

ON POETRY

Salvat-Papasseit, Joan. Barcelona, 16 May 1894–7 August 1924. He began his poetic career with the publication of the poem *Columna vertebral, sageta de foc* (Vertebral Column, Arrow of Fire, 1917) in the journal *Un enemic del poble* (An Enemy of the People), a career that would affect the evolution of avant-garde poetry in Catalonia, even as he adopted the most critical stances of Italian futurism. The books *Poemes en ondes hertzianes* (Poems in Hertzian Waves, 1919) and *L'irradiador del port i les gavines* (The Port Beacon and the Seagulls, 1921), subtitled *Poemes d'avantguarda* (Avant-Garde Poems), were to follow. From then on, Salvat-Papasseit's poetry underwent a change, consisting in the progressive abandonment of the avant-garde thesis and a closer approach to popular poetry: this is the case of the book *La gesta dels estels* (Epic of the Stars, 1921), or the cultivation of nationalist themes contained in the book *Les conspiracions* (Conspiracies, 1922). In 1923 he published *El poema de la rosa als llavis* (The Poem of the Rose on the Lips), a unified love poem, a love story between a girl, the "apprentice," and the poet, "master of love." Gravely ill of tuberculosis, he wrote *Óssa menor* (Ursa Minor, 1925), published posthumously.

SOTA EL MEU LLAVI EL SEU

Sota el meu llavi el seu, com el foc i la brasa,
la seda dels seus rulls com el pecat més dolç
—i l'espatlla ben nua
ben blanca
l'ombra corba
incitant
de l'esguard:
encara un altre bes
un altre
un altre
—quin perfum de magnòlia el seu pit odorant!

From the book *El poema de la rosa als llavis* (1923)

UNDER MY LIPS, HERS

Under my lips, hers, like fire on embers,
the silk of her locks like the sweetest sin
—and her back so bare
all white
the curving shadow
inciting
glances:
still another kiss
and another
and another
—perfume of magnolia her scented breasts!

Translated by Dominic Keown and Tom Owen

CARME ARENAS

WORK IN PROGRESS



Jordi Puntí was born in 1967 and lives in Barcelona. He is a regular contributor to *El Periódico* and *L'Avenç*. He has published three books of short stories: *Pell d'armadillo* (Armadillo Skin) (1998), *Animals tristos* (Sad Animals) (2002) and *Set dies al vaixell de l'amor* (Seven Days on the Love Boat) (2005), with drawings by Mariscal. His books have been translated into Spanish, Italian, German, French, Croatian and Portuguese. He has recently finished his first novel, *Maletes perdudes* (Lost luggage), to be published in 2010.

Selection from *Maletes perdudes*, chapter 4.

Destiny, scatterbrained and playful as a puppy, situated Gabriel and Bundó in a boarding house, property of one Senyora Rifà. Senyora Natàlia Rifà was a small, energetic and high-strung woman. She was a good fifty years old, single, distrustful, a belligerent coquette, and she moved through her house as if always stamping out fires in some room or another. Despite disappointments in love, she had never stopped putting herself together each morning. She was clean and demanded that her boarders be as well: if she saw that they had a future in the house, she educated them in neatness. She cooked passably, that is, with liberal administration of salt but without much flourish, and thus she only accepted men as boarders, because she knew they were more likely to be tolerant.

The pension had not been renovated since many years before the war. In the summer the walls sweated and in some rooms, when it rained, humidity stains formed on the walls, which took a long time to disappear (a student from Jaca, superstitious to a fault, saw faces in them). The furniture creaked of age and this somewhat musty atmosphere was made even more noticeable due to the greatest peculiarity of the house: the stuffed and mounted animals.

Birds, canines, rodents, and felines: each room exhibited its own embalmed beast. In the entryway, half hidden above the coat and hat rack, a shiny-coated fox was custodian of the entrance—do come in, don't come in. On the ground, next to the umbrella stand, a friendly-faced dalmatian kept him company, seated on his haunches, seemingly waiting to be petted by someone coming or going. A squirrel with its tail bristled just like a feather duster climbed the bookcase in the hallway. In the dining room china cabinet, a light blue parrot and a cockatoo with multicolor plumage and open beak eternally twittered, imitating the words most often repeated by the inhabitants of the house. In another corner of the same cabinet, an iridescent hummingbird sipped from a plastic flower, its wings in perpetual still movement. A civet with its mouth half open, perched on top of the old buffet table, yearned for that succulent prey.

This dedication to taxidermy even extended to the landing of the stairs outside. With the permission of the other neighbors in the building, who saw it as a point of distinction that benefitted the whole property, Senyora Rifà had hung a wild goat's head next to the door, one of those goats with spiraling, sharp horns. When long-term guests had gained the approval of the mistress of the house, "the secret of the goat" was revealed to them: the nearly closed teeth of the animal guarded a copy of the key to the boarding house for those who were late and forgetful.

The invasion of still animals had happened some time ago, when Senyora Rifà had a boarder who was a salesman of Rioja wines. Gabriel and Bundó had barely missed meeting him, but another lodger was moved to explain the mystery to them. That gentleman, a widow with two unmarried daughters who exasperated him, stayed at the house for close to four years. In the beginning he spent one week of every month there, the time necessary to make the round of businesses and restaurants in Barcelona, but after half a year the stays had lengthened and, claiming a heavy workload, he allocated twenty days to the pension and ten to Logronyo. He and the Senyora spoke familiarly to one another and, doubtless, coincided every night on the same mattress. Her cohabitation with that man gave Senyora Rifà the happiest days of her life. In the end it also gave her the collection of embalmed animals.

The gentleman from Logronyo was a great lover of taxidermy. Every Friday afternoon he visited the taxidermy shop on Plaça Reial as if he were an explorer out for the hunt. He examined and reexamined the exhibited pieces and once in a while, when one stole his heart, he spent the money required to bring it home. Senyora Rifà would receive the new acquisition with only a wrinkling of her nose, but she was swift to find a place for it. In each new adoption she saw a sign of attachment. As long as the animals were there, she thought, the gentleman from Logronyo wouldn't dream of abandoning her.

Needless to say, she was wrong.