# CATALAN WRITING

# 5

EDITORIAL ACTIONS & VOICES INTERVIEW ON POETRY WORK IN PROGRESS PUBLISHING NEWS LITERARY SOCIETY ON LINE

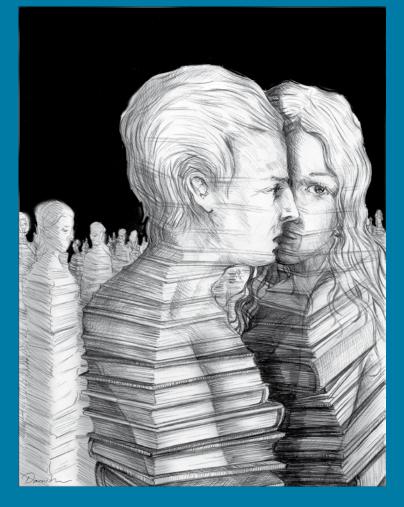
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## **EDITORIAL**

#### 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,

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institut ramon llull

#### because they are cultur e, 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

## **ACTIONS & VOICES**

Translation and Collections: Classic Classics and Modern Classics

#### "Els Nostres Clàssics"

(Our Classics) in Spanish, English, Italian and German

The international prestige of the "Els Nostres Clàssics" collection —the publication of meticulous critical editions in the Catalan language from its genesis until 1800— is the most important editorial project of the publisher Barcino (www.editorialbarcino. cat), founded in Barcelona in 1924 by J. M. de Casacuberta.

Given the scientific rigor with which the transcription of each work is undertaken and the cultural importance of this body of texts, Barcino has been prompted to work with other publishers in order to ensure its translation and dissemination in other languages.

In 2005 an agreement was signed with DVD Editions (Barcelona) to co-edit some of these works in Spanish. Ramon Llull's *Libro de Amigo y Amado*, Bernat Metge's *El sueño*, and the *Libro de Sent Sov*í have appeared. Also planned: a complete verse translation of the poetry of Jordi de Sant Jordi, as well as *Curial e Güelfa* and *Jacob Xalabín*.

Alongside this project, Barcino and Tamesis Books (London) signed another agreement for English co-editions. So far, the following have appeared: Ausiàs March: Verse Translations of Thirty Poems, The Catalan Expedition to the East from the 'Chronicle' of Ramon Muntaner, Francesc Eiximenis: An Anthology and The Book of Sent Soví: Medieval Recipes from Catalonia. During the coming year, the publication of Ramon Llull's A Contemporary Life is planned.

In addition, Edizioni dell'Orso (Alessandria) and Barcino are preparing, under the leadership of Stefano M. Cingolani and within the "Gli Orsatti" collection, the Italian publication of Jacob Xalabín. This will be followed, according to the terms of the 2007 agreement, by the *Llibre del rei en Pere* by Bernat Descolt and *Curial e Güelfa*.

This year, it is the German language that will benefit from new Catalan translations, again with Barcino, published by Lit Verlag (Münster). The "Katalanische Literatur des Mittelalters" series, coordinated by Alexander Fidora, plans on six titles, beginning with *Curial und Guelfa*. This will be followed by *Doctrina pueril* by Ramon Llull, a bilingual volume of Ausiàs March's poetry, *Der Traum* by Bernat Metge, *Der Disput mit dem Esel* by Anselm Turmeda, and another volume of bilingual poetry by Jordi de Sant Jordi.

#### The "Library of Catalan Culture"

Project by Meronia Publishing in Bucharest

From 1998, when the first book of this collection appeared, until now, ten years later, the number of works of contemporary authors that have been translated directly from Catalan into Romanian by Meronia Publishing (www.meronia.ro) comes to nearly thirty. This substantial body of translations could not have been completed without the tenacity of the collection's director, translator and editor Jana Balacciu Matei, and her team, who have been able to acquaint the Romanian public with an excellent selection of canonical authors and genres.

These authors include contemporary writers like Jaume Cabré (his *Vocile lui Pamano* will appear this fall), Carme Riera, Maria Barbal, Quim Monzó, Joan F. Mira, Ramon Solsona and Joan Peruga; poets such as Miquel Martí i Pol and Carles Duarte; anthologies of Balearic Island prose and poetry; and classic writers such as Mercè Rodoreda, Manuel de Pedrolo, Miquel Llor, Blai Bonet, Miquel Àngel Riera and Pere Calders. All of the texts are accompanied by an introduction. The most recent publishing success was the presentation of the work *Iisus: Un profil biografic* by Armand Puig in Bucharest.

To find support for the translation of literary works from Catalan to other languages, consult: http://www.llull.cat/llull/estatic/eng/tramits/sub-traduccio.shtm

To find support for the translation of literary works from other languages to Catalan, consult: http://cultura.gencat.cat/ilc



# INTERVIEW

### JANA BALACCIU MATEI

Doctor in Romance Languages and Literature CARME ARENAS

Jana Balacciu Matei, Gogosari (Romania) 1947. Doctor in Romance Languages and Literature and researcher at the Linguistics Institute of Bucharest until 2005, since 1998 she has worked at the publishing house Meronia in Bucharest as translator and editor of the "Library of Catalan Culture" collection, which already numbers 27 volumes. In 2003 she was honored with the Creu de Sant Jordi from the Catalan Generalitat and, in 2005, with the Joan Cendrós prize from Òmnium Cultural.

#### How did you become interested in Catalan literature?

For many years I worked as a researcher in the field of romance linguistics at the Linguistics Institute in Bucharest. The best path to a literature is, I think, its language. Especially when this so-called "minority" language and literature have authors like Ramon Llull and Ausiàs March, or works like Tirant lo 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, it has caused me to love Catalonia like my own land, and it has given me great friends in all of the Catalan-speaking territories. And when I say friends I don't mean just translated authors, although I am proud to be called a friend by 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 or 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 reflections on human existence, but from a historical perspective that is Catalan. It is precisely for this reason that writers like Mercè Rodoreda, Carme Riera, Maria Barbal, and Jaume Cabré 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 it!" 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 exposure could only begin in an organized, continual way in the past decade or so. And now... Not everyone in Europe knows the names and works of Catalan writers. But some, of course, don't even know their own writers. There are many countries very involved with literature, where they know that there are Catalan writers of a value comparable to familiar Spanish, French, English, writers. I don't share the pessimism of many people from here about the future of the Catalan language and nation. As conclusive proof: the tens of thousands of Catalan books sold in Germany during and after the Frankfurt Book Fair.

#### As an editor, do you think it is enough to translate a work, leaving it to finds its way in the new literary system, or do you think that this work should be accompanied by presentations from those who are familiar with the literature of origin, in order to place that work in its context? What are the best strategies to introduce a work into another literary system, besides translation?

I think that in the case of a still little-known literature like Catalan, it is not enough just to translate a work. Some "supports" have to be added that help the readers to situate it in a cultural horizon, in a tradition. That's why in Bucharest we decided to begin this collection, as a kind of "landing strip" for each new title. A short prologue for orienting the reader about the work and the writer was ideal. In this case a good introducer (someone who may be Catalan, but also Romanian, in Bucharest we have had good results in both cases) means someone who can situate the work within and without, that is, in its internal and external literary and historic context. A strategy of proven efficacy is the use of book presentations with the author's presence, and an ideal strategy would be multifaceted events, with book presentations, musical concerts, etc.

# **ON POETRY**

"The tension and attention of the poet never waver; rather, we must make sure that our own tension does not diminish, reading her. For, in the end it all seems very concise and transparent, but, as Llull says, "there is a secret." Each poem, in itself fully achieved, has a possible reverberation in each person who reads it, if reading is active; without this participation, the poem does not suffer a waning of its moral and aesthetic excellence, but the audience ceases to obtain a deeper awareness of itself. A different, but not antagonistic, evolution than that of one of her masters, Joan Brossa, has brought Maria-Mercè Marçal from a dazzling enthusiasm for the word to an aesthetic expression capable of addressing an audience who cannot stoop to passive reception. This role of the poetic word is not something new, rather it is one of the oldest and most genuine: in this way only can we read Sophocles, Pindar, or Sappho. Only in this way can we read, in Catalan, Ausià s March or Maria-Mercè Marçal."

Pere Gimferrer

La carn, sense paraules, davant de mi i en mi.

I jo que havia llegit tots els llibres.

Flesh, without words, in front of me and in me.

Me, who had read all the books.

\*\*\*

Per tu voldria anar camí de Liliput amb les alforges plenes de cançons sense llei, i trobar-nos al prat on l'atzar és un rei despullat, franc d'espasa, de vici, de virtut.

For you, I would like to take the road to Lilliput, my saddle-bags full of lawless songs, and reach the field where chance is a king without any clothes who'll sell his sword to vice or to virtue.

(Translation: Christopher Whyte) Translation: Richard Mansell

Information about Maria-Mercè Marçal: http://www.fmmm.cat/ Translated into English: Survivors (Institut d'Estudis Nord-Americans, 1991) Chapman. Scotland's Quality Literary Magazine, 88 (1997) Translated into Spanish: Maria-Mercè Marçal, Deshielo (Igitur, 2004)

Jose-Agustín Goytisolo, Veintiún poetas catalanes para el siglo XXI (Lumen, 1996)

# **WORK IN PROGRESS**



Imma Monsó began her literary career in 1996. She is a writer and language professor and her novels, No se sap mai (You Never Know, 1996), Com unes vacances (Like Some Vacations, 1998), Tot un caràcter (Quite a Character, 2001), and book of short stories, Millor que no m'ho expliquis (Better Not Tell Me, 2003), have been awarded with various prizes, such as the Prudenci Bertrana award, the City of Barcelona award, the International Terenci Moix prize, and the Salambó fiction prize. The author was born in Lleida and lives in a town near Barcelona.

**"Una tempesta"** (A Storm), a novel by Imma Monsó (Beginning of Chapter 5)

A writer on her way to give a literary talk in a mountain town meets an ambulance in the street. While speaking to the drivers of the ambulance, which carries a young man who just lost his life in a storm, the writer realizes that the person who lives with the man, and who left him a message saying that he or she won't be eating dinner at home, still knows nothing of the accident, and that this person will probably be at the talk.

#### MALMERCAT, 8 p.m.

One more turn of the road and suddenly she sees two rectangles of yellow light shining through the darkness, deformed by the water falling heavily on the windshield. She figures it would be smart to park in the open area in front of the windows. The town is small, the castle in ruins, and the windows actually belong to a wooden structure added to the castle for the celebration of the Summer Festival cultural events. "Literary talk at the castle," she thinks. He or she is here: this sentence hammers at her and she can't tear her eyes from the warm light that indicates life and shelter. This thought is clear as day as she drives twice around the space, in case there might be a parking spot right in front of the door, but there isn't after all. She turns off the motor and looks for an umbrella to use for the twenty meters between her and the glass door. Walking across the parking lot in this weather is turning out to be a difficult operation, and now she sees the person in charge of welcoming her coming out of the door with an umbrella. "I've got it," says Sara in the direction of the woman walking towards her, but her voice is snuffed out by the almost continuous thunder, and the host seems eager to show the Invited One that she is willing to get wet. Both of them go through the entrance that heads toward the hall, shoes full of mud, and while they energetically wipe their feet on a mat, the woman introduces herself as "the one who will announc e the talk." Her placid smile reinforces Sara's conviction that nothing has disturbed the calm of the place and that, inside this room, is the person who has left dinner in the oven. It could also be, thinks the Invited One, that the person who left dinner in the oven isn't there, that he or she decided not to come on a night like this, in such weather. But that possibility is unlikely. Out of a hundred people who decide to go somewhere, those who give up on the idea are few. Of course the probability of meeting the ambulance that carried the unfortunate relative of someone in the room was also low, so thinking about probabilities was pointless. Anyway, that person not being there would result in a very improbable probability. Still, it could happen. Since she has no control over fate, she decides to trust the conviction that she has felt since she saw the illumined rectangles. He or she is here. She can't shake this sentence, like an echo dodging the words she hears and the words she speaks.

"When we got here it wasn't raining so hard, but now it's really coming down," says the woman at her side. "I'm sorry for being late, but I tried to call a bunch of times," says the Invited One. The host tells her there's no reception, which had worried her. "It worried me, too, because I knew you were waiting and there wasn't any way to get in touch with you," says Sara, a relative worry, because her mind has for some time been fully occupied with the ambulance. "I was especially worried," says the other with a serene smile that belies any worry, "because I knew you would be worried if you tried to call and couldn't get a hold of us." Once all the respective worries have been shared, the host adds that she was only fifteen minutes late, and Sara says she had thought she would be later, given the state of the road.

At the end of the passage is the hall. As they get closer, the murmur Sara can hear is getting louder, a pleasant sound, like the crowd in an old-time theater before the movie. As they walk towards the platform, the woman tells her that quite a lot of people have come, despite the weather, probably because it's Friday. Sara smiles and can't even hear her own reply, because she's already becoming detached from her own voice, which always happens when she's in an uncomfortable situation. She has bundles of thoughts and rips them open so they can escape and make their own way. Meanwhile, she sticks to her main stream of thought, the mother stream, one might say, the one most present, the one that listens, speaks, that has substance, that looks at her and is looked at. "Today there are summer people here, and also some who don't belong to the reading club and who are spending the weekend," says the host, and Sara mentally rules out any of the weekend people as the possible Affec ted: the ambulance guys said it was a kid from the town. To know what she knew made her feel strange in her own skin, as if she had been invested with a useless and undeserved power, the power to see the future, someone else's future, a future she couldn't change, a future that she could conceive of but the person it belonged to could not, even though it was right there, right under his or her nose.

# **PUBLISHING NEWS**

or a Sack of Bones

Lluís-Anton Baulenas "Per un sac d'ossos" ("Za worek koĐci", For a Sack of Bones)

Wydawnictwo Literackie

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. He died of cold and was buried hurredly 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: Signature made a strong presentation of the Dutch translation of "La felicitat" (The Happiness), of which have already been sold more than 15,000 copies. The same publisher has already bought the rights for "Per un sac d'ossos." In France, after selling mo re than 12,000 copies of the translation of "El fil de plata" (The Silver Thread) and more than 10,000 of "La Felicitat" and "Alfons XIV" (under the title "Combat de chiens"), the publisher Flammarion will publish "Noms a la sorra" (Names in the Sand) in September and has bought the rights to "Per un sac d'ossos." In the United States, Harcourt has also bought the rights to "Per un sac d'ossos."



Albert Sánchez Piñol "La pell freda" (Cold Skin)

Mir Knigi Translated into Russian by Nina 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 disembarking 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, instead, he meets a crazy lighthouse keeper. The hero soon discovers that each night mysterious and menacing visitors appear. The book is the first part of a trilogy, of which Sánchez Piñol has already written the second, "Pandora al Congo" (Pandora in the Congo), also with international success. The author has just published the book of stories "Tretze tristos tràngols" (Thirteen Sad Dilemmas).



#### Joan Margarit "Tugs in the Fog"

Bloodaxe Books English version by Anna Crowe

"Tugs in the Fog" is an anthology of all of the poetic production of Joan Margarit, one of the most-read living poets in Catalonia today. The anthology includes around two hundred poems. Anna Crowe's English version has been awarded a prize by the Poetry Society. The poetry of Margarit has also been translated into German, Hebrew, and Russian. This year the poet will be recognized with the National Literature Prize for

his most recent collection, "Casa de misericòrdia" (House of Mercy), a book which also received the Catalan Critic's Prize. About his poetry, Margarit has said, "I look for lucidity. Lucidity is intelligence accompanied by understanding and feeling. The capital sins are still the same as ever, and behind each sin is fear. The only way to neutralize it is by understanding and facing it, opening the door of that dark closet. Only in this way does it lose its menacing aspect.



Das graue Heft

Bibliothek Suhrkamp

Josep Pla "El quadern gris" (The Gray Notebook)

Surkamp Verlag Translated into German by Eberhard Geisler

The publishing house Suhrkamp published Josep Pla's "El quadern gris" to coincide with the International Book Fair in Frankfurt in 2007, where Catalan culture was the guest of honor, with a prologue by the critic and editor Josep Maria Castellet. Josep Pla (Palafrugell, 1897 - Mas Pla de Llofrui, 1981) is one of the great Catalan prose stylists of the twentieth century, and "El quadern gris" is his referential work, a fundamental

volume in the history of Catalan literature. It is a diary of his youth, which he began to write on March 8, 1918, and continued until November 15, 1919, just before Pla went to Paris as a correspondent for the newspaper La Publicitat. Years later, before publishing, he revised it. "El quadern gris" is not the only work by the author translated into German: the publisher Ammann has published "El carrer Estret" (The Narrow Street) and Berenberg, "Històries de mar" (Sea Stories), with its likenesses dedicated to Antoni Gaudí and Salvador Dalí.



#### Jaume Cabré

"Les veus del Pamano" ("Le voci del fiume", The Voices of the River)

### LITERARY SOCIETY

#### THE TWO FACES OF MERCE 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 Barcelonan woman whose life is turned upside down by the civil war; published in 1981, *Quanta, quanta querra...* is the story of a boy who looks for liberty in war; unfinished and posthumous, La mortila primavera is the story of a town and the laws that govern it, totalitarian when it comes to death. Proscripted 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 enllà del bé i del mal, Beyond Good and Bad): "What worried l'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 hunted 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.

Maria Bohigas

## **ON LINE**

#### **Rodoreda Year**

http://www.mercerodoreda.cat/

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

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

#### Grup 62

#### http://www.grup62.cat/

After various fusions, Grup 62 is today the most important Catalan publishing house, appearing under 18 different labels, which embrace all literary genres and all aspects of publishing. In Catalan, Spanish and English.

#### **Institut Ramon Llull**

#### http://www.llull.cat/

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.

#### **AELC Updates**

#### http://www.escriptors.cat/

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

#### Translated into Italian by Stefania Maria Ciminelli

"Les veus del Pamano" has become, after its publication in January of 2004, 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, Dutch, Italian, Slovenian, Romanian, Hungarian, German...), receives critical praise from respected voices such as the ex-minister of German Foreign Affairs, Joschka

Fisher (who recommended it during the 2007 International Book Fair in Frankfurt), or Andrea Camilleri in Italy ("one of the books that has most profoundly impressed me", he said in an interview). In addition, the Italian translation by Stefania Maria Ciminelli received Honorable Mention in the Roma Prize of 2008. "Les veus del Pamano" develops in two times: in the early years of the post-war, and at the beginning of the twenty-first century. It takes place in a small town of the Catalan Pyrenees. Tina Bros, teacher and amateur photographer, discovers in the aban doned schoolhouse a notebook that contains the memoir of Oriol Fontelles, the former teacher of the town, also thought to be a Franquist hero. The notebook reveals the true history of Oriol Fontelles, quite different from what was said of him, which will be difficult for Tina to explain. The book is an elegy against forgetfulness, an impassioned defense for remembering, and a fight to ensure that history is not only written by the victors.

**Literary Blogs** 

#### http://www.blocsdelletres.com/

"Catalan Literature Hyperblog" allows you to follow permanent updates of the best literary blogs in Catalan. Received the 2007 Lletra prize for best digital initiative in Catalan literature.

#### **VilaWeb Letters**

http://www.vilaweb.cat/www/lletres The best digital space for information about Catalan letters. VilaWeb Letters is a section of the recognized independent electronic newspaper VilaWeb.

**MONTSERRAT SERRA** 

JAUME SUBIRANA