

FROM THE EDITORS:

Over forty years ago, in the midst of the democratic transition following the death of dictator Francisco Franco, author and activist Montserrat Roig contemplated her duties as an “*ésser civic*” in a moment of intense cultural and political change:

Escriure en català és una afirmació de supervivència, i no solament literària. Ganes “d’existir” privadament i col·lectivament [. . .] Si tot va bé, escriure en català ja no serà un acte de “salvació” sinó un acte natural, un acte intern i privat que dóna coherència als sentiments i a les frustracions personals.

[To write in Catalan is an affirmation of survival—and not just in literature. A will “to exist” privately and collectively [. . .] If everything works out, writing in Catalan will no longer constitute an act of “salvation,” but a natural endeavor, an internal and private act that makes sense of our feelings and personal frustrations.]

For years, communicating in Catalan was an act of witnessing—of lending testimony to an ever-precarious past and present. While this understanding of Catalan as resistance is necessary, Roig contends that mere survival has never—will never—be enough. Instead, a language of the living should reflect the *feeling* of its people. And perhaps it’s no surprise that this kind of writing is typically coded as feminine.

While our political and cultural context is decades and miles different from Roig’s, our work, too, was born out of desire: to render visible the many labors of contemporary women writing in Catalan, and that of the many translators who craft their stories into English. Many of the texts here highlight and grapple with emotional labor and other responsibilities traditionally assigned to women, and what connects the struggle presented by Roig and our own is the labor of our craft: translation as a way to keep our worlds vital, empathetic, and expressive—a rewarding yet woefully unrecognized toil.

In several ways, *Barings // Bearings* is a response to another remarkable anthology titled *Women Writers in Catalan*, which was put out re-

cently by the Catalan publishing house Raig Verd. A sharp response to a cultural context still dominated by male writers, it comes as no surprise that the anthology's editors were duly concerned with visibility, as captured in the common refrain at the release party: "Celebrem que existim!" ("We celebrate our existence!"). Yet, most of the excerpts appear in English by way of a handful of hired translators, who, by no fault of their own, remained largely unaware of the many translators who were already undertaking the endeavor. In many ways, this volume of *Absinthe* is a site for these fabulous translators to make clear that they exist, too, giving them the chance to break into the competitive world of literary translation.

Barings // Bearings is a testament to the thriving worlds of women's writing in Catalan, with time-travelling fiction by Bel Olid (tr. Bethan Cunningham), regrets on pregnancy sublimated into an airborne taxi ride in a story by Tina Vallès (tr. Jennifer Arnold), Mireia Vidal-Conte's poetry reflecting on Virginia Woolf's suicide (tr. María Cristina Hall), a story of revenge on an abusive elderly woman by Anna Maria Villalonga (tr. Natasha Tanna), as well as reflections on war, bookstores, and generational conflict in post-Franco Spain. These often surreal pieces of Catalan fiction are informed by several essays and works of literary memoir, including those by Marta Rojals (tr. Alicia Meier) on the state of the Catalan language, Lluïcia Ramis (tr. Megan Berkobien) on the memory wars across the dictatorship and into today, and Najat El Hachmi (tr. Julia Sanches) on the conditions of growing up in Catalonia as the daughter of Moroccan parents. These latter pieces resist and explore the contours of multilingualism, highlighting the intra- and interlingual reality of spoken Catalan alongside Spanish and Amazigh.

For the early-career translators in this issue, this publication follows years of immersion in Catalan culture, countless hours honing our translation skills, and much solidarity. We only hope this issue will highlight and commend the important work these writers and translators are building today. So give yourself over to feeling, for, as Montserrat Roig reminds us: "La cultura és l'opció política més revolucionària a llarg termini," or, "In the long run, culture is our most revolutionary political option."

Megan Berkobien & Maria Cristina Hall



“Top on the Red Mountain” | Elisa Munsó