptors.cat/autors.php>

For over a decade the Association of Writers in the Catalan Language (Associació d'Escriptors en Llengua Catalana; AELC) has provided a web page for its members. There are now over two hundred.

Lletra Authors

In Catalan: <http://www.uoc.edu/lletra/noms.html>

In English: <http://www.lletra.net/noms.html>

A collection of web pages about Catalan authors from the website Lletra: Catalan Literature Online (available in Catalan, Spanish, and English).

JAUME SUBIRANA