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Catalan Review is the premier international scholarly journal devoted to all aspects of Catalan culture. By Catalan culture is understood all manifestations of intellectual and artistic life produced in the Catalan language or in the geographical areas where Catalan is spoken. Catalan Review has been in publication since 1986.

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Catalan Poetry: Translations :

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CATALAN POETRY

TRANSLATIONS

DEL BOSC, ABANS TAN PRÒXIM...

Del bosc, abans tan pròxim,
a penes te'n recordes;
i tanmateix forma part de la teva
particular història.
Oblidar també és viure.
Ara torna a ser el temps
de seure pels pedrissos,
de clavar els ulls al bell mig de la tarda,
de rentar-se les mans
amb l'aigua de la pluja.
Revindran els torrents.
És l'hora del blat tendre i de la sal.
Gira't de cara al vent i, a poc a poc,
sentiràs com la pell se't desarruga.

Miquel Martí i Pol

From *Vint-i-set poemes en tres temps*,
Edicions 62, Barcelona, 1972

THE WOODS, ONCE SO CLOSE

The woods, once so close,
you hardly recall;
yet they are still part
of your personal story.
Forgetting also is living.
Now the time has returned
to sit on stone benches,
stare at the heart of the day,
and rinse your hands
in water from rain.
The streams will run again,
and here is the time of salt and new wheat.
Turn to face the wind and
little by little
feel how your skin unwrinkles.

Translated by Nathaniel B. Smith and Lynette McGrath

DESPRÉS

No serà falaguer, l'estiu, i la tardor
— saps prou com l'estimàvem —
serà potser en excés melangiosa.
Quan s'escurcin els dies te'm faràs més present,
perquè el silenci fa més densos
els records, i més íntim el temps
que ens és donat per viure'ls.
A ulls clucs et veuré: tot serà tu
per la cambra, pels llibres, en la fosca.
Després passaran anys i esdevindrà translúcida
i a través teu estimaré el futur
potser sense pensar-te ni sentir-te.
Arribaràs a ser una part tan íntima
de mi mateix, que al capdavant la mort
se t'endurà de nou quan se m'endugui.

Miquel Martí i Pol

From *Llibre d'absències*

Editorial Empúries, Barcelona, 1985

AFTERWARDS

Summer won't be prosperous and fall
— how much we loved it, only we can know —
will overflow, perhaps, with melancholy.
When the days grow shorter, you will be more present:
silence makes memories more dense
and more intimate the time
that's given us to live them in.
Through half-closed eyes I'll see you: everything
— in the room, its books, the darkness — will be you.
After, years will pass and you'll become translucent;
through you I'll come to love what lies ahead,
perhaps, without the thought or feel of you.
You'll be so intimate a part of me
that death, at last,
will take you off again when it takes me.

Translated by Nathaniel B. Smith

ARA MATEIX

Ara mateix enfilo aquesta agulla
amb el fil d'un propòsit que no dic
i em poso a apedaçar. Cap dels prodigis
que anunciaven taumaturgs insignes
no s'ha complert, i els anys passen de pressa.
De res a poc, i sempre amb vent de cara,
quin llarg camí d'angoixa i de silenci.
I som on som; més val saber-ho i dir-ho
i assentar els peus en terra i proclamar-nos
hereus d'un temps de dubtes i renúncies
en què els sorolls ofeguen les paraules
i amb molts miralls mig estrafem la vida.
De res no ens val l'enyor o la complanta,
ni el toc de displicent malenconia
que ens posem per jersei o per corbata
quan sortim al carrer. Tenim a penes
el que tenim i prou: l'espai d'història
concreta que ens pertoca, i un minúscul
territori per viure-la. Posem-nos
dempeus altra vegada i que se senti
la veu de tots solemnement i clara.
Cridem qui som i que tothom ho escolti.
I en acabat, que cadascú es vesteixi
com bonament li plagui, i via fora!,
que tot està per fer i tot és possible.

Miauel Martí i Pol

From *L'àmbit de tots els àmbits*,
Edicions del Mall, Sant Boi de Llobregat.

RIGHT NOW

Right now I am threading this needle
with an idea that I won't tell
and starting to patch. None of the prodigies
announced by great prophets
has been fulfilled, and the years pass fast.
From nothing to little, always the wind in our faces:
what a long road of suffering and silence.
We are where we are; better to know it and say it,
to place our feet firm on the ground and proclaim
we're heirs to a time of doubting and renouncing
in which noises muffle the words
and many mirrors half disguise life.
Longing and complaining won't get us a thing,
or the indifferent touch of melancholy
we dress in, like a sweater or tie,
to go out in the street. We barely have
what we have, no more: the space
of concrete history that is our particular lot and a tiny
territory to live it in. Let us rise
to our feet again and let the voice
of us all, solemn and clear, be heard.
Let us shout who we are, and let everyone listen,
and after that, all put on
what we please and cry alarum,
for everything is possible, and still to be done.

Translated by Nathaniel B. Smith and Lynette McGrath

BRUIXA DE DOL

XII

Els teus llavis. La fruita. La magrana...
Àngel rebel, tot olor de gingebre.
Atrapa'm pels replecs d'aquesta febre.
Vine amb verdor de pluja. Sargantana

que em fuges pels cabells, sense frontera,
al bat del sol, ales d'ocell nocturn!
Serves per cor la Lluna o bé Saturn
i, als ulls, un tast de boira matinera.

El teu cos mineral. Sal. Vi. Maduixa.
Com una serp, cargola't al meu ventre
i cerca'm, amb verí d'amor, el centre.

Tu seràs un gat negre. Jo una bruixa.
Ens fitarem errants, i en el desvari
la lluna, cega, encendrà l'escenari.

Maria-Mercè Marçal

From *Bruixa de dol*,
Edicions del Mall, Barcelona, 1979

WITCH IN MOURNING

XII

Your lips. Fruit. Pome granate...
Rebellious angel, all smelling of ginger.
Catch me by the folds of that fever.
Come with the rain's greenery. Little lizard,

you flee from me through my hair, with no border,
fluttering to the sun on wings of a night bird!
You keep the Moon, or rather Saturn, as a heart
and in your eyes, a taste of morning mist.

Your mineral body. Salt. Wine. Strawberry.
Like a serpent; wind up to my belly
and seek, with your love poison; my center.

You will be a black cat. I, a witch.
We will gaze at each other, wandering, and in the ravings
the moon, blind, will light up the stage.

Translated by Kathleen McNerney

VUIT DE MARÇ

*Amb totes dues mans
alçades a la lluna,
obrim una finestra
en aquest cel tancat.*

Hereves de les dones
que cremaren ahir
farem una foguera
amb l'estrall i la por.
Hi acudiran les bruixes
de totes les edats.
Deixaran les escombres
per pastura del foc,
cossis i draps de cuina
el sabó i el blauet,
els pots i les cassoles
el fregall i els bolquers.

Deixarem les escombres
per pastura del foc,
els pots i les cassoles,
el blauet i el sabó
I la cendra que resti
no la canviarem
ni per l'or ni pel ferro
per ceptres ni punyals.
Sorgida de la flama
sols tindrem ja la vida
per arma i per escut
a totes dues mans.

THE EIGHT OF MARCH

*With both hands
raised up to the moon,
let's open a window
in that closed sky.*

Heirs to the women
they burned yesterday
let's make a bonfire
of ravage and fear.
Witches of all ages
will come.
They'll leave their brooms
to feed the fire,
basins and kitchen rags
soap and bleach,
pots and pans
mops and diapers.

Let's leave brooms
to feed the fire,
pots and pans,
bleach and soap.
And the ashes that remain
we won't trade
for gold or iron,
for sceptres or daggers.
Born of the flame
we will have only life
as arms and shields
in both hands.

El fum dibuixarà
l'inici de la història
com una heura de joia
entorn del nostre cos
i plourà i farà sol
i dansarem a l'aire
de les noves cançons
que la terra rebrà.
Vindicarem la nit
i la paraula DONA.
Llavors creixerà l'arbre
de l'alliberament.

Maria-Mercè Marçal

From *Bruixa de dol*,
Edicions del Mall, Barcelona, 1979.

The smoke will trace
the beginnings of history
like jeweled ivy
around our bodies
it will rain and be sunny
and we'll dance to the music
of new songs
that the earth will receive.
We will take back the night
and the word WOMAN.
Then the tree of liberation
will grow.

Translated by Kathleen McNerney

RETRAT DEL POETA

Xiula el vent, l'aigua s'ha glaçat
a les canonades, neva.
Fa hores que és fosc
i es formen caramells de gel
a les teulades.
Que n'és de bo tancar el llibre,
bufar la bugia que crema sobre la taula
i, a la claror de la llar de foc,
arrauir-se al llit, sense sorolls,
per no desvetllar el son d'aquest cos jove
que ja fa estona que descansa, pur.
Ara, colgat sota les flassades, tanca
els ulls i rememora aquest dia
no gaire diferent de tots els altres.
Frueix d'aquest petit moment de plaer
que tot s'ho val, abandonant la mà
sobre un pit que sospira, adormit,
la cara en la tofa flonja dels cabells.
¿Serà així, la mort?
¿Benvinguda com aquesta son que et pren,
dolçíssima, sense retrets ni greuges,
agraint només els dons incommensurables de la vida?
¿Serà així que, en el camí de la fosca,
anirem a l'encontre de la llum?

Francesc Parcerisas

From *L'edat d'or*,
Quaderns Crema, Barcelona, 1983

PORTRAIT OF THE POET

Wind is whistling, water frozen
in the pipes; snow
is falling. It's been dark
for hours and from the roofs
icicles grow.
Good it is to close the book,
snuff out the candle burning on the table
and, by the glow of the fireplace,
stretch out in bed, without a noise
to break the sleep of this pure young body
that already has been resting for a while.
Now, buried in sheets, he closes
his eyes, remembering this day,
hardly different from all the others.
He delights in this momentary sense of pleasure
that it's all worth while, letting his hand
droop on the breast that sighs in sleep,
his face in the spongy mass of the hair.
Will it be like this, death?
Welcome, like this sleep that takes you,
completely sweet, without grudge or reproach,
only thanking the measureless gifts of life?
Will we, like this, on a road of darkness,
go to meet the light?

Translated by Nathaniel B. Smith and Lynette McGrath

BALADA DE JOHN SMITH

I

Diuen que John Smith vingué a treballar al ferrocarril i que la seva suor colpejava el ferro com una trista cançó, llunyania d'amants en l'immens laberint de l'Oest — ho diu la balada: que l'hivern blau ajuntava homes de callat origen, irlandesos vençuts, criminals holandesos, belgues, francesos, anglesos d'ulls torbs, i que John Smith es trobava entre ells. I diu que s'aixecaven glaçats d'infortunis, al matí, per cargolar metalls amb llur força irada de corpulents manyans, amb rabiüts martells de fusters i destrals de peons. Al càmpament, cent iardes de ferrocarril per dia, la nit s'apedaçava de solitud i divertides històries. Tot això ho diu la balada, la història de l'Oest llunyà; ho explica la vida mancada dels pioners, el llit de fusta, el sol de migdia, la humitat del matí, les nits sense el foc de l'amor, les cordes de la guitarra. I, tot plegat, reconeguem-ho, és una bella cançó al treball aventurer i difícil dels homes que aixecaren un poble.

II

I tu, petita ciutat, cementiri vençut pel vol marí de les aus, on deses les cançons dels teus pioners, els homes d'avui? Et penges a l'esquena els homes nats d'un negre esqueix de terra allunyada, no vols saber de la mort, dels subjectes anònims que omplen els teus carrers, que t'escombren la cara, rebenten el teu terra, aixequen amenaçants edificis, i van i vénen missatgers de paraules

THE BALLAD OF JOHN SMITH

I

They say John Smith came to work on the railroad
and that his sweat struck the iron like a sad song,
the lovers far away in the vast maze of the west.
Says the ballad, the blue winter united men of silent origin,
vanquished Irish, criminal Hollanders, Belgians, French,
fierce-eyed English, and John Smith was among them.
And it says they rose up, frozen with misfortunes in the morning,
to bolt metal with brawny blacksmiths' heated breath,
and carpenters' raging hammers and laborers' knives. At the camp,
a hundred yards of track a day, the night patched together with solitude,
and stories to pass time. All this the ballad says, the history
of the Far West; it tells the desolate life of the pioneers,
the plank bed, the sun of midday, the damp of the morning,
the nights without the fire of love, the guitar strings.
And all in all, admit it, it's a beautiful song to the work,
heroic and hard, of the men who raised up a people.

II

And you, little city, cemetery vanquished by the sea flight of birds,
where do you keep the songs of your pioneers, the men of today?
You hang on the backs of men born of a black slice of far-off
earth, you don't want to hear about death, the nameless subjects who fill
your streets, who sweep your face, who break open your ground,
raise menacing buildings and go and come, messengers of words

i deures, escacs de la mort. Desagraïda terra que ignores
els nous fills i balles tranquil·la sardana entorn la taula abundant.
El teu proverbi mesquí és llei acceptada: *Barcelona és bona si la
bossa sona.*

Si això és un exemple: rebentin els cels!

Francesc Parcerisas

From *Discurs sobre les matèries terrestres*,
Edicions 62, Barcelona, 1972

and duties, pawns of death. Ungrateful land who disown
your own children and dance your tranquil sardana around
the laden table,
your petty proverb is accepted law: "*Barcelona is kind if your
pocket's well lined*"
If that's the way it is: let the skies break open!

Translated by Nathaniel B. Smith and Lynette McGrath

PER MARIA ANTÒNIA,
CATERINA I CLEMENTINA
I TANTES – NO MOLTES – D'ALTRES

Sabia que vosaltres podíeu,
malgrat moltes coses,
explicar-nos sempre
fragments d'allò que volíem.

Sabia que vosaltres sabíeu
molt més del que vau escriure;
que vau ser més agosarades
que la valentia que us calia.

Sabia que hi havia,
rere tants frens, tantes traves,
tantes portes doctes i tancades,
una deu on apaivagar set i gana.

Sabia que teníeu bocins del tot
(ho he sabut gairebé sempre,
més enllà de silencis burletes)
que m'estalviaven mots de massa.

Sabia que calia cercar-vos
(furgar per edicions no gens assequibles),
llegir-vos, fidel i atenta, a vosaltres,
precedents de la nostra mala vida.

Marta Pessarrodona

From *Poemes 1969-1981*,
Edicions del Mall, Barcelona, 1984

FOR MARIA-ANTÒNIA,
CATERINA AND CLEMENTINA
AND SOME – NOT MANY – OTHERS

I knew that you could,
in spite of many things,
always explain to us
pieces of whatever we wished.

I knew that you knew
much more than you wrote;
that you were much more daring
than the bravery you needed.

I knew that behind so many restraints,
so many obstacles,
so many doors learned and closed,
there was a fountain to quench thirst and desire.

I knew that you offered morsels of every kind
(I have known it almost always,
beyond the silent ridicule)
that saved me too many words.

I knew that I had to search for you
(to rummage through editions impossible to obtain)
faithfully and closely to read you,
precedents of our poor lives.

Translated by H. Patsy Boyer

NO MORE TEARS

No et penedeixis mai
de les emocions sentides,
encara que sigui per mi,
que t'he estimat, això és cert,
amb totes les traves possibles.

No deixis mai
de mirar tant de dol i de dansa
com ens volta, encara
que sembla haver-hi
munts de cotó fluix aixoplugant-te.

No fugis mai
del que vindrà, de totes les dones
que seran jo i voldran estimar-te,
encara que no els calgui el comiat
que, avui, a tu i a mi ens traspalsi.

Marta Pessarrodona

From *Poemes 1969-1981*,
Edicions del Mall, Barcelona, 1984

NO MORE TEARS

Don't ever regret
feelings you've had
though they were felt for me;
I've loved you, that's sure,
through all possible trials.

Don't ever stop seeing
all the mourning
and dancing around us,
though mountains of cotton wool
seem to be sheltering you.

Don't ever flee
from all that is happening, the women
that will be I, wanting to love you,
though they won't need the farewell
that shatters us today.

Translated by Nathaniel B. Smith and Lynette McGrath

DEU-ME UNA SANTA

Deu-me una santa, enc que no sigui al dogma,
a qui pugui pregar: *Jo pecador d'amor*;
deu-me una santa que hagi estimat força,
que per pregar-li calgui un bes i una cançó.

La santa aquella que, en donar almoïna,
si els seus ulls et ferien t'embraçava el coll,
i era el seu tast com la més fina noïa
i al coixí del seu pit hom havia el son dolç.

Aquella santa sempre bella mossà;
no havia mendicant que no li fos devot:
era tan clara, blanca, fresca i jove
com nata de primala i com un veire nou.

Jo hi aniria de matí, en 'quella hora
en què deixo l'amiga abans no surti el sol,
quan a l'església obririen la porta:

— duria l'estampeta arran, arran del cor.

Joan Salvat-Papasseit (1894-1924)

From *La gesta dels estels* (1922),
in *Poesies*, Ariel, Barcelona, 1962

GIVE ME A SAINT

Give me a saint (though she weren't on the calendar)
to whom I could pray: "I, sinner of love...";
give me a saint who has loved more than any
and for your prayer takes a song or a kiss.

She's the saint who, when you left her some alms,
once her eyes struck you, was hugging your neck,
her taste was that of the subtlest maiden
and sleep was so sweet on the pillow of her breast.

My saint was always a beautiful girl,
and every beggar was a member of her cult:
she was so bright and white, so fresh and young,
like a yearling's cream and like a new-made glass.

I'd like to go to her at the morning hour
when I leave my girl before the sun comes up
and they've just opened the doors of the church:

— I'd wear her image close, close by my heart.

Translated by Nathaniel B. Smith