

LITERARY SOCIETY

Literary adaptation in the cinema. *Pa negre* (Black Bread)

Literary adaptations have been one of the sources from which the cinema has frequently drawn, be it from the novel, from stories or from the theatre. The stylistic resources that characterise literature as such, apparent in the written word, are manifest in cinema through image and action. Metaphors and poetry are portrayed visually. Here lies the great difficulty in adaptation. What is important is that the film should maintain the spirit of the novel, but above all, the film should retain its essence as a film.

In the case of *Pa Negre* (Black Bread), the novel had a leading character, Andreu, the boy who developed in an extraordinary manner and ended up in a harsh, unexpected outcome. What appeared as Andreu's introspection in the novel proved impossible on film, and those delightful dialogues among the group of children, bemused under the plum tree, had to be converted into action, thus the races through the wood.

As most great authors, Teixidor moves repeatedly around the same subject and, from the stories *Sic transit Glòria Swanson* and *El retrat d'un assassí d'ocells* (The Portrait of a Bird Killer), equally good as *Pa Negre* (Black Bread) itself, we took the opening act of the spectacular free fall of the wagon, immediately situating the film in an outstanding category, and the second act in the script which was far more complex as it required events to take place at a non-stop pace to hold the audience's attention.

The treatment of language has been a key factor in *Pa negre* (Black Bread). In cinema, the language used by the actors has to be verisimilar. How to make the words of peasant children in the depths of the nineteen forties credible? This was one of our obsessions and we got round it by going out and looking for the youngsters in the villages of Osona, so that language would be as it is spoken there, without ornamentation or archaisms. I believe this to be one of the things that our audience has valued most, and it is one of the enticements in Teixidor's novels, the wealth of language.

At first we thought that the success of *Pa negre* (Black Bread) was due to the concern felt by the Catalans in the Principality for the subject. Proximity in fiction is an indisputable value, but the film was a sell-out in Valencia and the Balearic Islands too, which meant a new commercial dimension for our cultural and linguistic market. In the Catalan Countries we have earned three quarters of the showing profits, Spain has awarded us nine Goyas and France has released the film in Catalan with subtitles in forty towns most successfully. The film has been sold to China and Japan and sales continue.

Pa negre (Black Bread) has turned into a phenomenon, a before and after in Catalan cinema, for reasons unrelated to historical vicissitudes from other periods when Catalan cinema was massively consumed as a novelty after the repression of Franco's regime. By means of *Pa negre* (Black Bread), cinema in Catalan, with the aim of explaining ourselves as a collectivity, has entered an era of NORMALITY. Normality is to start from very localized stories about human emotions, which are always universal.

Good films and the impact they create on the media are the best presentation to the world a country can have, and the Catalan public has understood this and responded, thus opening up a glimmer of hope for the last branch of Catalan culture in need of normalization, the seventh art, the cinema.

ISONA PASSOLA

INTERVIEW

Five Leaves - Books on Catalonia in the UK

"The only way to make a small fortune in translating anything is to start with a large fortune".

Despite the multiple translations from English into Catalan, few modern novels are published in translation in Great Britain. And very few from Catalan, though in recent years there has been a small spurt: Sánchez Piñol's *Pandora al Congo* (Pandora in the Congo) and *La pell freda* (Cold Skin) with Canongate, this latter in a censored version -the protagonist's previous life as an IRA man was considered too risqué for English-language readers-; Quim Monzó's *La magnitud de la tragèdia* (The Enormity of the Tragedy) with Peter Owen; *Sota la pols* (Under the Dust) by Jordi Coca with Parthian; two crime novels by Teresa Solana with Bitter Lemon; and *Pedra de tartera* (Stone in a Landslide) by Maria Barbal with Peirene. Except for Canongate, all these are small, literary publishers, inspired perhaps by the focus on Catalan literature at the 2007 Frankfurt book fair.

Another small publisher, Five Leaves (www.fiveleaves.co.uk), has not just picked up one book (or two) it liked, but has launched a list under the heading 'Catalonia'. The first three came out a few years ago: two books by UK authors, *Catalonia, History and Culture* by John Payne and *Barcelona* by Michael EAUDE. They were accompanied by Joan Fuster's idiosyncratic classic, *Diccionari per a ociosos* (Dictionary for the Idle) and a collection of three modern plays by women. In 2011, Five Leaves brought out another play, *Trueta* by Àngels Aymar (in a dual-language edition) and *Where Rivers Meet*, translations and essays on Jesús Moncada, edited by Kathryn Cramer.

We interviewed Ross Bradshaw, founder-owner of Five Leaves.

What do you enjoy in publishing?

What I like is publishing material that would never have seen the light of day without my involvement. I commission virtually everything so most of the books are my idea. Less so with the Catalan books.

You're based in Nottingham, outside the metropolis. What are the advantages/disadvantages of being a small publisher outside London?

I've lived here since 1978. Life would be so much easier if the press was based in London -all those networking and bookstall opportunities... On the other hand, I am very involved in the local literature scene and everybody knows everybody else. Mostly that is a plus point.

For a small publisher, you publish a lot of books. On your list, you have Nottingham books, left-wing books, Jewish books. What are your criteria? Books you like? Books you think will sell?

This year Five Leaves will publish 28 books -never again! We'll steadily drop to a more realistic twelve a year. I've always vainly thought that if I was interested in a particular subject or title there must be enough people out there who'd also like it to make the book economic. Mostly I find that is the case. I'll keep silent about those where I was wrong.

Now you're publishing books on Catalonia and have taken over the Anglo-Catalan Society list of books. How did that come about?

I'd published a book on William Morris by John Payne. He'd had a disaster years earlier when he wrote a book about Catalonia that was pulped on publication when the big publisher involved changed hands. I persuaded him (or he persuaded me) we should publish a revised edition. Then there was the book on Barcelona. Then the Anglo-Catalan Society asked if I was interested in taking on their titles. The Society is a group of academics, from various disciplines, who are interested in everything Catalan. Their previous publisher was taken over and closed many of their specialist lists. So far we've brought out four books (see above).

What's next?

I'm hoping to publish a book of Catalan short stories with the Anglo-Catalan Society and will see what happens beyond that.

Apart from the Anglo-Catalan Society books, are you going to publish other books in your Catalonia series?

It has got much harder to sell this kind of book. The UK book market is in a mess so we're hanging on in there, waiting for better weather. Like everyone else.

Are you able to get these books into Catalan bookshops?

Frankly, we struggle to get the books into Catalan bookshops. We have an agent, Iberian Book Services, who does its best but I guess that the whole peninsula's book trade has its own financial worries too.

Is there a public for books in English on Catalonia and/or translations of Catalan books?

As to whether there is a future for the books, Britain is famously limited in its reading of books in translation. One of the best independents that focused on translation, Harvill, has been swallowed up by Random House. Serpent's Tail has published a lot of Catalan and Spanish fiction over the years. They've recently merged with a bigger independent and I hope their translations will continue. I suspect, however, that the only way to make a small fortune in translating anything is to start with a large fortune. It would help if the airport bookshops and the Spanish bookshops would stock a wider range of translations for tourists who want to dig a bit deeper. I should say though that the Catalan government, through the *Institut Lluís*, is very supportive of publishers translating books from Catalan.

MICHAEL EAUDE

