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MANAGING LITERATURE: RECENT APPROACHES

In the commitment to culture, *the important thing is the new approach*. And how it transforms citizens, how it makes them *open, democratic, integrated, ecological, sensitive, well-read, etc*, quite different from citizens who are invited to passively contemplate museums, theatre, exhibitions and heritage as users, customers, consumers, partisan supporters, administered subjects, etc.

Toni PUIG, *Se acabó la diversión*, 2004.

The year in which the journal *Kesse* proposes to review the last decade of Catalan literature in the Camp de Tarragona is a significant one for various reasons. On the one hand, it is certainly true that the fact that Catalan culture is the guest of honour in Frankfurt, considered to be the most important International Book Fair in the publishing world, is just an excuse to conduct a review. Nevertheless, it is rather a useful one when trying to determine the significance (not artistic, but in terms of recognition) of the writers that live and write in this region within the Catalan literary landscape and in the structuring of the institutional canon; we shall discuss this point later on.

The year 2007 is also significant because, from the perspective of cultural management, encouraging reading and the diffusion of literature on a local level – which is what I shall discuss in this article –, in my opinion, it is a year that marks a turning point towards new aims, or, at least, requires us to commence new lines of action and explore other models of reaching out to citizens. This is the proposal for the future.

I could not say whether ten years ago the writers in the Camp de Tarragona had a smaller creative output, whether the literature that was published was better or worse, or whether we had such a long list of writers in Catalan. What I can say with certainty is that

over the last five years Tarragona has led a process of bringing together and reinforcing the group of writers that were born, live and/or produce their work in the region, giving rise to the current figure of 110 active writers. Above all, this has involved the following: indexing, counting, statistics, talking about things and about people so that we are aware that they exist. And, as is the case here, I would say that over the last decade, one of the most significant actions undertaken by the municipal administration in the ambit of literature in Tarragona has been: the coordination of agents, creators and people in order to allow the wealth of talent that already existed in the urban subsoil to blossom; in other words, to provide the conditions for all the assets that existed in the city to develop. We are moving slowly but surely.

City of Tarragona Literary Awards

The City of Tarragona Literary Awards (PLCT) is the literary event around which an ambitious programme of promoting and diffusing literature in Tarragona began to develop. These awards date back to 1978, when the *Òmnium Cultural del Tarragonès* created the Domènec Guansé Youth Literary Competition, although in fact the ceremony in all its categories – which, over time, has merged various institutional awards of this organisation with other City Council awards – has been held on a regular and continuous basis since 1991. Exactly ten years ago, in 1997, a new award was added to the list containing the Pin i Soler narrative award, the Comas i Maduell poetry award, the Rovira i Virgili essay award, the Ricard Opisso graphic short story award, the Gramunt i Subiela history award and the Pons d'Icart archaeology research award, which reflects one of the characteristics of the period we are reviewing: the Internet

Tinet short narrative award, which until now has given awards to short stories sent via e-mail. The incorporation of the City of Tarragona University Studies Foundation (an independent municipal entity) in the organisation of the Awards in 1994, resulted in the creation of a highly original competition that aimed to promote the use of this new means of communication and has obtained an extremely high level of participation until today. The Tinet award is therefore one of the exponents of a decade that has introduced new technologies and the Internet in all areas of life, the literary world of the region and the city.

Just one year later, in 1998, there was another turning point in the history of the PLCT: the Pin i Soler narrative award increased its prize money in spectacular fashion and, by awarding the winner three million pesetas, placed itself at the highest level among the offer of Catalan literary awards. This was significant because, at the time, it served as a catalyst in the promotion of literary creation, but above all because it allowed Tarragona to project itself externally and start making a name for itself in the Catalan literary ambit. Furthermore, this was a commitment that was accompanied by the programming of a Literary Awards Week, a measure that made the list of awards unique in the sense that, unlike in other locations in Catalonia, the awards ceremony would be preceded by conferences and seminars.

Thus, it can be said that such innovations represent the arrival of a serious and ambitious programme for promoting reading and the diffusion of literature in the city, or at least a planned one, since within this Awards Week the Administration has attempted to create a series of activities addressed at various sectors of the public and to exercise the function of promoting and coordinating the services of the cultural agents that work for literature. The Literary Awards Week began by offering citizens events that encouraged the reading of various texts and which were consequently spread over the days leading up to the award ceremony that was held at the Teatre Metropol, but gradually this was extended over time and the number of proposals increased, until it became the Literary Autumn, a programme that lasted for a month.

Literature experienced with all five senses

As a result, in 2001, Tarragona City Council, which was responsible for organising the awards, made a strong commitment to promote the city's literary world and, as I mentioned earlier, produced a definition of the Literary Awards Week that increased

their stature and which pursued the major challenge of involving the entire community in the Awards. This Literary Awards Week of 2001 already featured events that could be considered established ones, such as Poetry Night, which every year, and even today, is held at La Vaqueria and which, from 2000 up to 2004, was organised by Arola Editors. Other indispensable elements of the Literary Awards Week at the time included street readings organised by the Booksellers' Association, literary events held in restaurants, theatrical and musical performances and book presentations.

In response to the stimulus provided by the involvement and enthusiasm of the cultural agents of the city and the Camp de Tarragona, since 2003, this series of events has been held for an entire month, the month of November. Thus, the Literary Awards Week became the Literary Autumn, which under the slogan «with all five senses» featured events which, in accordance with the slogan, made it possible to touch, see, hear, smell and taste literature: storytelling sessions, literary routes, conference days for studying Tarragona's writers and literary movements, the Meeting of Writers from the Camp de Tarragona, book presentations and poetry recitals and performances are just a few of the events that involve the senses of hearing, touch and sight, while the Literature on Tables programme, in which various restaurants in the city offer recipes related to literary texts, enables literature to be discovered via less conventional channels and allows literature to be smelled and tasted in the literal sense of the word. The awarding of the Literary Awards remains a high point within Literary Autumn, but despite the very important place it occupies, it has become complementary to many other activities.

In the last two years, the figures have been striking: an offer of more than one hundred events and an attendance in excess of 10,000 spectators at each edition. As I pointed out earlier, this success is due to the fact that the City Council, on the one hand, has wanted to play a programming role, but above all because it has taken on the role of coordinator and has welcomed within this platform the proposals of community organisations that work for literature: the city feels at ease within the environment of a participative Literary Autumn, with the result that many organisations spontaneously decide to programme literary activities especially for this time of the year. For this reason one can understand the success of the project: because it is a project for everyone and counts on the participation of everyone, and is consequently not at all an artificial product exclusively imposed and defined by the City

Council, but by the sum of contributions of agents as important as the Public Library of Tarragona, Teatre El Magatzem, Tarragona Provincial Council, the URV, Fundació Caixa Tarragona, the Social and Cultural Centre of Fundació "La Caixa", APELLC and the School of Letters, to name just a few examples.

Today, Literary Autumn features events for a specialised audience, for an audience that is actively or potentially interested in literature and for an audience that never reads and has no intention of attending a literary event. From another perspective, it features events for various age groups: aimed at children, young people and adults. The principal aim of the series of events is, therefore, to focus on literature and all types of people, and for this reason it may contain seminars that provide an academic insight into a writer or a literary movement that has made an impact on the city's history, poetry recitals accompanied by live music, poetry reading on the street, on buses or at the train station, literary menus at schools, hip hop concerts or theatrical representations of narrations, for example.

Literature and the Internet

I spoke earlier of the Tinet award. And I did so because it is much more significant than it may appear at first sight. Tarragona is a medium-sized city that has had the privilege to experience at first hand, and long before many other European cities of its size, a global revolution: the integration of the Internet in everyday life. In 1995, TINET (Tarragona Internet) was created in the city with the support of Tarragona City Council, the first citizens' Internet network in Spain and among the first three in Europe.

Literature in the Camp de Tarragona has benefited from this privilege, which was the result of an initiative of Manel Sanromà and a team of entrepreneurs with links to the URV (Rovira i Virgili University). TINET has not only promoted the organisation of a literary award that uses new technologies, but, more importantly, has generated and assimilated cyber-knowledge among citizens in a simple way, and has provided the infrastructure tools to allow this culture to develop on websites, blogs, discussion lists, etc. For twelve years now, Tarragona has been able to count on many expert users in this medium, who can navigate through the Network with ease, and it is not hard to imagine the cultural repercussions of this reality.

The Internet environment has played a key role in managing literature in the last few years. In the first place, coinciding with the stimulus the Culture Department of the City Council gave to the Literary Awards Week, in 2001 a website was created for the list of awards, which soon aspired to becoming

a portal with a broader focus, a reflection of the city's literary activity. In this respect, therefore, the principal function of this tool – *www.tarragonalletres.cat* – was and still is to publicise the actions that are carried out, to provide information on events programming and on news concerning the writers in the Camp de Tarragona and to become a virtual materials archive that would continue to grow (extracts, literary routes, exhibitions...). However, from the outset, another route was also explored by investigating the novelties and opportunities that the Net could bring to the creative process: the «Make a Literary Click!» section contained (and still does) a host of virtual proposals that analyse the various forms of collective literary creation, for example, which lend themselves to being deployed in this medium: exquisite cadavers and linked stories created by different users, a range of experiences that blend poetry and images – «The literary city» proposes a metropolis made up of thematic walls on which poems can be attached or drawn –, a domain that links texts based on words, etc. Such activities have demanded the creative participation of websurfers (and therefore go beyond the passive user) and have had an excellent response.

Throughout these years, the Letters portal has received external recognition and has been mentioned on various occasions by the judging panel of the Lletra award given out by the UOC as part of the Girona Literary Awards. As a consequence of this entire process, in 2005 Tarragona hosted the 1st Conference on Catalan Literature Websites of the Catalan Speaking Regions. What is more, the city has been able to count on major initiatives such as the publication of the Tarragona Digital Library (BdT), created by OASI in order to convert the most important literary texts of the Camp de Tarragona into digital format and therefore allow them to be accessed freely from any location; or, the more recent and more dynamic TinetBiblioteca (*www.tinetbiblioteca.org*), which has integrated the BdT, and has become a platform in which creators can edit their own work (the number of works included is now well in excess of one hundred).

Among other significant developments, such as offering the citizens the possibility to design and maintain their own blog, a new form of literary expression or even a new genre that creators from the Camp de Tarragona have been able to test, TINET has been in charge of innovation and in the end has been the driving force, together with the City Council and the La Pell del Llaví municipal platform, which is where the idea originated from, behind holding the First Competition of Poetic-Artistic

Podcasts in 2006, a pioneering initiative in Spain which has received an unexpectedly positive response. It is the first competition in Catalan language that explores the podcast as a medium for artistic creation in the sphere of literature and the first event that has counted on the participation of podcasters from all over Spain. A landmark event that has placed Tarragona at the cutting edge and which has linked up with the virtual platforms and cultural centres most attentive to the new forms of expression, such as Podcatalà and Podcastellano, or the CCCB.

All of this helps us understand the important role played by the Internet over the last decade in the diffusion and promotion of literature in our regions.

Writers from the Camp de Tarragona

Coordination and structuring are tasks that Tarragona City Council has carried out in an emphatic manner with regard to the Writers from the Camp de Tarragona group, in addition to increasing the prestige of the literature produced by our writers. Together with the Department of Catalan Studies of the URV, which presented the proposal to the Culture Department, since 2001 both organisations have worked closely to bring together the group of people who write in Catalan in our region or who are linked to it and to promote the work produced, on the one hand, through the organisation of

Writers' Meetings – which take place three times a year and are dedicated to a literary figure on each occasion –; and on the other, through various promotional activities during the days that celebrate Sant Jordi (extracts of new titles, stand at the Rambla dedicated especially to their works, etc.), and finally through a series of collaborations with the local media, such as *El Punt*, in which the writers in the group publish articles on new titles, *Diari de Tarragona*, which features a monthly section, or Tarragona Radio, which has a programme dedicated to literature within our region, presented by Jordi Tiñena.

All these actions have strengthened the «Writers from the Camp de Tarragona» brand and have contributed to the fact that, within our immediate surroundings, more is said about the works of this group and consequently, I suppose and hope, such works have more readers. And above all I believe that it has helped reinforce the idea that we now have sound and appealing literature. Furthermore, these are actions that have generated a bibliography around our writers and documentation that may be of use in the future: the extracts and webpages that have been published on the occasion of each writers' meeting leads to the creation of useful and permanent study and reference material.

Actions based on the writers from the Camp de Tarragona have, on the other hand,

*Writers from the Camp
de Tarragona (2006).
Photography by
Montse Riera.*



resulted in the broadcasting of a television programme, *Tinta negra*, which has led to a qualitative leap in the projection of these literary figures and the activities they undertake. In any case, *Tinta negra* is a programme that has been broadcast by the Canal Reus channel and which, until now, has had a more or less local audience, despite the fact that for the second season there is a will to extend it to the Network of Local Television Channels.

Consequently, the major challenge from now on is to try to ensure that the range of projection is the country, Catalonia, and this requires a firm commitment from the Administration and other public bodies. I say this with regard to the impact of the creative work of writers from the region and the impact of programmes such as Literary Autumn, which remains wholly inadequate. In relation to the comment I made at the beginning of the article, the presence of writers from the Camp de Tarragona that has been determined in institutional terms by the Autonomous Government of Catalonia and by the capital's media is habitually weak and the works of fiction that are published in the Camp de Tarragona encounter many difficulties in reaching beyond our frontiers, and for this reason we view the catalogue of the Frankfurt Book Fair or the selection that is usually made in the anthologies with renewed enthusiasm. We could allude to the fact that the scope of the media in Barcelona is, in general, very narrow and offers few opportunities to Catalan literature in general, yet the actions that could be undertaken from here are numerous if we invest in resources.

Management of a sensitive community: the right to enjoyment

Often, when we reflect upon the cultural management that is implemented in municipalities, as professionals within this sector, we refer to areas of action such as the creation, formation and diffusion of culture. We also refer to some of the bases that have to guide our task: the direct participation of agents and citizens in such management, regionalisation as a way of ensuring that our city is a point of reference within the area, originality that will allow us to take our place on the Catalan map, the structuring of a connected network of agents, the coordination of activities and creators, etc. As I have said, these are concepts that undoubtedly guide us when performing a task well and I believe that some of these have been developed to a greater or lesser extent over the last decade with regard to the management of literature in the Camp de Tarragona.

However, in my view there is a concept that receives little attention in cultural management, and is sometimes overlooked: I am referring to the enjoyment of culture. (And, in this final reflection, I use the concept of culture as the equivalent of an artistic discipline – literature, music, painting, sculpture, etc.) Without doubt, and the best managers have said this, we have to work for an interested and potentially interested audience, since working for those who (in the theoretical terminology of cultural management) show reticence towards culture is a waste of time. Within the municipal ambit, this immediately raises an important question: can we overlook the majority of the population, who contribute to building the city in the same way as all those who benefit, either regularly or occasionally, from the cultural services the administration offers?

Nowadays, it is possible to say that wealth is no longer the main parameter for class differentiation: this role is now played by culture. Culture creates status, it provides, above all in certain spheres, the dynamics of small group identification and therefore, a comfortable and gratifying distinction. However, it should be borne in mind that all of us who are find ourselves in this milieu are not chosen ones or beings touched by the hand of God: quite simply, we have been fortunate enough to acquire, to a lesser or greater extent, one way or another, a sensibility towards art; we have had the great fortune to make it an inseparable part of our lives, as essential as eating or sleeping. Up to the point that, in order to live, we need culture, we need to read, paint, photograph...to look at and listen to art. Hence, we have grown up with the ability to enjoy art.

The administration needs to take this into account; and I believe the network of agents and those who dedicate much of their time to creation too. Within the various lines of action that are deployed, I think we need to work in detail on this aspect. This is a more painstaking and day to day task, of creating policies that will not lead to major headlines in the newspapers but which will have a real impact on the lives of citizens, not citizens in abstract terms, but the people who walk the streets and breathe the air of this common space that defines us. And I believe that there are various ways to do it.

Some examples. From the municipal administration ambit, in the first place, through education; to children and adults, inside the school and outside the school, by carrying out actions that cannot normally be implemented in the classroom, or which involve lifelong learning. In the second place (another example), by breaking down

the barriers between the installations and the urban environment. The key lies in allowing people to develop confidence in art, since many people can appreciate and enjoy a work of art if their intellectual ability is not questioned. Therefore, ensuring that the installation or programmed act is not presented as a huge question mark that continually questions the ignorance of the user.

The urban environment is a physical and psychological space that blurs the boundaries that delimit erudition and which give rise to rejection, and which establishes itself as an ambit of equality in which appraisal is totally free, like a giant open balcony that has now become the stage, which does not expect a certain behaviour from users, but makes them the absolute protagonists of the act (why don't we refrain from calling them users and call them cultural actors?). We have to take advantage of the urban environment, in order to interact in a real way with the lives that make their way through the city, and also create a corridor that connects them with the installation. Education, on the other hand, is the way to ensure that we enjoy quality and is a basis we have to apply to all actions, precisely so that people do not feel intimidated by art, and to ensure they become excited and make this excitement a part of their everyday lives.

This desire to manage a sensitive community that incorporates culture in their everyday lives is the motive for projects such as the La Pell del Llavi, the young creators platform created by Tarragona City Council in 2004 which, based on the principles of freedom, rebellion, criticism and beauty, has at all times sought poetic integration in city life and the lives of people, to arouse curiosity towards the impact of art and, consequently, encourage the direction participation of the public. Within this ideology formed in metaphorical terms, the aim of La Pell de Llavi has been to make citizens aware of poetry through the corporal, visual, vocal and imaginary filter of the city's young creators, in other words, through their own personal interpretation and to transform public space into an impudent but fertile space, in which art is represented in a naked and unashamed way, by involving the senses of citizens and breaking their routine. It involves committing towards a culture that trusts in and works with the bases of society (in this case, channelling and educating the sensibilities of a sector of citizens that represent our future, young people) in order to reach out to every corner of the community, from citizens for whom literature is a part of their everyday lives to citizens who do not participate in any

act related to literature and do not read as a habit.

La Pell del Llavi has achieved this aim, above all in the sphere of poetic action, in other words not so much through exhibition activity, but through activities that require the intervention of the public in order to be achieved and constructed. This is just one example of the approach that I would like cultural management to take over the coming decade. We need to seek excellence in a culture that is produced for the everyday lives of citizens, so that citizens can really make use of literature in everyday locations, so that children can enjoy, on any day, a literary meal at school and share a meal with the writer who created stories and riddles for the recipes they are eating – as is the case with La Lletra Petita, the cuisine and literature programme that has been implanted in compulsory education schools with the collaboration of Fina Anglès – or so that people who, for one reason or another, live outside the usual scheme of things – the elderly who live in care homes, long-stay hospital patients, the disabled, etc. – can share in a social way the power of literature and benefit from it.

The future proposal I am presenting requires a format involving multi-faceted management, and above all one that is aware of the real needs of citizens. Consequently, I believe that it is a legitimate proposal; it may be the only one that is possible for the City Council. The Administration is not an enterprise that has to sell a product at any cost in order to survive, and therefore does not have to think in quantitative and statistical terms. After a blinding light, the coloured lights that remain soon fade. And the major challenge is to ensure that culture, that literature, in this case, is not an exceptional event and becomes part of people's routines, in order to transform them and add value to the lives of individuals who have names and surnames, or groups made up of people with different faces and different interests.