EDITORIAL

Wary of Intercultural Dialogue

When we speak of intercultural dialogue, who dialogues with whom? International bodies, full of good intentions, have gotten into the habit of exerting themselves to disseminate expressions that seem to contain the magic solution for the world’s problems, but that hardly refine precisely the construction of these solutions. They are empty expressions. This year is the International Year of Intercultural Dialogue, and surely the initiative has served as the impulse for meetings, debates and exhibitions, which is a good thing, but without many people asking themselves what dialogue between cultures actually means.

Cultures are not what separate people, not even in the anthropological sense. There is an essential element in culture, and that is the universality of cultural appetite, of curiosity. When a person has culture, that person has all cultures. It is a virtual space, unique and complex, where the creative contributions of different identities and roots and textures converge. A space that cannot be visited without being contaminated by influences and suggestions from around the world. There are exceptions for everything, and shadows loom everywhere, but in general it is difficult to find someone who would reject a book, music, or gastronomic taste because of its origin. Cultures dialogue spontaneously in the imagination of its users; cultures travel alongside worldwide industry; cultures are an inextricable mixture that ends up configuring itself as one shared culture.

As such, dialogue has to be promoted in another area; this is why the expression “intercultural dialogue” is deceptive. Dialogue has to be political. Governments have to practice dialogue. Governments are those who destroy cooperation among countries, whether for greed or ideology, or by using religion as an excuse. Why not a year dedicated to Political Dialogue, to signal who has the responsibility? If difference—because difference is culture—becomes an impediment to dialogue, it is because politics has gotten involved. Cultural diversity is no more than the spontaneous expression of rootedness, a way of looking at the world: you cannot understand and be understood by another if you do not exist. Political dispute is provoked, it is a conscious effort to raise barriers, stir up hatreds, exalt ambitions. If culture is emotion and intelligence, this destructive politics is gut and instinct. The opposite, thus, is an intellectual product. Cultures, because they are culture, always dialogue.

That is also the case for the kaleidoscopic societies of our times. To be sure, indifference to the outsider exists (no curiosity, no questions); even fear and rejection exist. But it is not from culture that this phenomenon is produced, rather from prejudice or from circumstance, circumstance understood as the daily environment willingly or unwillingly shared. It is then the circumstance, the physical and social surroundings, that must be confronted. It is against prejudice that the conceptual apparatus must be aired, opening windows and sensibilities, because with renewed air enters the possibility of conceiving a more flexible reality. We must promote culture so that community may result.

PATRÍCIA GABANCHO
The Catalan Library of Culture
Project by Meronia Publishing in Barcelona

From 1988, when the first book of this collection appeared, until now, this impressive text collection has been translated into Catalan from nearly a hundred languages that have been translated directly from Catalan into Romanian. It contains a substantial body of works and translations which has never been published in the Romanian language before.

This substantial body of translations could not have been completed without the commitment of the Catalan government and the Romanian Ministry of Culture.

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How did you become interested in Catalan literature?

For many years worked as a researcher in the field of Romance Languages at the University of Bucharest. The best path to a literary translation is, I think, language. Especially when this so-called “minority” language and literature have authors like Ramon Lull and Ausiàs March, or works like Sonet Tomat in Blanc, in the middle ages.

At Meronia you edit a collection dedicated to contemporary Catalan authors. What is your experience with this collection?

An engaging experience, with a very high degree of satisfaction. For one, I have never come in more with Catalan in the Romanian cultural scene. And what is my friends I do not mean just translated authors, although I am proud to be called a friend of well-known Catalan authors. Secondly, it gives me great satisfaction to serve as a kind of bridge between the two cultures I love most. And, last but not least, translating Catalan authors on checking others’ translations makes me happy.

What kind of works and authors most interest the Romanian reader?

First of all, contemporary authors. Especially authors who offer collections on human existence, but from a historical perspective that is Catalan. It is precisely for this reason that we decided to translate works like Mercè Rodoreda, Carpe Riera, Maria Barbat, and Jaume Caballé already have fans in Romania.

How is Catalan literature viewed in Romania?

The circle of those who really have a perspective on Catalan literature is not very large, but includes experienced and demanding readers. “We couldn’t even have imagined!” they say, delighted, amazed.

You are very familiar with the Romanian and Catalan literary systems, as well as others. Could you tell us how you see the external projection of Catalan literature throughout Europe?

I think small, important steps have been made and are being made. You must realize that this is a very important cultural task, but also a difficult one. And when I say friends I don’t mean just translated authors, although I am proud to be called a friend of well-known Catalan authors. Secondly, it gives me great satisfaction to serve as a kind of bridge between the two cultures I love most. And, last but not least, translating Catalan authors on checking others’ translations makes me happy.

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### PUBLISHING NEWS

**Lluís-Anton Baulenas**

*Per un sac d’ossos* (“22 word story”, *For a Sack of Bones*)

Translated into Polish by Anna Sawicka

The novel’s point of departure: Nico’s father had only one friend in the concentration camp of Miranda de Ebro in the nineteen-forties, the persecuted Bartomeu Camús. His mother had been buried hurriedly at the side of a road. Nico’s father is also about to die when he makes his son promise to recover the body of Bartomeu Camús, bury him, and find his papers, which guard a terrible secret. Nico is fifteen years old when his father dies and twenty-four (in 1949) when he decides to fulfill his promise.

"Per un sac d’ossos" won the Ramon Llull award in 2005, the most well-endowed prize in the Catalan language. For Lluís-Anton Baulenas this is a year of international exposure. As his publisher announced: "Per un sac d’ossos" will be the first of a series of translations of his books, both in English and in German. The publishing house Flammarion will publish “Noms a la sorra” (Names in the Sand) in September and more than 10,000 of “La Felicitat” and “Alfons XIV” (under the title “Combat de classes”) to coincide with the International Book Fair in Frankfurt in 2007, where Catalan culture was the guest of honor.

Albert Sánchez Piñol

*El pol·lop* (Cold Sun)

Translated into Russian by Neta Avrova

"La pell freda" is the most-translated Catalan work ever, by now published in more than thirty languages. The three most recent are Icelandic, Galician, and Basque. The book has become an international phenomenon. In some countries, like Russia, hundreds of thousands of copies have been sold. There are not many living authors of Mediterranean Europe whose works have exceeded the number of editions reached by "La pell freda". This adventure novel begins with the main character deciphering on a small remote island to stay for a year as official meteorologist. But the man he is to replace is nowhere to be found and the lighthouse is deserted. The hero soon discovers that each night a very special guest arrives. This original tale seduces Europe. It has been translated into more than ten languages (French, English, Spanish, Russian, Italian, and others). The three most recent are Icelandic, Galician, and Basque.

### LITERARY SOCIETY

### THE TWO FACES OF MERCÈ RODOREDA AT GALLIMARD

The centenary of Mercè Rodoreda has resulted in an important undertaking in France: Gallimard, the publisher of *La plaça del Diamant* (*The Time of the Doves*), has decided to recover the French versions of Quanta, quanta guerra… (*How Much War*) and La mort i la primavera (*Death and Spring*), which will appear to the public this month of October.

We won’t find ourselves in quite the same situation as in Germany, where one publisher, Suhrkamp, offers its public the entirety of Rodoreda’s work. But the appearance of these three novels of Rodoreda, under the Gallimard name, may change the perception of her work.

Published in 1962, *La plaça del Diamant* is the story of a Barcelona woman whose life is turned upside down by the civil war; published in 1981, *Quanta, quanta guerra*… is the story of a boy who looks for liberty in war; unfinished and posthumous, *La mort i la primavera* is the story of a town and the laws that govern it, totalitarian when it comes to death. Desprosected death, in this town, consists of filling the dying with cement so the soul cannot escape through the mouth at death. The French reader, very conscious of the tribute that literature always pays to death, surely is reminded of Jean Améry and his essays about extermination camps (*Més mòll del bé del mal*, Beyond Good and Bad): “What worried the homme d’esprit just as much as his non-intellectual friend was not death but how he would die…[.] The story was told, for example, of an SS man who had gutted a hunting animal and filled its stomach with sand.” Maybe, with this step toward Paris, Rodoreda will return to Catalonia transformed into what she is: a European writer in the Catalan language.

### ON LINE

**Rodoreda Year**

http://www.mercerodoreda.cat/

http://www.iletra.cat/expo/mercerodoreda/

2008 marks one hundred years since the birth of the greatest (and most translated) contemporary Catalan novelists: Mercè Rodoreda. We recommend the websites of her Foundation and another with an excellent virtual exhibition. In Catalan, Spanish, English, and German.

**Institut Ramon Llull**

http://www.iletra.cat/ramon-lull/innovation/catalan-literature/

The Ramon Llull Institute is the official body responsible for the exterior promotion of Catalan Culture. It subsidizes translations from Catalan to other languages, and organizes periodic events for the promotion of Catalan works and authors at international fairs and festivals. In Catalan, Spanish and English.

**AEIC Updates**

http://www.escriptors.cat/

The Association of Writers in the Catalan Language (AEIC) maintains literary notices on its website, updated daily.

**Literary Blogs**

http://www.blocsdelletres.com/

"Catalan Literature Hyperblog" allows you to follow permanent updates of the best literary blogs in Catalan, recommended and widespread in the past years. And now it also seduces Europe. It has been translated into more than ten languages (French, Spanish, English, Russian, Hebrew, and others). The three most recent are Icelandic, Galician, and Basque.

**VilaWeb Letters**

http://www.vilaweb.cat/www/iletra

The best digital space for information about Catalan letters. VilaWeb Letters is a literary blogs in Catalan. Received the 2007 Lletra prize for best digital initiative in Catalan literature.

### Montserrat Serra

Jaume Cabré

*Les veus del Pamano* (*“The Voices of the River”*)

La Nova Fronteira

Translated into Italian by Stefano Mario Cornelli

"Les veus del Pamano" has become, after its publication in January of 2008, one of the most-read Catalan novels, recommended and widespread in the past years. And now it also seduces Europe. It has been translated into more than ten languages (French, Spanish, English, Russian, Hebrew, and others). The three most recent are Icelandic, Galician, and Basque.

The book’s point of departure: Pompa’s story. The Pamano, the Pamano river, is the story of a boy who looks for liberty in war; unfinished and posthumous, it is a diary of his youth, which he began to write on March 8, 1938, and continued until November 23, 1949. Just before Pompa went to Paris as a correspondent for the newspaper La Publicitat. Years later, before publishing, he revised it. "Les veus del Pamano" is the story of a town and the laws that govern it, totalitarian when it comes to death. Desprosected death, in this town, consists of filling the dying with cement so the soul cannot escape through the mouth at death. The capital sins are still the same as ever, and just as much as his non-intellectual friend was not death but how he would die...[.] The story was told, for example, of an SS man who had gutted a hunting animal and filled its stomach with sand.”

Maria Bohigas

Jaume Subirana

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