

Carles Torner

Exile, literature and translation

“I am forced to leave behind everything I love. I am so filled with fury and sadness that no tears come and I faint would die. The Pyrenees can now be likened to a great reef on which Catalonia and our lives are foundering.”

The words are Pere Calders’ and describe his journey through a mountain pass to France and exile some seventy years ago as the Spanish Civil War drew to an end. The Republic had finally succumbed to the Fascist onslaught and he joined half a million other refugees fleeing from Franco, among them hundreds of writers, intellectuals and artists seeking shelter in Europe and America.

Various Catalan writers joined other European writers in witnessing the violence. The round tables held at Université de Paris X-Nanterre in February 2009 analysed the treatment meted out to the refugees in the French internment camps of Argelès, St. Cyprien, Barcarès, Agde, Le Vernet, Bram. It was there that most refugees were interned after crossing the border. The writings of Agustí Bartra, Lluís Ferran de Pol, Xavier Benguerel, Pere Vives comprise an intense literature reflecting a wide range of approaches and viewpoints but which to date have found little echo in the European imagination.

Many exiles sailed to the New World. Those who remained in Europe soon found themselves caught up in the Second World War. In Berlin in June 2008, Enzo Traverso, Jean Bollack and various other European specialists reflected on the thought of Walter Benjamin and on the testimonial literature of authors such as Varlam Chalamov, Alexander Solzhenitsyn, Robert Antelme, Paul Celan, Primo Levi and Joaquim Amat-Piniella. The last of these suffered the fate of many Spanish Republicans: imprisonment at Mauthausen concentration camp. The experience was reflected in Amat-Piniella’s heart-rending novel *K. L. Reich*.

The 1939 Republican exodus was tragic. None of the fugitives could have imagined that their exile would last so long. Letters and narratives from those

editorial address transfer // SPRING 2009

years reveal the shock and outrage felt by Catalan exiles at the Western allies' policy of bolstering the Franco regime once Hitler and Mussolini had been defeated. For Catalans, the Fascist repression was made all the harder to bear by the banning of the Catalan language and the way in which Catalan literature was forced underground. Paradoxically, this attempt to wipe out Catalonia's language and culture led to a flowering of Catalan literature in exile. The exhibition *Literatures de l'exili* (The Literatures of Exile) began in Barcelona and toured Buenos Aires, Santiago de Chile, Mexico City and Santo Domingo before returning to its starting point in time for Saint George's Day 2009. It led to a unique work: *El dia revolt* (A Stormy Day), an extraordinary literary mosaic written by Julià Guillamon and based on the testimony of Catalan exiles and their European and American descendants. Now, over three decades after General Franco's death, they reveal how the Catalan diaspora took the flame of Catalan culture to the furthest-flung corners of the world. The Catalan literature of exile in Europe and the New World is charted by the *Lletra* Internet portal using the mapping facilities provided by Google Earth www.topobiografies.cat.

In this fourth issue of *Transfer*, readers will note the publication's presence on the Internet. The new *Transfer* web site (<http://transfer.llull.cat>) contains articles from the four issues published to date, their original versions

in Catalan and hypertext links to the cultural magazines and journals in which they first appeared. *Transfer* ties the essays to contemporary debates and reveals the richness of Catalan contributions. Many of these debates are held in English. A great deal of resources therefore need to be earmarked for translation if thinkers in other languages and cultures are to enrich these debates with their unique insights. In this respect, English should be seen as an opportunity to foster cross-cultural fertilisation of ideas rather than as an insuperable barrier.

The effort put into translation pays handsome dividends for Catalan literature. The magnificent reception accorded the translation of Joan Sales' *Incerta glòria* (Uncertain Glory) in France (see *Transfer* 3) has led to a new appraisal of the novel in Catalonia, as revealed by the workshops held in Barcelona this past January. The translation of Catalan classics to other languages helps forge a literary canon through dialogue. This point was stressed by Olivier Mongin, Director of *Esprit* magazine, on the day the book was presented in Paris: "*Incerta glòria* is an important novel of the Spanish Civil War. It also falls within a European genre that tackles the heinous crimes of the 20th Century and the untold harm they inflicted on body and spirit. In this context, Sales' work should be read alongside those by Solzhenitsyn and Primo Levi" ■

Carles Torner, a writer and poet, is head of the Humanities and Science Department of the Institut Ramon Llull.