

JOAN COROMINES



NOT ONLY IS JOAN COROMINES I VIGNEAUX (B. BARCELONA, 1905) ONE OF THE MOST IMPORTANT FIGURES IN CATALAN LINGUISTICS, HE ALSO OCCUPIES A LEADING POSITION IN THE SPHERE OF ROMANCE LINGUISTICS.

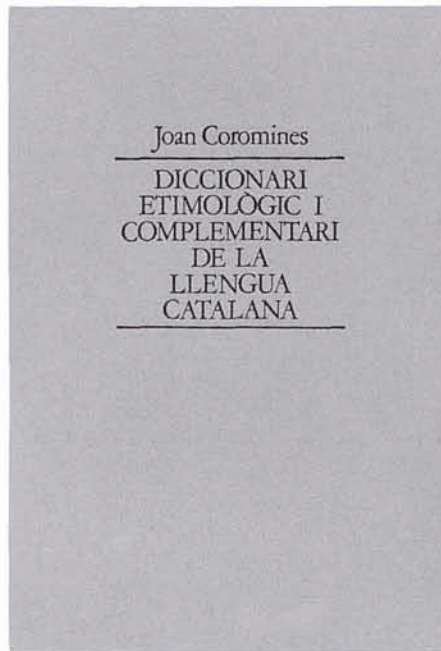
CARLES DUARTE HEAD OF THE LINGUISTIC ADVICE SERVICE.
GENERALITAT DE CATALUNYA

Catalan culture during the twentieth century has contributed a number of outstanding figures to universal culture in the fields of science, humanities, the arts, music, literary creation, etc. Joan Coromines, born in Barcelona in 1905, is most certainly one of them.

Joan Coromines is one of the most important names in Catalan linguistics, as well as occupying a leading position in the sphere of Romance linguistics.

The first evidence for his interest in linguistics goes back to when he was fifteen years old, but that early concern soon turned into an intense and lasting passion which led to a university degree in Letters, a doctorate (with a thesis on Aranese vocabulary), and to courses in linguistics in Montpellier, Zurich and Paris with the leading European experts in his speciality.

Between 1931 and 1936 Joan Coromines lived a period of intense research in Catalonia with the start of work on the *Onomasticon Cataloniae*, a work which was to gather and study Catalan place and personal names, and his decisive participation in the *Butlletí de Dialectologia Catalana*. But the Civil War shook



the country and radically overturned Joan Coromines's life and work.

Joan Coromines, like so many other political and cultural personalities, was forced into a lengthy exile, which led him to teach first at the University of Cuyo in Mendoza, until 1945, and later at the University of Chicago, from 1945 to 1967. Exile, which led him to aban-

don, at least in part, his original projects in the study of Catalan, led Joan Coromines to the realization of one of his most significant works, the *Diccionari crític etimològic de la llengua castellana* (1945-1957), later revised and enlarged with the collaboration of José A. Pascual, in the *Diccionario crítico etimológico castellano e hispánico* (1980-1991).

Very soon, though, he was able to re-establish contact with Catalonia and in 1964 he concluded the surveys carried out for the *Onomasticon Cataloniae* and the *Diccionari etimològic i complementari de la llengua catalana*. It seems worth emphasising this aspect of his investigation work: alongside his analysis of manuscripts and his bibliographic research, Joan Coromines, a great excursionist, acquired a direct knowledge of the living language through the realization of surveys on common nouns and place and personal names throughout the Catalan linguistic domain. Few researchers have possessed such an exhaustive and direct knowledge of a language as Joan Coromines in the case of Catalan.

Following his definitive return to Catalo-

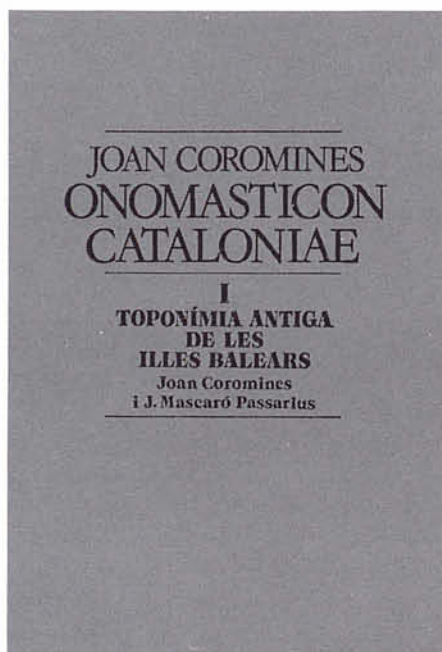


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nia in 1967, Joan Coromines resumed and completed some of his projects: the Catalan version of Kalidasa's *Vikramórvasi*, the publication of the works of his father, Pere Coromines, in Catalan and Castilian, the publication of books with varied works, such as *Tópica Hespérica*, *Lleures i converses d'un filòleg*, *Entre dos llenguatges* and, especially, his monumental *Diccionari etimològic i complementari de la llengua catalana* (1980-1991), written with the collaboration of Joseph Gulsoy and Max Cahner, the publication of the works of Cerverí de Girona and *El parlar de la Vall d'Aran. Gramàtica, diccionari i estudis lexicals sobre el gascó*.

In addition, having completed and published these books, Joan Coromines has been able to resume his work on the preparation of the *Onomasticon Cataloniae*, a work of which the first volume has already appeared and which is at present in the process of being edited.

Joan Coromines is a researcher who has devoted –and devotes– his entire life, without concessions, to the study of Romance linguistics, to which he has made fundamental methodological con-



tributions and which he has enriched with exceptional works, some of which it is difficult to believe are almost entirely the work of a single person. Over the years, Joan Coromines, an untiring investigator, has acquired an incomparable linguistic grounding which, along with his exceptional tenacity, has allowed him to produce editions of med-

ieval texts, etymological dictionaries, studies of place and personal names, etc. And we have to remember that his research work has had several languages for its subject matter: Catalan, Castilian, Portuguese-Galician and Provençal, and that his investigation has clearly contributed to the knowledge of the history of other Romance languages such as French and Italian.

I would not like to end without taking the opportunity to mention his civic attitude, which, from his youth and throughout his life, has led him to firmly defend democracy and the national identity of Catalonia.

The work and the life of Joan Coromines have earned him a number of awards, amongst them, the Gold Medal of the Generalitat de Catalunya, the Premi d'Honor de les Lletres Catalanes, the Premi d'Honor Jaume I, the Premio Nacional de las Letras Españolas and an honorary doctorate from the University of the Sorbonne.

Joan Coromines, then, is (and hopefully will be for many years to come) an inspiring figure who has generously devoted his whole existence to serving knowledge and his country. ■