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Culture in Catalan: from Ramon Llull to the present

“...[B]ut there are several different Catalonias: Ramon Llull’s Majorca, Ausiàs March’s Valencia, Salvador Espriu’s Barcelona, and places I regret I will never be, now that I am old, including Alacant and Andorra.”

With these words, the critic Harold Bloom concluded a lecture he gave on 11 February 2006 at Poets House, New York, adding,

“Few peoples are as devoted to the best of their imaginative literature as are the Catalans. Barcelona is a city-of-cities, like New York, Rome, and Paris, and resembles them most in being a city of imagination. Again, I regret that probably I never will have the energy to voyage for a final visit. Instead, I will try to immerse myself more deeply in the study of Catalan and of its literature.”

In his New York lecture, the author of *The Western Canon* linked Llull with Cervantes, Goethe, Dante and Chaucer because all of them were initiators of a literary language and founders of a tradition. Llull founded a diverse language that was adaptable to all registers because he alternated poetry, narrative, philosophical reflection and theological essay, thereby ushering in a literature that would unfold in all the facets of poetry, narrative writing, drama and thought. Eight hundred years later, at the start of the 21st century and after its tragic struggle for survival during the Franco dictatorship, Catalan literature is flourishing, with renewed vitality in all genres and registers of the language. The essay, works of thinkers, and academic research in Catalan constitute a vehicle for engaging with writers from everywhere in Europe and all around the world, and this dialogue has found an ideal space of expression in a multiplicity of journals of culture and contemporary thought, which, from Valencia to Barcelona, and from Lleida to Palma de Mallorca, engage in the debates of contemporary thinkers.

However, this dialogue with writers in other countries is unidirectional. Translations are produced, debates are carried out with thinkers from everywhere but the voices of Catalan thinkers and essayists rarely manage to cross the linguistic borders so that they can be heard and be part of the discussion with their colleagues elsewhere. The journal **Transfer**, with this, its first issue, aims from the outset to be a vehicle for communication. In each issue we shall offer, translated into English, recent articles written in Catalan by our thinkers or published in our cultural journals. An editorial board, autonomous in its decision-making powers but in close collaboration with the network of cultural publications, will make a selection of articles, offering variety and substance. **Transfer** will consist of four sections: Essays (on a range

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of contemporary matters), Focus (a monographic section bringing together articles that have been published in different journals on a particular challenge we face today), Notes & Comments (briefer articles on different aspects of Catalan culture) and Reviews (a selection of reviews of recently published books of essays and contemporary thought or literature that have been written in Catalan). This collection of articles will be addressed to essayists, thinkers and readers around the world who are interested in the topics **Transfer** deals with but, in particular, it is hoped they will attract the attention of other journals of culture and contemporary thought in all languages that might be interested in translating the writers and articles that appear in **Transfer**, not to mention publishers, literary agents and translators who specialise in the domains of research and contemporary thought.

Our translating these works into English is partly due to the fact that there is a renewed interest in Catalan literature and thought in the Anglo-Saxon world. The first four months of 2006 have seen a symposium on Catalonia and European national identities in the Remarque Institute of New York University; a conference on the linguistic policies of Catalonia and the universality of linguistic rights at Georgetown University; the creation of a new Joan Coromines Chair at the University of Chicago, and another Chair at the Research Centre for Catalan Studies at the Queen Mary University of London. This wide-ranging interest fits very well with the promotion of contemporary Catalan thought now being carried out by the Humanities and Science Department at the Ramon Llull Institute.

Transfer will not be a publication that is concerned with Catalan nationalist issues but rather will publish articles pertaining to international debates in the fields of contemporary thought and culture, as may be seen in this first issue.

However, the choice of English as **Transfer**'s language of expression also responds to the cry of warning, "Mind the gap!" Be careful with the increasing distance being created by a form of globalisation that is conveyed by the English language, which perceives itself as global but is, in fact, one of the languages that is least concerned with translation of other languages. **Transfer** aims to steer clear of this "covering-law universalism" (to use Michael Walzer's expression), which is being imposed everywhere along with its demand that the richness of thought expressed in its own language should be renounced. **Transfer** opts instead for the "universalism of translation", to use Enric Sòria's words in a book that is reviewed in these pages. From a literary tradition of eight hundred years that is full of life today in all its genres, from the wish to foster exchanges between essayists and researchers who write in Catalan and their colleagues around the world, and from the standpoint of a radical political option in favour of the universalism of translation, the Ramon Llull Institute has decided to publish **Transfer**.

Finally, the Ramon Llull Institute wishes to express its gratitude to Publicacions de la Universitat de Valencia (University of Valencia Press) for its valuable assistance, to the leading Catalan-language journals of culture and contemporary thought, and to Antoni Tàpies for being the first Catalan artist to offer us recent original work to accompany the articles that appear in this issue of **Transfer** II

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