

ON POETRY

Jordi Sarsanedas (1994-2006). Poet, narrator, translator and professor. His literary voice is characterized by essential subjects such as dream, allegory, or the crisis in social and moral values.

Outstanding works in Sarsanedas' poetic production are *A trenc de sorra* (Breaking by the Sand, 1948), *Algunes preguntes, algunes respostes* (Several Questions, Several Answers, 1956), *Postals d'Itàlia* (Postcards from Italy, 1968), *Cor meu, el món* (My Heart, the World, 1999), *L'enlluernament, al cap del carrer* (Dazzlement, along the Street, 2001) or *Silencis, respostes, variacions* (Silences, Answers, Variations, 2005).

Among numerous distinctions, he presided the PEN Català from 1983 to 2001.

TROPHY

to a sculptor friend

The wind asks. Deep in the wind's lair
a pebble answers,
wedged among wisps of straw and darkness.
Observe this smooth, pulsating cheek as the lark
takes to the skies in uninterrupted song.

The wind answers.
Tall, masterful, treading on claws that tear.
In birdlike cape, above the bramble thicket
night lifts a dogmatic anchor.
So straight, so black, observe the mariner
slip unerringly between dawn's petals.

Absence of the landscape. Everything is known,
compressed, issues in muscular embrace,
abandoning of eyelids.

But, on the skyline,
skyline on skyline throbbing at our wrists,
at a day's edge and every day's
like a dead weight, the last, of the last air,
swags of fruit and colours profiting
what justice or what tenderness?

As thought,
marble and bronze, hips and hindquarters,
the sun's caress should now or never draw
itself erect, and a shadowy counterpoint
of deep-toned notes and ink were to embody
the secret of some lofty victory.

JORDI SARSANEDAS

(Translated by Anne Crowe, *Light of water, XXV Catalan Poems 1978-2002*, Manchester, Carcanet, 2007)

WORK IN PROGRESS



MAITE CARRANZA author, scriptwriter for television and university professor of Script Writing. She holds a degree in Anthropology and is a writer of novels for young people and adults since 1986. A very well-known author and highly appreciated by youngsters, she has published forty-five books and has received the following literary prizes: Serra d'Or, Folch i Torres, Joaquim Ruyra, EDEBÉ, Protagonista Jove (Young Protagonist) and El Temple de las Mil Puertas (The Temple of a Thousand Doors). Her books have been translated into twenty-six languages. Readers from many countries of her fantasy trilogy, *La Guerra de les Bruixes* (The Witches' War), have brought her great international popularity. Carranza's latest novel, a thriller entitled *Paraules Emmetzinades* (Poisoned Words), has received praise from the critics and has been awarded five literary prizes.

*La Lola** by Maite Carranza

Extract from chapter 3, «The Scar»

The raw coloured scar hurt her eyes like the slash of a knife.

A cropped rose, thinks Lola immediately, as she imagines the absence of the tiny clitoris and compares it -it's not really the same, it bears no comparison and she knows it- to the emptiness she felt last summer when Oriol cut her yellow rose.

"Where's my rose?," she asked him immediately.

"In the rubbish bin."

Oriol hadn't cared about the glow of yellow on the terrace during the May evenings, the burst of joy, the feel of the velvet petals.

The death of the rose hit her hard. She imagined it shrinking back from the fish bones and peach skins, impregnating the food remains with its heavy scent of sickly sweet syrup.

A clitoris isn't a rose she brooded, as her white hand gently feels the black belly of the young girl.

It had all happened by chance. A few minutes before, a mother had entered her paediatric surgery, filling it with a stunning African presence, pushing a pram and accompanied by a skinny adolescent who contemplated the world with a woman's eyes.

"It hurts her down here, when she wees."

A relatively simple diagnosis, most probably a urine infection. But she has decided to examine her to make sure it isn't caused by anything else, it could be vulvitis because, while consulting her case history, she has noticed it isn't the first time this has happened. The girl has refused to lower her panties and fear haunts her eyes. All the more reason, she says to herself, to insist. She probably wants to avoid all contact because of the pain.

She is wrong; her vulva is terse, pink and healthy, with no inflammation, slightly reddened around the urethra, that's all. But it isn't whole. The excised clitoris is missing.

Excision has an aseptic, neutral connotation, even that of cleanliness. It is simply an arbitrary word, she repeats to herself in silence, almost like a chant.

She's getting distracted.

She wants to concentrate on the young Gambian girl's diagnosis, she wants to think only about the pain she feels when urinating, of her slight feverishness, but she can't understand why her blasted memory keeps recalling over and over again her lost rose, in association with the absence of Oriol and the absence of the girl's clitoris. A lump came to her throat each time she tried to find it, and she strained against admitting it was no longer there. The rose would never be found there again. Left in its place was an amputated stem. A useless stem.

Once more she feels her eyes prickling uncomfortably and she fears that any moment now an uncontrollable tear will slide down her cheek and betray her. She feels light-headed. She suspects that since their separation, her body is acting with a will of its own, without asking her permission.

"Am I hurting you? If I do, give me a yell," she says to her.

She must understand. She must be at school and speak fluent Catalan. But the girl doesn't answer. She lies stretched out and motionless on the spotless examination couch, her t-shirt rolled up above her navel and the rest of her body bare. She probably reached maturity a couple of years ago; she has a woman's pubis, a young girl's breasts and rounded hips. At a glance, she thinks she must be about fourteen. She's still a child, though. Her eyes are unusually gaping, wide open, and as she looks more carefully, she notices her tense fingers gripping the sides of the couch. She is scared to death, or perhaps she feels vulnerable. Nakedness is a kind of vulnerability.

Her dark, gleaming skin is almost black and it trembles at the touch of her hands. Her supple muscles strain ready to leap like a panther. Suddenly, without warning, the girl closes her legs and her mother scolds her in an unknown language.

"Could you help me hold her still, please?," Lola asks her.

The mother has stood motionless at the top of the couch. She is wearing colourful clothes, a long patterned tunic down to her toes that she wears elegantly, her skin is taut and her teeth are white. Lola thinks how attractive and sensible she is, and she is grateful to her for not interfering. The woman moves to her side and takes charge of her daughter's right leg, pulling it open little by little.

From outside the surgery, the sound of crying and loud voices can be heard, made by the people waiting. Lola ignores it. Years of experience have taught her not to rush and to make the most of the hard earned intimacy behind the thin walls. Within the four flimsy walls time stands still and the miracle occurs. The patients listen to her; they look into her eyes with devotion and wait expectantly for her words. Magic. The more time she devotes to them, the wider the smile on their faces.

"What's your name?"

It makes no difference, she doesn't answer. She asks the question so as to get the girl to relax and open her legs again. She wants to inspect that mutilated body a little more. She wants to examine the scar in the hope of finding herself mistaken, of having made a human error.

She examines her thoroughly.

She holds down the left leg firmly and scrutinises the wound.

There is no doubt. An excision. The clitoris has been removed, just like that, cut out from deep down, she realises with a sinking heart. As if it were a useless object, a kind of unneeded appendix not worth saving.

Most likely, the person who performed the excision had done it three or four years ago, she deduces. The amputation had probably been carried out by an elderly woman, using an unsterilized knife, a piece of broken glass or a rusty razor blade. What's more, she had also probably done it with no anaesthetic, helped by other women who firmly held apart the girl's legs, in much the same way as she and the mother were doing now. And she shudders as she imagines the screams of pain, the blood flowing down her legs and the tiny fragment of her body cut out and thrown away in the rubbish.

* Lola is the diminutive for Dolors, a very popular woman's name. (Translator's footnote)