

Who's Who

CATALAN WRITING

A SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY OF JOAN FRANCESC MIRA

- 1974 *El bou de foc* (The Fire Bull). Valencia, Tres i Quatre, [novel]
- 1975 *Els cucs de seda* (The Silkworms). Valencia, Tres i Quatre, [stories]
- 1981 *El desig dels dies* (The Desire of Days). Valencia, Tres i Quatre, [novel]
- 1983 *Viatge al final del fred* (Journey to the End of Cold). Barcelona: La Magrana, [revised and expanded edition, Alzira: Bromera, 1998]
- 1984 *Crítica de la nació pura* (Criticism of the Pure Nation). Valencia: Tres i Quatre, [Essay]
- 1987 *Punt de mira* (Sightline). Valencia: Tres i Quatre, [Essay]
- 1989 *Els treballs perduts* (The Lost Works). Valencia: Tres i Quatre, [Novel]
- 1997 *Els sorolls humans* (Human Sounds). [Essay] Alzira: Bromera.
- 1998 *Quatre qüestions d'amor* (Four Questions of Love). [Stories] Valencia: Tres i Quatre.
- 1999 *Borja Papa* (Pope Borja). [Novel] Valencia: Tres i Quatre, 1996; Barcelona: Proa. *Sobre ídols i tribus* (On Idols and Tribes). [Essay] Valencia: Tres i Quatre.
- 2003 *Purgatori* (Purgatory). [Novel] Barcelona: Proa.
- 2005 *Literatura, món, literatures i altres discursos sobre parlar i escriure* (Literature, World, Literatures and Other Discourses on Speaking and Writing). [Essay] Valencia. Publicacions de la Universitat de València.
- 2006 *Paradís, pestes, kalàixnikovs i altres temes i qüestions* (Paradise, Plagues, Kalashnikovs and Other Themes and Questions). [Essay] Valencia. Tres i Quatre.
- 2008 *El professor d'història* (The History Professor). [Novel] Barcelona: Proa.



Joan Francesc Mira

LITERARY HISTORIES tend to sort authors into a genre, based on one or two specific works. Only with difficulty could we label Joan Francesc Mira (Valencia, 1939) a novelist, anthropologist, essayist, or political and cultural activist, because he is above all a multi-faceted man in terms of his writings and, as he defines himself, an “active or contemplative anthropologist.”

Of all these things, his most literary angle—that of essayist and novelist—represents a milestone of quality in Catalan letters. This literary character revolves around a global conception of culture integral to both writing disciplines.

The more imaginative of the two, fiction, has played with the universe of symbols and myths since his early work. Thus *Els cucs de seda* (The Silkworms, 1975) includes a sense of discovering the world, of leaving the cocoon, and Daniel in *El bou de foc* (The Fire Bull, 1974) evokes Biblical references and turns the idea of the hero upside down, which fits with the contemporary antihero most in use. We also find a Hercules of Valencian postmodernity in *Els treballs perduts* (The Lost Work, 1989), a motorized Dante in Valencian purgatory (*Purgatori*, 2003) and a Faust who connects Goethian motifs to a vision of what revolves around him (*El professor d'història* [The History Professor], 2008).

Still there is the load of symbology on the structure—the value of twelve as a number related to the solar cycle, for example—and the names of his characters, the story that contemplates each corner of the city of Valencia, the Valencian land, or even the Rome of the Borjas (*Borja Papa* [Pope Borja], 1999). To read the novels of Joan Francesc Mira is to read the history of Europe, as the digressions of some narratives demonstrate. With *El professor d'història* (2008), we find a clear example, with an abundance of reflections on rationalism and the human condition.

Above all, the author is a specialist in the articulation of discourse, not a vacuous assertion if we attend to his skill in the text. If in cinematography we admire wisely administered camera technique, in Mira the novelist and storyteller we must admire his capacity to navigate between the discourse of the narrator and his characters. Changes of narrative voice flow without being forced because they play so skillfully at appearing in the most fitting moment. Reporting the thoughts of a subject through monologue, including free indirect style to maintain ambiguity of the voice, manifesting direct style as a way to evince ideological features of the characters: these are proof of the writer's agility.

All of this, of course, is accompanied by cultural reserves, filling the wisdom of his pages by the incorporation of historiography, anthropology, philosophy, politics, even the archive. To this is added the recourse of intertextuality, opportunely employed, as an incentive for reading.

This knowledge, which is shown more clearly in studies of an academic or historical style—see the works on Vicent Ferrer (2002), Blasco Ibáñez (2004) or the Borjas (2000)—becomes the foundation on which is constructed a good part of the arguments of his essays. Opinion, meditation on a transcendental question, or even the most apparently casual fact, is a question of craft, where we are shown the rational being, capable of writing about the essential authors and features of literature and applying the most pure sense of “logos” (*Literatura, món, literatures* [Literature, World, Literatures], 2005). In fact, the appearance of the word “rational” in all of Mira's essays is notable, and here history and the capacity for comparison come back to the surface.

Fundamentally, the logic of the essayist is soaked in a willingness to rethink things, to break clichés, to sift through ideas and pass them through the sieve of facts, in contrast to the superficiality of media pundits today. In this there is a very skeptical vision of the thought of the postmodern era and a taste for detail, for meticulousness, which does not lack a high dose of irony.

On postmodern thought and life (*Els sorolls humans* [Human Noises], 1997), we find reflections regarding relations between the individual and society. The analysis of the group plays an important role. This does not only refer to the tribal components of Catalonia, but also the way to worry (or not to worry) about national writers, the affability of North Americans mistreated by the most crushing prejudices (*Cap d'any a Houston, Texas* [New Year in Houston, Texas], 1998) or the analysis of news such as the dissolving of the Eastern bloc.

It all seems to be the fruit of the same thing, at once many things: the capacity to assimilate other texts, a solid humanistic education, and a devotion to reading—not just the classics of antiquity, but also contemporary classics. This is made manifest in some translations that show, more than the pure urge to exchange one language for another, the enjoyment of the original text and the desire to figure out the semantics of every word of origin. The versions of Dante's *Comedy* (2001), Tabucchi's *Nocturn a l'Índia* (Nocturne in India, 1997) or Francesca Duranti's *El germanista* (The Germanist, 1989), among others, are proof of his intention to put into Catalan that which goes beyond simple equivalencies of the dictionary.

Joan Francesc Mira skillfully assimilates those incombustible features of the history of literature and gives them shape, so that the avid reader may consume his wholly modern and vigorous writings.

Adolf Piquer