

## A SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY OF BIEL MESQUIDA

- 1975** *L'adolescent de sal*. (The salt adolescent) Prudenci Bertrana Prize, 1973. Barcelona: Edicions 62.
- 1977** *Self-Service* (with Quim Monzó). Barcelona: Iniciatives Editoriales. Ucrònia Collection; and «Matèria de Cos» (Body Material) with Steva Terrades. Barcelona: Els Marges, 10 (May). Pages. 65-70. In 2009 Steva Terrades produced a limited edition of two copies of *Matèria de cos*.
- 1978** *Putà Marès (ahí)* (*Bloody Lumps of Sandstone, (there)*). ( Barcelona: Iniciatives Editoriales. Ucrònia Collection. Translates into Spanish with Alberto Cardín *El baile de las locas* (*The dance of the wolves*) by Copi. Barcelona: Anagrama.
- 1980** *Mallorquins a Barcelona*. (*Mallorcans in Barcelona*) Barcelona: Ajuntament de Barcelona. Starts to collaborate every week with the Majorcan press.
- 1981** *Notes de temps i viceversa*. (Notes on time and vice versa) Manacor: Casa de Cultura: "Sa Nostra".
- 1982** *Xenius, Escriptura, Premsa*. (*Xenius, Writing, Press*) Bellaterra: Degree Thesis. Autonomous University of Barcelona. Faculty of Media Studies.
- 1985** *El bell país on els homes desitgen els homes*. (*The beautiful country where men desire men*) Barcelona: Laertes. A clandestine mimeographed edition of this work was produced in 1974.
- 1987** Translates *Incidents* by Roland Barthes. Barcelona: Empúries.
- 1990** *Doi*. (*I give*) Barcelona: Editorial Empúries.
- 1993** Starts to collaborate with *Diario de Mallorca* (*The Mallorcan Daily*). In 1999, these chronicles will then lead to books such as *T'estim a tu*, (*I love, you*) *Els detalls del món* (*World minusculae*) or *Acrollam*.
- 1994** *The Blazing Library*. Palma: University of the Balearic Islands. Servei de Publicacions i Intercanvi Científic (Publications and Scientific Exchange Service).
- 1996** *Excelsior o el temps escrit*. (*Excelsior or the writing of time*) Barcelona: Editorial Empúries. Premi Ciutat de Barcelona i Nacional de la crítica (National and City of Barcelona Critics prize).
- 1999** *Vertigens*. Barcelona: Editorial Empúries. City of Palma Prize 1998. *Som l'altre* (*We are the other*). Barcelona: l'autor (Collectors edition). *Veu de poeta* (*The Poet's Voice*). CD presenting verses recited by the author.
- 2000** Co-writes the script with Antoni Aloy and Agustí Villaronga for the film *El mar* (*The sea*), based on the novel of the same name by Blai Bonet.
- 2001** *T'estim a tu*. (*I love, you*) Barcelona: Editorial Empúries.
- 2002** *Camafeu* (*Cameo*). Barcelona: Editorial Empúries. *Paraula de poeta* (*The Poet's Word*). Conselleria d'educació i Cultura de les Illes Balears (Education and Culture Council of the Balearic Islands). Palma, 2002.
- 2004** Starts his blog *Plagueta de bord*. (*Log book*) Publishes the poetry pamphlet *Com passes d'ocell a l'aire* (*How you move from bird to air*) with drawings by Margalida G.R. Sancho. Barcelona: Els ulls de Tirèsies Collection. Editorial Cafè Central.
- 2005** *Els detalls del món*. Barcelona: Editorial Empúries. National Culture Prize for Literature 2006. *Homersea*. Barcelona: Vilaweb. Receives the Cross of Saint George.
- 2007** *Un escriptor europeu en llengua catalana diu* (*A European writer of Catalan says*). Opening speech about Catalan literature in the inaugural act of the programme about the culture of Catalonia, the invited guest of the Frankfurt Book Fair.
- 2008** *Acrolla' m*. Barcelona: Editorial Empúries.
- 2009** Publishes the second bilingual edition, Catalan-French, of *The Blazing Library*. Barcelona: Institució de les Lletres Catalanes. Translates *Desaparición da nieve* (*The Disappearance of Snow*) by Manuel Rivas. Madrid: Santillana.
- 2010** *Esmolar la garrova*. (*Carob grinding*) With prints by Sandra Lehnis. Arenys de Munt: Murtra Editions.

# Who's Who

CATALAN WRITING



@ Toni Catany

## BIEL MESQUIDA: WHEN WRITING MEANS DISPERSAL

The work of Biel Mesquida (1947) is frenetic, passionate and disturbing literature, altered writing, text that turns things into what they were not before, leaving us speechless and troubled. It is in this ploughed up landscape that we become most aware that it is a kind of writing that strips away the layers, that it is non-mixtifying and that it allows us to see what is hidden beneath the dead skin of the words. It never, but never, consigns agitation to order and always presents an aesthetic of resistance to convention, to anything that whiffs of doctrine and ignores any desire to become a word of order. Even controversy, criticism and a kind of aesthetic of refusal and blame in this work undergo the stripping process and lay the living flesh of words and things open to view, to the air. Even so, many have never dared go further than the agitated superficial effervescence. They search the surface froth, without realising that what makes the literature so disturbing is to be found in the depths. But whenever anyone tries to pin it down, make a cliché out of it or read it simply as an unweildy yet spectacular discourse, it always departs by the back door, its natural habitat, into that permanent oscillation of the restless word. That is its vanguard. *Don't forget that I never write anything that is sure*, says one of the characters of the stories in *Els detalls del món*, confirming and even demanding that this is what great literature tends to do. Mesquida's work is a laboratory in which it is possible to ask oneself questions in the midst of the bellowing of time. It allows us to see things that are not shown, things we would miss if we were not really alive. Traffickers of language takes a risk, a magmatic and magnetic risk, in the false, honeyed crust of reality – like an antiseptic, a bleached word that reflects the bubbling of the moment. It is a permanent state of foreignness. Taking one thing for another, that is what makes for the extreme malleability in his prose and verse – forging its own way forward in a desire to capture everyone in mid-agitation. All of this is easily detectable in the work, from what has become established as the cornerstone of the Mesquidian corpus, *L'adolescent de sal* (*The salt adolescent*) to more ambiguous pieces – artefacts somewhere between journalistic chronicles and the type of urgent novel that make up his latest books.

Much has been made, too much perhaps, of the type

of textualistic relationship linked to the *Tel Quel* group in *L'adolescent de sal*, for its diffuse and dissolvent structure, in a desire to place it among the avant-garde practices of the seventies. There have also been attempts to find links with the *bildungsroman*, when the text is actually more about magmatic self-dissolution. We are talking about a chant for deformation, not about the *bildungsroman* of the time, which invites the desire to break away. This insubmission comes from the irreverent profile of the main character who rips up the path on purpose. It uses verbal and corporal pornography and devises eroticism and the celebration of the body as the freshest forms of opening windows on the stuffy atmosphere of the Franco era. Some day we will have to read *Self-Service* and *Putà marès (ahí)* in this trajectory of disintegration that tried to dismantle itself, exhaust itself to the point of coming dangerously close to the aphasia of its own foundational hegemony and which had placed it on an avant-garde pedestal. Its radicality consisted in not allowing itself to become a fetish, not even from its own textualist exaltations, even when it tests the paths that are currently being pursued in postproduction and collaborative art projects. A permanent aesthetic of migration towards a research into its own instability, that escapes from its own ways, distancing itself from the narcissism that is claimed by those who want it to be a Catalan version of *telquelism*. Destabilising itself in the research of its own eclipse, placing itself in a permanent state of crisis and being a continual site of work in progress, emptying itself.

In fact, towards the eighties a period of research began, which set out from the only certain knowledge that in his work there had been nothing final and from the anxiety to reinvent himself through a process that involved disarmament and which plays dangerously with fragility, failure and that process of sinking that puts him right at the top of the dizzy heights of disarticulation. From this enriching process of erratic dispersion and metamorphosis, we find what floats up to the visible surface of the work: especially poetry (*Notes de temps i viceversa* and the publication of a poetic text that ran backwards and forwards, *El bell país on els homes desitgen els homes*, a translation (*Incidents*, by Roland Barthes) and his work with the press.

Without leaving aside the poetical research that he tends to use as the true horsepower for that permanent work in progress that forms the Mesquidian corpus, he published *Doi* (1990), in which he explores the possibilities of short narratives from an unfixed fulcrum, not in an attempt to

procure a model or to return to traditional formulae, but as a way of testing them out unmercifully. On the contrary, he tried always to graft literary forms onto one another, to adulterate them, in an attempt to delve into the most fertile disparity, always sounding out a literary method that never ceases to be exceptional in the way in which it pursues high performance testing. That is precisely what he would do with the novel in the works published in the nineties: *Excelsior o el temps escrit* and *Vertigens*. Always trans-generic, always in the process of revising literary tradition and his own findings, never falling back into the comfort of a finished work. In fact, many people await the "next novel" without realising that it has already journeyed into other literary areas. Recycling, re-establishing meaning, from newspaper to book, the texts published in the *Diario de Mallorca*, or on his blog, later appear in the books *T'estim a tu*, *Els detalls del món* and *Acrollam*, to make the tableau of the landscape of contemporary dispersion and daily ruins from the insular panorama. Instantaneous snippets that absorb a saturated world, overloaded, unarticulated, with the congestion of the present and speak through those liminal and archipelagic words, through that writing of evacuation, the soluble world of contemporary simulacra. That is why he starts with the islands, a genuine laboratory of liquidated forms from present-day life. And he writes from the instability of this temporary, silencing space, which is now nothing more than a spectacular and volatile event, but also from the precariousness of the literary system in the panorama of the audiences. That is why many of his stories are staged as collapse, accident, emergency and rupture, between chronicle and fiction.

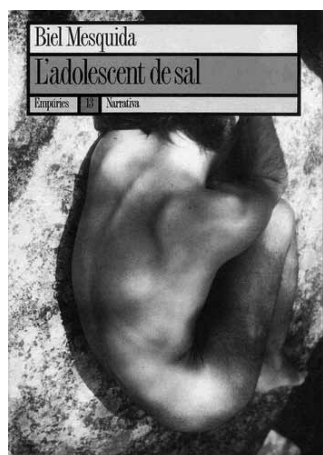
But it is also in poetry that Mesquida shines in the viscous tenacity of the book from the facts to research into the sublimity and lightness of the winged words spoken by Homer. You only have to read *Com passes d'ocell a l'aire* (2004) or *Esmolar la garrova* (2010) to be able to perceive that vehemence of working with the untethered word that grazes on disparity, on the poem as an insect in the amber of life.

More than the linguistic gold-working for which he has rightly been praised, more than applauding the work of Mesquida through purely verbal gesturing, his writing must be considered as one of the riskiest narrative projects in the Catalan literary scene today.

SEBASTIÀ PERELLÒ



## Works reviewed



**L'adolescent de sal**  
(*The salt adolescent*)  
Barcelona: Edicions 62, 1975.

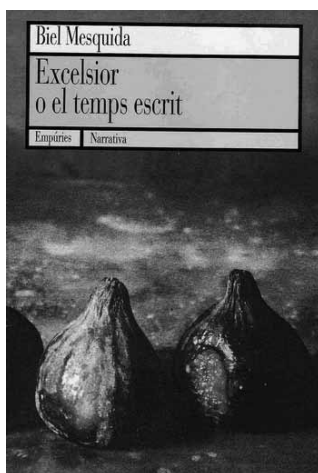
A cult novel in contemporary Catalan literature that was rejected by various publishers, which after winning the Prudenci Bertrana Prize in 1973 was banned from publication by Francoist censorship until 1975. A form of literature that detoxifies, with a veritable art of stripping bare, which uses narrative models that salinate.

While appearing to be an investigation into adolescent identity, it crystallizes into a conglomerated mass that at times is solid and at others dissolves into a flow of words. Literature from the gutter, that has been read too historically within the experimental framework of the seventies, as a symbol of an era, with the aim of pinning it down, but that fails to explain the true drift of this mass which insinuates textual forms that always go that bit further. As if the writing was waiting, for example, for an electronic edition capable of placing in evidence the true artefact of this textual essay that never quite achieves a fixed form, something it specifically rejects.

The adolescent is the subject in process, a true parable of immaturity that doesn't want to conform, with what everyone expects of him nor to fulfil his destiny. For this the writing takes its form from a process of pulling apart. Fragments are drawn away from any guiding organisation and frenetically refer to quotations, to an intertextuality that recycles, re-qualifies and samples, to self-fiction, the newspaper, to the logbook, the pile of papers, to the annotation, the draft, the collage, meta-literary illusions in a veritable palimpsest. The aim of presenting itself within this discursive heterogeneity is not simply a rebellious and iconoclastic experiment that we can anchor within a specific era transforming the work into a symbol of a time and a search for identity, thereby converting it into a counter effigy of late Francoist Spain. If in the text we are the offspring of this process of putrefaction that the author virulently attacks, it is also true that it crystallises the gamble on a literary direction that Biel Mesquida will maintain in his work right up until today.

It is the story of a young boy from Majorca, who flees and loses himself and in getting lost on his way from the island to Barcelona, he finds the salt of the earth. Hence why he is the salt adolescent: echoing the close link between knowing and savouring, having taste. But without ever abandoning the sacrificial connotations of being something that disinfects and that acts as a barrier against evil. We are in a literary territory of sterility and desertification, of the salt that is most lethal, related to pain but also to thirst, that element of vitality that understands salt as fertility. The true protagonist of this work is the *salax* of the Romans, the man in love, flesh of desire, the ferment of life. It is this irresolvable duality inscribed in the text, that gives voice to the irritation of the dispossessed, that shatters the eclipse and flees towards a narrative desert, that solely retreats, that grafts itself on to the instrument of alarm yet at the same time is the writer of combustion with the air of an exhausted fireman, who breathes the smoke with the pleasure of a pyromaniac.

To read it simply as a disordered experimental avant-garde text from the seventies, stagnant and with no continuity in the Catalan literary system, is to fail to see his writing as a habitual and curious search that connects with the new phenomena of electronic poetic and narrative forms. That connects with the manifestations of cultural and textual hybridisation, the periphery and the emergence of proposals that arise out of emigration, subordination and the diaspora, out of literary exiguity. A mosaic, a kaleidoscopic and arborescent puzzle, that at every turn can be read within the context of multi-modal discursive strategies, a galaxy of interconnected texts, a nebulous of fragments that are barely fixable, ever evanescent and unsteady. A written event, of a fragile and ephemeral configuration, as literature already is this constellation, this fluidity.



**Excelsior o el temps escrit**  
(*Excelsior or the writing of time*)  
Barcelona: Editorial Empúries, 1996.

Biel Mesquida, in his research, does not establish the call to disorder that has usually been foisted upon him. This chaos is on the whole stirred up by the society of terror that wants to justify its practices of bullet-proof impenetrable control, something that the writer specifically places

in evidence. To do so he rummages in the breaches, in the wounds, testing his words in frontier spaces while at the same time using texts as perturbing signals that can and want to affect how the established systems, be they social, political or literary, function. Seen in this way, his texts are a permanent interrogation of these systems, of their identity and a form of monitoring, an observation, of their mutating capacities and incapacities. And for this reason, he once again uses in this novel, as a metaphor, for the destabilising and work of the devil, the amour fou on the one hand, and on the other, the scenographic reverse of Acrolla'm, with which he attacks the medallion and the preserved, mythicised and diorama-like image of the island of Mallorca.

Always with the aim of dissenting from discursive marginality and of becoming actively resistant. The documentary marquetry of the novel is laid out in a trio of voices, three soloists that interweave into a true piece of chamber literature. Far from the multitudinous reredos that he will use in later work, here he plays upon the text as a space that resonates with the dovetailing of voices in a spectral vision of history and literary tradition. From the intimacy of the solos that intertwine, far from the epic of the novel, these texts are exercises in deriving and devouring: straying and generic contamination, the unravelling of the warp and weave of the narratives from positions that incite multiple displacements and accentuate the notion of flight, assemblage and a disintegration that doesn't camouflage the discontinuities, nor make their crooked and diffident manners, nor the narrative inclemency to which the reader is exposed, disappear.

A novel that is written in disarray, that disperses in search of overcoming its own limitations. A truly sponge-like literature that devours and sucks the blood from tradition, as the voices rummage around in the three great contemporary models of the 20th century: Mercè Rodoreda, Josep Pla and Llorenç Villalonga. While they confer and recognise their authority, they precipitate into variation, always with lacunae, inscribed from the overture, from the possible declinations of the discursive tones of the masters that have served as their generators, not of singularity, but as a means of entering into the flow of production: literary tradition as a workshop, tools to be used, where he exposes himself as an accidental parasite and as a proliferation. Always retractable he produces literature in the form of discharges, where writing is already this rereading, a jogging of the memory – in lands of chronic amnesia – that appears as a task of continuity and excision, a textual reopening of the past on the present. In a spectral manner they are the classic texts that they read us today.

And the informal you. He is on intimate terms with the living and the dead. There are splits, reproaches, interrogation and the drive of this constant presence and questioning of the speaker. If the I, to all effects identifies, the you is ambiguous because it is shy and accusing, exposing the faults or making commands. An inner voice, a retreat from where to question the tangle of lives of Acrollam, this reserved simulacra, this inverse mirror that globalisation directs on the local space, enabling it to outline and replicate the multiplying and disperse panorama that makes us appear to be in the world and that is a metaphor for contemporaneity and the transitory nature of almost everything. It is in this text that one needs to look for the seeds of the books that will follow; T'estim a tu or Acrollam, where what is written will already be presented as coagulated moments of centrifugal words that try to outline this form of resistance between the resort island and the museumification of local remains, in a spiral where any place is on either side.



**Els detalls del món**  
(*World minusculae*)  
Barcelona: Editorial Empúries, 2005.

This is the second work that comes from the cròniques (chronicles) that Biel Mesquida has published in the newspapers since 1999. These urgent pieces of prose adapt to the contemporary metamorphosis and fluctuation of the fractured insular panorama that establishes

itself as a metaphor for the soluble and instantaneous world of the 21st century. In these brief and fragmentary texts, urgency is the equivalent of the current disseminated and sporadic landscapes, this literary nanotechnology seeking the mechanisms to infiltrate the fluid channel surfing. He writes in this incommmodity, that is neither document nor fiction, so as to capture the most fugitive present from the position of a generic frontier that stems from the recycling of texts, from existing material published in the newspaper or on the blog. Isolated in these spaces they propose a separate reading, an isolated fragment, or one floating in the promiscuity of the rush of the constant avalanche of information, but that reread in the cyclorama that is *Els detalls del món*, takes on new meanings in a process of continuous textual reassigning. No longer a simple collection of articles, they come to form histories of an archipelago, showing their intermittency in a catalogue of instants, an atomised reredos that talks of the dead leaves left by History, the concrete reality from the insignificant note that is capable of revealing this frieze that interweaves comedy and tragedy with the banality of the hyperbolic detail. And it is this hypertrophy of the minutiae that enables him, with the incisive derision of an uncompromising gaze, to paint the picture of the asphyxiating reality of the leaflet that envelops us. That deforms whoever does not conform.

Biel Mesquida has known how to find the way to talk about this amorphous, informal space that is the present in these kind of synoptic pictures where what is local articulates in a precipitated manner the global, in permanent decomposition and re-composition, where above all fluidity prevails. For this the narratives pile up in a conglomerate that together profiles the collective and their surroundings, superimposed realities, garish worlds, crossovers, tangential perspectives, this agitation of the fine tessellations of a mosaic that frenetically come together and disintegrate. A clot of arguments that gathers together a cabinet of curiosities, and displays its characters amongst misunderstandings and perplexity. It is also the weirdness of Mesquida's populated landscape, the erring of the women and men who run hopelessly through the stories, who are set up as in the familiar contemporary novel, cells that move frenetically through the social and territorial magma of this supermodernity, pure instances in a galaxy of interconnected texts that manage to capture the pulse of our times, our appearances and disappearances on the cartographic skin of the present.

Constellated lives and a pluriscopic vision of the world according to a fractal model. The title itself already insinuates a totality and its fragmentation. There is no longer any privileged viewpoint from where to supervise the machine of the world. From the vast landscape to miniscule lives, minute stories from the infinite and improbable recompiling of broken mirrors.