

## 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 Soví* 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 Gueifa*. 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 Balaciu 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 *Istus: Un perfil biogràfic* 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/esstatic/eng/tramits/sub-traduccio\\_shtm](http://www.llull.cat/llull/esstatic/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>

XAVIER MONTOLIU

## INTERVIEW



### JANA BALACIU MATEI

Doctor in Romance Languages and Literature

CARME ARENAS

Jana Balaciu 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 find 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, Ausiàs 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.

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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 announce 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.