

British scholar and erudite voice of Catalan culture

# Arthur Terry

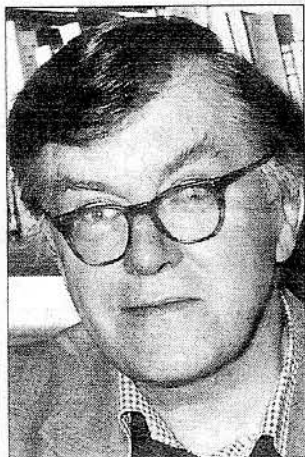
When Arthur Terry, who has died at the age of 76, first went out to Barcelona in 1949 on a grant to study early Catalan monasticism, it was still a conquered city: the Franco government regarded interest in Catalan language or culture as subversive. Arthur attended clandestine literary meetings and collaborated on magazines harried by censorship. Young Catalan writers, grateful for his solidarity and outstanding critical gifts, became lifelong friends.

His death made headline news in Barcelona. This quiet Englishman meant much to Catalans as an interpreter of their culture to the world and themselves. No other British scholar can have spoken for another nation's culture with such recognised authority. Extraordinarily for a foreigner, he was made president (1986-92) of the *Associació Internacional de Llengua i Literatura Catalans*, later receiving a four-volume homage from them (1997-2000).

The autonomous Catalan government, the *Generalitat*, also awarded him the *Cross of Sant Jordi* (1982) and the coveted *Ramon Llull* prize (1995).

Arthur was born in York, and educated at St Peter's school. He gained first-class honours in Spanish and French at Cambridge (1944-47), and widened his linguistic knowledge further in his two years' national service, during which he learned Russian and was posted to Germany.

When he returned from Spain to lecture in Belfast in 1950, his professor, Ignacio González Llubera, himself a Catalan and a distinguished



Terry ... poets' friend

medievalist, refused to teach anything later than 1500, and Arthur had to master the more recent eras. He intervened trenchantly in critical debates on 16th- and 17th-century Spanish poetry, and began his first book, on the early 20th-century Catalan poet Maragall. In 1962, he succeeded Llubera as professor of Spanish.

His advice, eagerly sought, was always generously given

Queen's University staff in the 1960s had a lively culture of cross-disciplinary talk. Arthur was supremely well adapted to this, having read more than anyone else, and thought about it to more purpose, though pleasantly difficult in advancing his views. In the Belfast Writers' Group, founded in 1963, his original contributions were limited to verse translations, but his presence was indispensable,

as was his organising work. A valued friend to poets since his Barcelona days, he now won esteem from Philip Hobsbaum, Seamus Heaney, Michael Longley and many others.

When the Troubles started, his sturdy ethical humanism made his department an accepting space, valued by students of all allegiances. He and his three colleagues covered a full honours programme. He taught memorably and undertook most of the academic chores, refining and nurturing other people's projects.

Research was a natural extension of that dialogue of ideas which daily contact with Arthur entailed. Formal administration was minimal, effective and consensual. New courses appeared (translation studies, Latin American texts). His two-volume anthology of 16th- and 17th-century Spanish verse (1965-69) confirmed him as his generation's leading critic of Hispanic poetry.

In 1973, when the University of Essex offered him what had been Donald Davie's chair of literature, it was natural for Arthur to accept a wider remit. Less of a public figure than Davie, his 21 years there were no less fruitful.

His teaching found new opportunities: more post-graduates, more on translation, more English poetry, more Latin American texts — still short, though, of the full range of his multilingual personal culture. His work in the British Comparative Literature Association (he was its president, 1986-92), as his successor noted, left British literary culture, "greatly in

his debt". His teaching, and his ever-perceptive comments contributed massively to the academic revaluation of translation, as did his own continuing activity as a translator. His advice, eagerly sought, and was always generously given.

A regular TLS contributor, he went on to write books that rounded out themes from earlier work: studies of Riba, Foix, Ferrater, Brossa and others — Catalan writers he had known and valued; *Seventeenth-century Spanish Poetry* (1993), extending the scope of his earlier anthology. A new cluster of completed projects — most recently *A Companion To Catalan Literature* — appeared from 1999.

More were in progress, in a retirement that was active to the last. His lectures as the first José Angel Valente Professor of Poetry at Santiago de Compostela appeared as *La idea de la lengua en la poesía española* (2002). In November 2003 he lectured at the *Universidad Autónoma de Barcelona* on English poetry.

Friends will remember Arthur's love of music and his delight, in his mid-seventies, in finding the right piano teacher; his recidivist pipesmoking; his mildly subversive yet unmalicious humour and the warmly welcoming, richly spontaneous family life he and his wife Molly created.

She and their children Sally, Philip and Richard survive him.

**Nicholas Round**

*Arthur Terry, scholar, critic and translator, born February 17 1927; died January 24 2004*