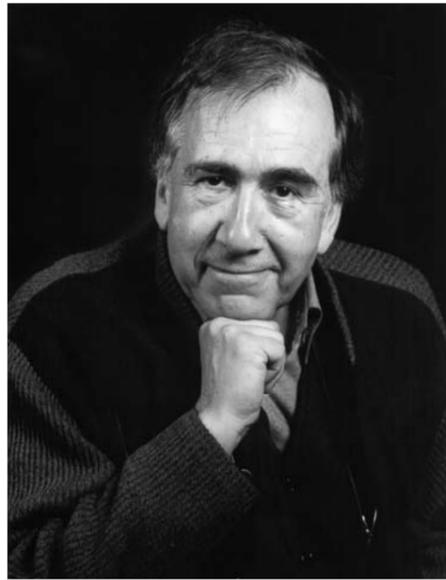


ACTIONS & VOICES

The Presence of the Catalan Language at Universities Worldwide

One of the efforts of the Ramon Llull Institute is to aid the presence of Catalan language and culture studies in the curricula of universities outside of the Catalan-speaking territories. Currently there are 164 universities outside of these territories that impart some kind of teaching of Catalan culture, in large part in arrangement with our Institute. This entails a presence on five continents, with a total of 7,000 students. It is not a uniform presence, for obvious reasons—beginning with geographic, cultural or linguistic proximity: 123 universities in Europe, 33 in America, four in Asia, two in the Middle East, one in Africa and one in Oceania. The studies undertaken are also diverse: from doctoral degrees—in higher-level research centers—to the “complementary qualifications” that we have started in eight German universities: aside from the degree program that each student follows, he or she has the option to take a 150-credit course of Catalan language and culture. Thus, students obtain the degree title in their field, and at the same time a qualification in Catalan that, for example, might permit them to have an internship in our country’s businesses. We might say that Catalan is the European language without official status in any state of the Union that achieves the largest international university teaching presence, more even than a good number of those that are official, which is also the case for Catalan in other fields, such as web pages or literary translations. Still, once we have achieved what we might call a satisfactory quantity, the challenge is to create a qualitative leap: more presence of Catalan language and culture in curricula—especially in literature, thought, art, etc.—, more research centers, more presence in regions further away...

JOSEP BARGALLÓ I VALLS,
director of the Ramon Llull Institute



INTERVIEW

JOAN MARGARIT

PATRÍCIA GABANCHO

He defines his poetry in one word: clarity. The clarity of human beings facing life. Joan Margarit, considered one of the best contemporary Catalan poets, analyzes and transmits his experience with precise, stripped down, and entirely elegant language: literary austerity to explain the pain and consolation of being alive. As a professional architect, the house, this refuge-space, is a recurrent metaphor: “I say again, pointing at an abstract space / like the one from my childhood: *this is home*. / And all places are nothing more than death.”

Poems don’t fall from the sky. As a poet you are always searching. One doesn’t write a poem every day, but one must work every day, starting from inspiration. Image? Word? Inspiration is never linguistic. Poems are in the world, around you, because experience is the primary material with which you work. You have a family, professional, economic, social, emotional, and sexual life, and it doesn’t matter whether you are an architect or a plumber. The important thing is the experience of life, because that is where you search for the poem. I am not at all a hunter but I imagine that if you make a hunter, for example, cross a forest, he will not be able to help but find tracks, signs that tell him whether it is partridge or rabbit season. The poet has an eye trained to find poems in life.

In your poetry there is a very intense, very sad experience, and a very naked way of expressing it. And also the intuition that life goes on.

I would say that what defines my poetry is clarity. There is, of course, also pain and consolation. To take the last three books, *Càlcul d’estructures* (Structural Calculations) is a book about pain and *Casa de Misericòrdia* (House of Mercy) is a book about consolation. *Misteriosament feliç* (Mysteriously Happy) is to begin to recognize, without any dissembling, that a mysterious path leads us to happiness in life, and mysterious I think is essential here. We don’t know how, but there is the possibility of approaching a kind of happiness. Life is worthwhile, but you have to work. Without this effort, possibilities diminish and life might be reduced to a couple of cheers when your team wins on a Sunday. One can live like that, certainly, but it is not very rich. If we had 27 lives it wouldn’t be a problem for one of them to be reduced to that, but we only have one life after all. So it is necessary to deepen it.

Poetry is, thus, an instrument of knowledge?

Of course. As much for the poet as for the reader: to read and write poetry is the same thing. The point of departure is not democratic because not everyone can write poetry, just as not everyone can paint a painting, but that doesn’t matter: a poet is only the composer and the poem is the musical score, a piece of paper. The reader is not the person who goes to hear the concert, but rather the musician, and depending on how you read, and the moment in which you read, the poem changes. A musician does not play the same way on one day as another; it depends on the experiences borne in each moment. It is not easy to be a reader of poetry, and that is why there are so few.

In *Casa de Misericòrdia*, poetry is defined as a refuge where one is welcomed after pain. Is it a refuge for the reader as well?

Basically, for the reader. Without readers poetry does not exist. The interpreter makes the poem reality.

Does poetry always tell the truth?

Yes, if there is not truth it is a bad poem. We don’t know why, but the reader can see it. You don’t return to a bad poem. If you aren’t certain that you will return, or that you can return to it, that poem is worthless. And it is always the poet’s fault.

In poetry, is it true that less is more? Does learning to write consist of stripping language, taking away ornament to leave only the essence?

Poetry tends towards the naked truth, or at least my generation thinks that language becomes more powerful if it is rid of artifice. Now, maybe another generation will think the opposite. It wouldn’t be the first time.

Is writing in Catalan the ballast for global dissemination?

I manage in two linguistic areas, in Catalan and Spanish. I always write the first version of the poem in Catalan, but beyond that I work in two languages at the same time. I have readers in Catalonia and in Spain. I’m not too worried about the rest of the world; I don’t have that ambition, because I know that language is not universal like music or painting. In another language it is another poem. That’s why they say that only a poet can translate poetry, or at least that it’s better for a poet to do it.

Does the fact that you are considered one of the best living Catalan poets mean that you have found good readers?

First, thank you for that “living,” because it means that I can keep enjoying life; after that, all in God’s good time, as the old folks say... It is difficult to be a good reader of poetry, but there is a nucleus of experience that makes us all equal: facing the death of a loved one. It doesn’t matter if you are a king or a pauper. Afterwards, different things will happen to you, but the experience is the same for all. Poetry has to explain this nucleus that is common to all of us. If the poem turns out badly it is because the poet has fallen into a cliché, has put on a mask. Or because the story is so personal that no one is interested.

“Frostless, above the hard earth / with its black rime, the birds depart” (...) “A melted purple on the horizon, / the mountains draw near like guilt.”