

## ACTIONS & VOICES

### The Ramon Llull Institute

The mission of the Institut Ramon Llull (IRL) is the international advancement of Catalan culture, in all of its aspects, including literature, music, dance, theater, cinema, and plastic arts. It also coordinates the teaching of the Catalan language in more than one hundred universities on five continents.

To promote Catalan literature around the world, the IRL has an ambitious program of translation support at its disposal, and participates in more than ten international book fairs, such as those of Frankfurt, Guadalajara, Paris, London, and New Delhi. Over the years, it has developed a network of four hundred publishing companies and translators from every part of the world. It offers collaborative aid to book translators and provides scholarships for translators to stay in Catalonia (which become, in the case of countries with few Catalan translators, intensive training courses). It also participates very actively in the promotion of Catalan authors' books once they have been translated abroad. The highlight of the IRL's literary work was its participation in the Frankfurt Book Fair, where Catalan culture was the guest of honor in 2007. Frankfurt affirmed the work done by the IRL, for during 2007 alone 53 Catalan works were translated into German, including classics such as Ramon Llull, Salvador Espriu, and Mercè Rodoreda, and a wide range of contemporary authors. To orient its work, the IRL produces reports such as that recently prepared in collaboration with PEN International, directed by Esther Allen (it can be consulted at [www.internationalpen.org](http://www.internationalpen.org)). The IRL also collaborates on the website of the Comitè de Traduccions i Drets Lingüístics of the Catalan PEN (Committee on Translations and Linguistic Rights; [www.pencatala.cat](http://www.pencatala.cat)) and on the magazine Catalan Writing. Fruit of an agreement among the governments of the Generalitats of Catalonia, the Balearic Islands and Andorra, the IRL promotes the work of all the authors who write in the Catalan language. You can find more information at [www.llull.cat](http://www.llull.cat).

CARLES TORNER

Head of the Science and Humanities Group  
Institut Ramon Llull

### The Institute of Catalan Letters, center of literary resources

Literature is a unique good because the experience of reading helps to give depth to life itself. From this premise, the Institute works to promote literature within the Catalan-speaking territories. An organization dependent on the Catalan government's Ministry of Culture and directed with the participation of writers' associations and the principal agents of the literary system, this Arts Council dedicated to writers and literature began work in 1938 and, after the interruption caused by the dictatorship of Franco, recommenced activity in 1988. Since then, through conferences, readings, gatherings, exhibitions, and all kinds of activities, whether organized by us or through the involvement of outside groups, the Institute works for the social promotion of writers, ensures that literature occupies a meaningful space within the educative system, enhances the visibility of our literary heritage, fosters reading, and encourages exchanges with writers of other literatures.

ORIOL IZQUIERDO

Director  
Institute of Catalan Letters (*Institució de les Lletres Catalanes*)

## INTERVIEW



### WITH JOSEP BARGALLÓ, director of the Ramon Llull Institute

CARME ARENAS

#### It's now been a year since you assumed directorship of the Institut Ramon Llull (IRL). What objectives have been proposed for the short term and the long term?

*The IRL is a young institute, created in 2002. Its primary objective is to continue working to strengthen the Institute's three areas of activity: the Catalan language, promoting its teaching and propogation outside of the Catalan-speaking regions; Catalan literature, with emphasis on translations and guaranteeing the presence of Catalan writers at all important literary events; and, finally, Catalan artistic creation, ensuring that drama, music, and the other arts are widely known.*

#### Catalan culture is fragmented among three autonomous territories of the Spanish state. How is the IRL working to minimize this territorial fragmentation and to help bring Catalan culture together?

*All European cultures are spread over more than one state. Ours is found in four countries: Spain, France, Italy and Andorra. We aim to work together and, in this sense, the presence of Catalan culture as guest of honor at the Frankfurt Book Fair this year has marked a watershed for our ability to join our strengths. We are now finishing up agreements with the administrations of all these countries and communities, which will allow us greater visibility abroad, with a united voice and shared interests.*

#### The existence of the IRL is for Catalonia the equivalent of the Cervantes Institute for the Spanish state. What relationship do the two institutes have? Does the IRL receive support from the Cervantes Institute?

*We have a collaborative agreement with the Cervantes Institute for offering Catalan classes, and we plan IRL activities in branches of the Cervantes Institute, which has a duty to promote abroad the cultural reality of the Spanish state and its four cultures: Castilian, Catalan, Galician and Basque.*

#### You assumed directorship of the IRL during the tail end of Catalan culture's participation as guest of honor in the Frankfurt Book Fair. What's your take on this experience? What would you change if you were to do it again?

*I inherited the Frankfurt project at a time when it was already well underway, but perhaps badly explained. My interest was to develop clear objectives and statements: explaining our culture, situating our writers on a level field, encouraging translations of the authors to German or other languages, and promoting them through their participation in organized events during the fair. The outcomes have been very good. Success came, however, thanks to the tranquility of knowing that Catalan literature can stand side by side with any other European literature.*

#### What large-scale projects are you currently planning at the IRL?

*In 2008 we have the milestone of the Guanajuato Festival, where Mercè Rodoreda and Agustí Bartra will be honored. And for 2009, the Biennale in Venice.*

## ON POETRY

Blai Bonet (Santanyí, Mallorca, 1926-1997) is one of the most significant Catalan poets of the twentieth century. Born to a humble family, he studied at seminary, which he had to leave for fear of tuberculosis. There he discovered, with great enthusiasm, the Bible, Ramon Llull, and the Greek and Roman classics, and he began to write. A high awareness of languages combined with an ardent sensuality makes his work a continuous journey. The quotidian word is loaded with high tension: metaphors that strike like kisses, diction that caresses with incandescence, rhythms of thought that sing the great themes of the lone and common man. Poet in verse, story, essay, diary, and translation, his is the modernity of the mystics and scientists of the renaissance, who materialize a prophetic voice from the great ravines of mystery. A true lover of the verb.

#### Soledat oberta (fragment)

Em dol tot, fins la camisa,  
A damunt el pit cremat.  
I les paraules em nafren  
Quan sonen damunt la llengua  
Amb el seu significat.

No puc parlar de tant que estim... La parla  
És sempre de baladres i sal grossa:  
Un agre ganivet que em reboteix  
Bavant-me sal i sang, i sal i sang,  
Pel meu bosquet senzill de parla verda...

I no vull tanta parla que s'esquerda.  
Mes, les meves paraules de «bellveure»,  
«taronja», «llimonera», «estrella», «amic»,  
les tenc, obscures, fent una plorada  
al carreró banyat de La Gran Pena.

#### Open solitude (fragment)

All this hurts, even my shirt  
On top of my burning chest  
And the words cut me  
When their sounds rest on my tongue  
With their signification.

I can't talk, I love so much... Talking  
Is stuff of rosebay and rock salt:  
A bitter knife that fills my form  
Drooling salt and blood, and salt and blood,  
Around my simple copse of green talk.

And I don't want so much talk it shatters,  
But, my words like "summer cypress"  
"Orange", "lemon tree" and "star" and "friend",  
They're here, dark and uncertain, crying  
Down the drenched alley of Sorrow.

Translation: Richard Mansell

## WORK IN PROGRESS



**Francesc Serés, born in 1972 in the town of Saïdí (Baix Cinca), holds degrees in fine arts and anthropology. He is the author of the novels *Els ventres de la terra* (The Bowels of the Earth, 2000), *L'arbre sense tronc* (The Trunkless Tree, 2001) and *Una llengua de plom* (A Tongue of Lead, 2002), which form a trilogy later published under the title *De fems i de marbres* (Of Dung and Marble, 2003). Following these, he wrote the book of tales *La força de la gravetat* (The Force of Gravity, 2006) and the book of articles *Matèria primera* (Primary Material, 2007).**

**He has been honored with the Crítica Serra d'Or award for *La força de la gravetat* and with the Premi Nacional de Literatura, awarded by the Generalitat de Catalunya.**

#### The Soloist

In the last drawer of all the archives that the KGB has hidden, is hiding, and will hide, is the most well-guarded file of all the files drafted by the presidential offices.

No, this is not a list of Swiss accounts where our leaders hoped to carve themselves a hideaway. Nor of plans showing the biggest oil and gas deposits that anyone has ever dreamed of, nor even of subterranean bunkers where the Soviets were to hide in case of nuclear crisis. No, everyone knows that, it's all on the internet...

Ah, the file... I could read it because I had to write the last part, and if I'm alive to describe it it's because of the special nature of that event: leaving everyone alive was one of the conditions that both parties seemed to have imposed. The secret diary of the Kremlin from one day in November of 1958 explains how one of the most absurd vicissitudes of what we've come to call the Cold War came to a close. Oh, the Cold War, going to such trouble to go nowhere.

In fact, come to think of it, these documents must also be hidden in the bottom basement of all the Pentagon's basements, and they will probably be destroyed when they destroy all the documents that miraculously disappear before being declassified.

That's why, if it weren't for this confession, no one would know that Elvis Presley performed a concert in Moscow's Red Square.

Yes, a 1958 concert in Red Square. It was one of so many shows of force that the powers made during the Cold War. A stupid show, but a show through and through. A stupid idea that some Russian official defined as a great act of love between Mother Russia and the North American people, oh, the things they said! With the distance of time someone might have seen the first metaphor of perestroika in the words of the official: Elvis in Red Square left us pregnant with capitalism.

It all began on March 29 in 1957, when our Marshal Zhukov visited Berlin. He spoke with officials, gave conferences, and while he spoke with officials and gave conferences, could not avoid doing the same thing that all the Marshal Zhukovs who visited Berlin did: showed off, got cocky in front of CIA spies. Sometimes I think that the only goal of speeches made in Berlin was to give material to the double, triple, or quadruple spies that every country sent to be a nuisance in Germany. One member of the party told them not to send so many or there wouldn't be enough apartments, that Berlin was still a city in ruins and there were already enough people who complained they didn't have anywhere to go. What a horde of spies...

So, back to the file. Point seven of the report shows the marshal saying that, given an imminent rise in enemy tension, the Russian army had to be prepared to take the first step. Up to here, nothing new, same tune as always. The Pentagon also told their spies not to send so many reports, that the United States had limited territory too. The source, furthermore, was a useless spy, like most of them writing reports from Berlin: just to say something they wrote that the Aral Sea was drying up, that the Russians wanted to send a dog into space or some other nonsense, that everyone was hungry and cold in Berlin.

If it hadn't been for a second, still unclassified report that sleeps in the last hidden corners of the archives of both powers (there are so many last hidden corners that I don't know how they ever find the papers), it wouldn't have gone any further. These days everything is doubted, of course, it's so easy now to question everything, but in that moment, the second report passed from hand to hand until it arrived at the Oval Office. Since Washington and Moscow were mirror and reflection, the reports made by Russian spies also went up all the floors of the Kremlin until they got through the president's door. If the first report by the cocky Zhukov was completely inoffensive, the second was truly worrisome. It included a map of the United States with dots where the Russians had been able to bring in rocket-building material. The map was imprecise. Besides, since the American secret service had gotten underway, they had only been able to find one hideout, and that one might have been a false lead.

FRANCESC SERÉS