

As Others See Us



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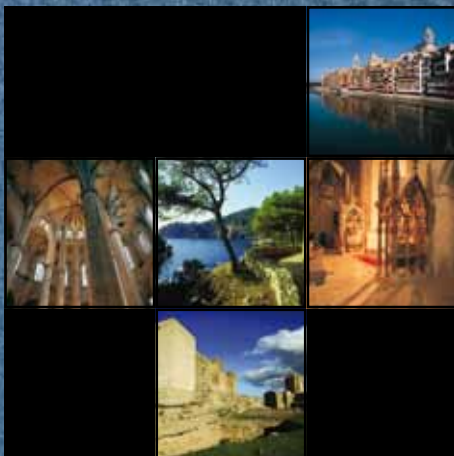
Guies turístiques de Catalunya



 Catalan
Tourist Board

 Generalitat de Catalunya
Government of Catalonia
Ministry of Innovation,
Universities and Enterprise





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As Others See Us. Catalonia through the eyes of personalities of worldwide renown

Presentation: a guide that fills a need

This guide affords an introduction to Catalonia through the testimony of a selection of authors and other personalities who, at different points in history, have said or written something of interest about Catalonia and the Catalans. Two criteria guided the choice of the sixty or so authors who appear in these pages. The first was that they should be figures of universal repute — Miguel de Cervantes and Ernest Hemingway, to quote just two examples — or persons who had gained widespread renown in their native cultural contexts, such as many of the Castilian, French or American authors quoted.

The other criterion was that each author and text must say something of interest about our country and fellow citizens. Each must have contributed, in other words, to making Catalonia's diverse scenery and landscapes, its historic buildings and cultural attractions, better known and appreciated — as befits a publication aimed at the travellers and tourists who visit us — or, alternatively, they must have cast light on some of the constants that have marked Catalonia's historical evolution — the preservation of our language, for instance, or our persistent struggle to safeguard our identity. As readers will see for themselves, these constants are acknowledged by many of our chosen authors.

The gamut of authors is wide and constitutes a fairly representative cross-section of the famous personalities who have expressed their views about Catalonia. Authors from European, or western, cultural backgrounds are especially well represented — people from Castile, Britain, France, Italy, and Germany, for instance, as well as Americans and Latin Americans — for it is they who mention Catalonia most often. In contrast, there are fewer testimonies from Jewish or Arab authors — only medieval texts in the latter case — or from more recent writers from the Far East. In terms of profession, the selection of authors is equally varied and encompasses politicians and journalists, soldiers, scientists and historians, writers and artists from all periods, and many more. No Catalans appear in the guide since its aim is precisely to depict Catalonia “as others see us”.

Catalonia, as a leading tourist destination, is currently facing new challenges and this seems to me an especially opportune time to issue a guide of this nature as part of the collection “Tourist Guides of Catalonia”, published by the General Directorate of Tourism. My reasons are twofold: on the one hand it will enable many tourists to discover how some of their most eminent fellow-countrymen — and other great authors — see or saw us, and on the other it will give not only tourists but Catalans as well a chance to see us through the eyes of others, to find out which features of our country have drawn the attention of the famous personalities who appear in the guide.

This last consideration prompts me to make one last remark, which is of special relevance when discussing tourism and tourist stereotypes. In this guide you will find opinions of all kinds, ranging from warm appreciations of our country and its inhabitants to decidedly negative opinions. In all cases, however, Catalonia, as a country and a society, is viewed as part and parcel of Europe, a land that considers its own identity as a matter of crucial importance. What you will not find applied to Catalonia is that hackneyed, Romantic vision of the oriental exoticism of Spain, which many 19th century authors and travellers, among them Richard Ford or Washington Irving, helped to spread and which endures to the present day. When these authors allude to Catalonia, they do so somewhat impassively, in sharp contrast to their enthusiastic evocations of the exoticism of Spain or the spell of Andalusia.

I invite you, then, to discover what has been said or written about Catalonia by some sixty personalities of worldwide renown, personalities whose chronological range extends from the days of Julius Caesar and the Greek geographer Strabo to the present time. I am convinced that this small guide will help you to gain a better understanding of our country and its people and to enjoy your stay here to the full.

Directorate General for Tourism

Using this guide: what you will find in *As Others See Us*

It is usually left up to the natives of a country to describe their land, their fellow countrymen and features of interest to tourists, such as mountains and coastline, scenery and natural beauty spots, historic buildings, museums, festivals, traditions and cuisine. This guide takes the opposite approach and concentrates exclusively on how Catalonia and the Catalans have been seen from elsewhere over the centuries. Hence the title — *As Others See Us* — which reflects the book's sole aim: that of assisting travellers and tourists in Catalonia by providing perspectives of worldwide validity.

The guide contains the accounts and thoughts of some sixty personalities of high repute who have referred to Catalonia and the Catalans at some period in history, from Roman times right down to the present. They include intellectuals and artists, but also soldiers, and politicians such as Winston Churchill. It is these personalities, through their writings, who introduce the reader to Catalonia: its scenery, its people and its culture. One might even say that we have appointed a series of figures ranging from Livy and Strabo to George Sand, Washington Irving, Ernest Hemingway, and many others, as emissaries of Catalonia.

The texts have been divided into four sections entitled “The Country”, “The Landscape”, “The Culture” and “The People”. Within each section they are arranged in chronological order, according to the period at which each author lived. The guide opens with an introductory quote from the Australian writer Robert Hughes. The success of Hughes' book on Barcelona, and the attraction he felt for certain features of present-day Catalonia, provide a perfect illustration of the current upsurge of tourism in Catalonia. Hughes lays special stress on our history, culture and art, singling out the genius of Modernism — Catalan Art Nouveau — which, along with the Gothic architecture that arose from Catalonia's medieval period of splendour, provide the keys, as Hughes himself points out, to understanding the strength and character of our land.

The authors quoted in this guide were selected in the light of the prestige they enjoyed at their respective periods. Thus alongside Julius Caesar you will find some of our own contemporaries, such as Octavio Paz, Paulo Coelho and Barack Obama. Variety is guaranteed: for instance, Benjamin of Tudela, a Jew, evokes the Jewish quarters of Girona and Barcelona in the Middle Ages, while Arab chroniclers such as Ibn Khaldun, Al-Umari and Al-Idrisi refer to the Catalan earldoms which for them formed the “northern frontier” of Al-Andalus. Each author also owes his place in the book to the renown he gained in his native culture. However we cannot resist pointing out, with some pride, that the guide contains numerous laudatory comments from some of the leading names in universal literature, authors like Miguel de Cervantes, Pablo Neruda, Stendhal and Gabriel García Márquez, whose works are to be found in the majority of public and private libraries throughout the world.

Our goal was to collect the broadest possible spectrum of references to Catalonia from authors belonging to the world’s major linguistic, cultural and religious communities. Nor did we confine ourselves to those who have praised us or showered us with compliments. On the contrary, the reader will find criticism too — the ferocious diatribes of the Castilian poet Quevedo, for instance, or the unflattering words of the French writer Prosper Mérimée. But these too will help travellers and tourists who consult this guide to understand our country better. Thus when Francisco de Quevedo writes that “In political terms the Catalans are a monstrous freak. They are free men, but with a lord, so that the Count of Barcelona is not a dignitary but a mere term, a plain word”, he is in fact denouncing the determination of Catalans throughout history to uphold their own identity.

Other views may be lukewarm or even grudging. This is perceptible in authors such as Richard Ford who writes: “The Catalans are not very courteous or hospitable to strangers, whom they fear and hate. [...] But] however rude their manners, it is said that when well known, they are true, honest, honourable, and rough diamonds”. Even so there is a sharp contrast between Ford’s effusive descriptions of the Romantic, eastern magic of Andalusia and his cold comments on Barcelona and Catalonia which, in the 19th century, had already entered the industrial era.

Enthusiastic appraisals are to be found in the guide as well, of course. Suffice it to recall Cervantes’ famous description of Barcelona: “treasure-house of courtesy, refuge for strangers, hospice of the poor, homeland of the brave, and champion of the outraged, a pleasant source of firm friendships”. Or the sweeping praise of Catalonia’s dynamism voiced by Voltaire in *Le Siècle de Louis XIV*: “Catalonia, in short, can do without the entire universe, but its neighbours cannot do without it...”. Such a claim, if made by a Catalan, would sound insufferably pretentious!

In short, these pages reflect many of the reasons for which people from elsewhere have visited us over the centuries — not always with peaceful intentions — and the image of our country that they in turn have transmitted. It is our wish that this guide will encourage each and every new visitor to do the same — to find new reasons for discovering and understanding Catalonia, and for appreciating what it has to offer: its landscapes and people, its festivals and traditions, its cuisine, its Mediterranean sunlight, and its subtle nature.

Joan Carles Vilalta



Robert Hughes

Australia, 1938

The Australian writer Hughes came to Barcelona for the first time in 1966 and has been fascinated ever since by Catalonia's capital, its art, history and lifestyle. In the introduction to his highly successful book on Barcelona he explains why.

So much of what was built in Barcelona in the late nineteenth century was grounded in a strong, even obsessive, sense of the Catalan past, in particular its medieval past, that there was little point in trying to describe the newer without the older. Moreover, the desire to revive the glories of the Catalan middle ages, felt so strongly by the architects of Barcelona's *fin*

de siècle, was also shared by writers, painters, and sculptors, and deeply entwined with the issues of political independence from Madrid and a sense of cultural continuity expressed in the struggle for the Catalan language.

[...]

The political and economic history of Barcelona is written all over its plan and buildings, and one cannot begin to understand Catalan architecture – particularly that of the nineteenth century, when it was such a forceful expression of national aspiration – without the image bank of local identity that lay behind it and often makes sense of what the foreign visitor is apt, at first, to assign to “mere” fantasy.

[...]

The sense of Catalunya as a distinct cultural entity within the larger Iberian body endures. It has been a source of great strength – and, occasionally, of self-delusion as well – for writers, architects, and artists, many of whom viewed their own creative efforts as rebuttals of centralism; and its results have often transcended centralist ideas of the “merely local”.

Barcelona, 1992



The Country

Strabo

Greece, 63 BC – 19 AD

This Greek historian and geographer gives a detailed description of the Iberian peninsula, notably the Mediterranean coast, in Book III of his great *Geography*. In the classical era this work became one of the most reputed sources of information about the area now known as Catalonia as it was in ancient times.

The colony of Dertosa [Tortosa] stands right on the River Ebro, which rises in the land of the Cantabri and flows southwards, parallel to the Pyrenees, across a broad plain.



Between the mouths of the Ebro and the lowest foothills of the Pyrenees – the mountains on which Pompey’s trophy was erected – the first city one comes to is Tarragona. It has no harbour but is built in the curve of a bay and is satisfactorily provided with everything a city needs.

Its current population is no less than that of Carthage, for it is well situated to serve as a governor’s residence and serves, in some respects, as a metropolis to the greater part of the territory, not only on this side of the Ebro but the other side as well. Another major advantage of its location is the presence of several large islands – the Gymnesians [Balearics] and Ebusus [Ibiza] – a short distance from the coast: Eratosthenes claimed that Tarragona was a port, but Artemidorus refutes this, saying that there is not even anchorage for ships.

Geography, 29-7 BC



Tortosa

Titus Livy

Rome, 59 BC – 17 AD

In 27 BC the Roman historian Livy set about writing a great history of the Roman people spanning the seven centuries from the foundation of Rome to the year 9 BC. In this extract he relates how the first Romans, led by Cato, reached what is now Catalonia in 218 BC, during the Punic wars.

The consul Marcus Porcius Cato immediately set out with twenty-five long ships, five of which belonged to the allies, towards the port of Luna, where he had ordered the army to proceed. After dispatching an edict along the coast and gathering a squadron of ships of all types, he set sail from the port of Luna and ordered



them to follow him to the port of the Pyrenees, intending to sail from there with a large fleet against the enemy.

From Roses, with the wind behind them, they reached Empúries; there all the troops disembarked, except those of the allied squadron. At the same time they gave a warm welcome to the consul and the army. Cato remained there for a few days while he explored the area and ascertained how large the enemy forces were. So that the halt should not be unproductive, he used the time to drill the soldiers.

History of Rome, 1st century BC





Catalan territory as medieval Muslim geographers and chroniclers saw it

To Arab geographers, the southern part of present-day Catalonia was the frontierland, or Upper March, of Al-Andalus, just as in the Frankish empire the northern part of Catalonia was the Hispanic March. Arab chroniclers refer frequently to Catalonia in their writings: we reproduce references by five different authors, with special attention to the great geographer Al-Idrisi.

Ahmad Al-Razi

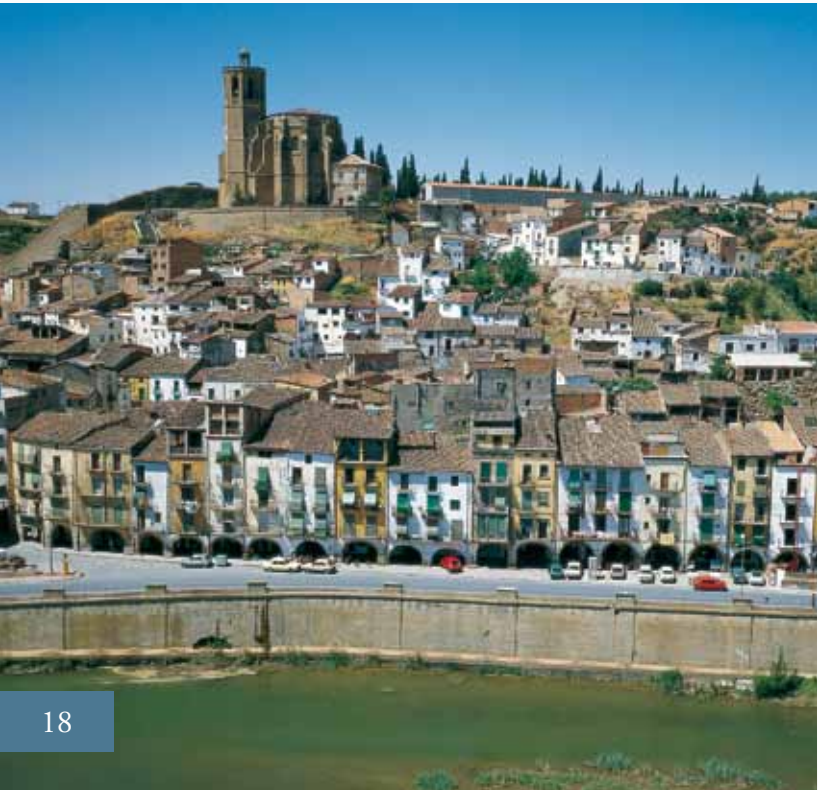
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That year, 284 H, the lord of the Upper March [the northern frontier of Al-Andalus], Lubb b. Ahmad al-Qasi, attacked the castle of Aura in the region of Barcelona, which is the Frankish usurper's base. Lubb captured and burnt the castle and inflicted losses on his enemy. When he met the Count of the region, Anqadid ibn al-Mundir [Wilfred 'the Hairy'], the father of Sunyer, he forced him to flee, scattered his troops, and on the same day struck him a blow in battle from which he died a few days later.

This writer, who came from a family of historians, wrote a history of the governors of Al-Andalus, *Tarik muluk Al-Andalus*. Here we reproduce a passage of great symbolic importance to Catalans, since it attests to the death of the Count of Barcelona Wilfred 'the Hairy' as a result of a wound received in battle.

That year, in the month of the Ramadan, Lubb b. Muhammad began building the castle of Balaguer, near Lleida.

Balaguer





Mur Castle

Al-Umari

1300-1349

Al-Umari, who was born in Damascus, wrote a twenty-seven-volume encyclopedic work entitled *Masalik al-Absar fi Mamalik al-Amsar* [Sight-seeing Journeys through the Kingdoms of the Civilized World] from which this paragraph is taken. In it he claims that the Catalans are *Arabs* who live in the land of the *Franks*. He also says that they react bravely when offended or annoyed.

As for the Catalans, they are Arabs who live in Frankish lands, and they descend from the Christians of Gassan, the companions of Gabela ben Al-Ayham, who entered the land of the Byzantines and gradually advanced until they settled in the country where they are now. They have their own king and include both land-dwellers and seafaring folk and they do not seek combat against anyone who does not disturb their sleep or destroy their tranquillity. But if they are annoyed, they put down the troublemaker and shut the mouth of any braggart.

Al-Himyari, 14th century

This scholar's chief work is a geographical dictionary of the world, *Kitab al-rawd al-mitar fi habar al-aqtar*, which includes a brief historical commentary for every place name listed. The entry we have chosen stresses the importance of Lleida and its surrounds, and the robustness of its fortifications.

Larida [Lleida]. Within the eastern border of Al-Andalus. This is an ancient city, built on the bank of a river called the Chiqar [Segre] that rises in the land of Gallaecia. This is the river from which gold nuggets are taken. Lleida lies to the east of Huesca. It was

Lleida



once destroyed and abandoned. It was rebuilt by Ibn Mussa ibn Lubb ibn Qassi in 883. The castle is impregnable and can withstand any attack or long siege. Above the castle is an attractive mosque belonging to an *aljama* and built in 901. The castle overlooks a vast plain known as the “plain of Maichkijan” [Mascançà].

Al-Maqqari

1000-1041

I put this question [about the location of the north-eastern corner of the triangle that made up the Iberian Peninsula] to a group of learned men and they replied that what Al-Idrisi said was true and that Narbonne and Barcelona did not belong to Al-Andalus and the corner that reaches the Mediterranean to the east, between Barcelona and Tarragona, along a river known as the Llobregat, is the frontier that separates Al-Andalus from Europe, where many tongues are spoken. In this spot rises the mountain of the port, that is, the aforementioned barrier, and there too stand the gates that were opened by the King of the Greeks with iron, fire and vinegar. Before this there was no other route from Europe to Al-Andalus.

This tireless traveller extensively explored the Middle East. His main work, *Kitab nafh al-tib min gusn al-Andalus al-ratib wa dikr waziri-hi Lisan al-Din b. al-Hatib*, was inspired by ancient texts and became a vital source of information on the history of Al-Andalus. This paragraph situates the frontier between Europe and Islam along the river Llobregat.

Martorell. Pont del Diable





Ibn Khaldun

1332-1406

Ibn Khaldun was a Tunisian historian and politician, though his family were from Seville. He held important posts in various North African courts until, after being imprisoned by the Tartar emperor Tamerlane, he took refuge in Cairo, where he was *cadi* until his death. The chosen passage describes the burning and sacking of Barcelona by Al-Mansur. The success of the attack is attributed to the weakening of ties between the Catalan counts and the Frankish empire.

In the early stages of their regime, the Umayyad caliphs [of Al-Andalus] passed down from generation to generation the advice that the *muluk* [kings] of Barcelona should be treated with courtesy because they were afraid they might receive help from the Lord of Rome and, later, that of Constantinople [in case of war]. But by the time Al-Mansur ibn Abi Amir was in power, it was obvious that the people of Barcelona had broken their ties with the king of Ifranga [the land of the Franks]. Al-Mansur immediately started carrying out raids, pillaged the country, and took punitive measures against each district. He captured Barcelona, burnt it to the ground and subjected its inhabitants to all kinds of hardship. At the time the *malik* [king] was Borrell [II], the son of Burrell b. Sunir [Sunyer]', and Al-Mansur treated him in the same way as the other Christian kings.

Barcelona. Plaça Ramon Berenguer el Gran

Al-Idrisi

1100-1166

Huesca and Lleida are 70 miles apart. [...] Lleida is a small but highly populated city with fortifications. It stands on the bank of a large river. It takes two days to travel from Mequinensa to Tortosa, a distance of 50 miles. Tortosa is a city built at the foot of a mountain, encircled by fortifications. It has markets, agricultural colonies and craftsmen's shops. Large ships are built there with timber from the nearby mountains, where pine wood of a length and thickness second to none is to be found. It is used to make masts and spars.

The pine wood from the mountains is red, with a smooth, resinous, durable bark; unlike other kinds of timber, it is not attacked by insects. It is very well known.

[...]

It is 16 miles from the mouth of the river [Ebro] to the tower of Kachtali, further west along the coast. This tower is very handsome and highly fortified and stands on the river that flows into the Sea of Syria [the Mediterranean]. It is inhabited by courageous people. To the west is a large village adjoining arable land. It is six miles from the tower of Kachtali westwards to the village of Yana [La Jana], which is close to the sea.

Kitab Ruyar ["Book of Roger"], 1154

This geographer and cartographer, born in Ceuta and raised in Cordoba, settled at the court of the Norman king Roger II of Sicily. In 1154 he made an engraved silver planisphere and wrote a set of learned commentaries about it known as *Kitab Ruyar* [the "Book of Roger" or "Tabula Rogeriana"]. The text chosen here describes the territory of the taifas of Lleida and Tortosa. Like other contemporary writers, Al-Idrisi highlights the red pine wood from the nearby mountains of Els Ports which was excellent for ship-building.

Tortosa-Beseit Mountain passes



Benjamin of Tudela

Navarrese Jew, 12th century

This traveller and writer resided in Baghdad from 1159 to 1173. From the notes he gathered in the course of his travels he published a book in Hebrew entitled *Sefer Massa'ot* ["Book of Travels"], which contains one of the earliest descriptions of Barcelona and its Jewish quarter.



First I set out from my home town [Tudela] for the city of Saragossa, travelled down the Ebro to Tortosa, and from there travelled for two days until I reached the ancient city of Tarragona, [which] was built by Greek Cyclops and there is nothing like it anywhere in Spain.



From there to Barcelona it takes two days. And in Barcelona there is a [Jewish] community, and learned, intelligent men, and great princes, such as R. Sheshet, R. Shealtiel, R. Salomon and R. Abraham ben Chisdai. It is a beautiful little city on the shores of the sea and merchants from all over bring their goods there: from Greece, Pisa, Alexandria in Egypt, the land of Israel, Africa and all around it.

From there it takes a day and a half to reach Girona, where there is a small community of Jews.

Sefer Massa'ot
[“Book of Travels”], pub. 1543

Tarragona. Archbishop's Tower

Dante Alighieri

Italy, 1265-1321

The Florentine poet's great *Divine Comedy* is part of the world canon. This excerpt exalts the figure of King Peter 'the Great' of Catalonia and Aragon, who liberated Sicily from the French, describing him as he who "is girt with the cord of courage". Dante also refers to King Peter's son, Alfons 'the Liberal', who reigned from 1285 to 1291, regretting that, since he left no descendants, his father's virtues were not passed down.

He who appears so sturdy and sings
in time with the man with the virile nose,
is girt with the cord of courage;

And if the young man who sits behind him
had remained king for longer,
his courage would have been passed on,

but this cannot be said of any other heir.
The realms belong to James and Frederick,
but not the richest part of the inheritance.

Seldom does a man's probity
rise up through the branches: such is the will
of Him who gave it, that we may ask it of him.

"Purgatory", Canto VII
The Divine Comedy, 1304

Santes Creus. Royal tombs (14th century)





The Travels of Cosimo de' Medici Italy, 1642-1723

The great Florentine prince was married, for reasons of state, to Marguerite-Louise d'Orléans. He made long trips across Europe in a bid, rumour had it, to get away from his wife. During one of his journeys he travelled all over the Iberian peninsula. In this passage he recounts his journey through the Segarra and Urgell regions, on his way from Barcelona to Lleida.



The countryside I saw in the morning looked very wild and rugged with a great abundance of pine trees. Near Hostalets [de Cervera] it becomes gentler, with many vine and olive groves. From Hostalets to Tàrrega it is still more beautiful, the land being very flat, the soil richer and the crops thicker. These include vineyards that wind round and round the hills, adorning their slopes with countless bright green garlands. They say that in this region the soil is so fertile that it yields eleven times the amount of grain that is sown, though it very seldom rains and we were told they had had no rain for fourteen months.

On the 9th his Highness woke at daybreak and heard mass at the convent where he had spent the night. Then he mounted his horse and set out for Mollerussa across countryside very similar to Tuscany, where wheat, vines and olive trees grow. He rode through Vilagrassa, the village of Don Antonio Velasco, and Bellpuig, the walled property of Marquis César of Aytona, the head of the Queen's household. The sumptuous tomb of the Great Captain [Ramon Folch de Cardona] can be admired in the main church of that locality, though his ashes are in Naples. Mollerussa is a small village with few houses standing around a square and looking something like a farmyard.

1668-69



Figueres. Castle of Sant Ferran

Alexandre de Laborde

France, 1773-1842

This soldier, writer and artist served in the French army during the Napoleonic Wars (1808-1814) by drawing the scenes where battles took place. His most outstanding work, *Itinéraire descriptif de l'Espagne*, was translated into Spanish in 1826. Several editions were made. It contains idealized sketches of the most significant places in Catalonia. This passage describes the castle of Sant Ferran (Figueres).

The town of Figueres [...] has a parish church, two convents — one belonging to the Capuchins, the other to the Franciscans -, a hospital, an *alcalde mayor* for the administration of justice, and a small garrison. The streets are fairly wide, the square is square in shape and surrounded by porticoes. There are 4,000 inhabitants, most of whom cultivate the land with diligence and skill. Here travellers should change money from their own countries to avoid losing on it further inside the kingdom.

A citadel known as the castle of Sant Ferran was raised nearby during the reign of Ferdinand VI at vast expense. It stands on a hillock and is lavishly built. The walls are made of hewn stone, the moats are deep and wide, and the surrounding area is mined. The walls, storehouses, stables, cellars, barracks and hospital all have casemates; the rock on which it is built is so skilfully used that it is virtually impossible to dig a trench anywhere round it.

Itinéraire descriptif de l'Espagne, 1808

Maximilien Sébastien Foy

France, 1775-1825

In the course of the Napoleonic Wars (1808-1814) this French soldier and writer fought in various campaigns waged by the French army in the Iberian peninsula. Here he lays special stress on the identity of Catalonia and how the Catalans defend it against both France and Spain.

Catalonia is less a province of Spain than a small State subjected to the sceptre of the Catholic Kings. The Catalans have different customs, a different language, and a different social organization from Castile. [...] Nowhere else in the Peninsula does one sense such a thirst for freedom and independence. [And, at the same time] nowhere do parents pass down to their children such a keen hatred of their French neighbours.

They reproach the French with having constantly driven them to rebel against the Kings of Spain during the 17th century only to abandon them to the resentment of their outraged master. They cannot forgive them for imposing upon them a king who humiliated their pride and abolished their privileges in the early 18th century.

Histoire de la guerre de la Péninsule sous Napoléon, 1827

Manresa. Museu Comarcal
French seal-paper being burnt on the main square (2 June 1808)



Washington Irving

USA, 1783-1859

Irving was the author of the famous *Tales of the Alhambra*. He worked as secretary of the US embassy and became the American ambassador to Madrid from 1842 to 1846. An untiring traveller, he gives a flattering description of Barcelona, in which he highlights the supreme merits of the Mediterranean climate and the landscape of the Barcelona plain.



I am delighted with Barcelona. It is an attractive city, especially the new part, where the Spanish, French and Italian characters merge. The climate is gentle and voluptuous, the heat moderate, because of the sea breezes. Between the sea and the hills stretches a fertile plain studded with farmhouses half-hidden amid orchards and gardens, where oranges, lemons, pomegranates and other fruits of southern climates grow. We have an excellent Italian opera house too, which affords me great amusement. It is the main place for social gatherings in the evening and there are lively comings and goings between one box and another.

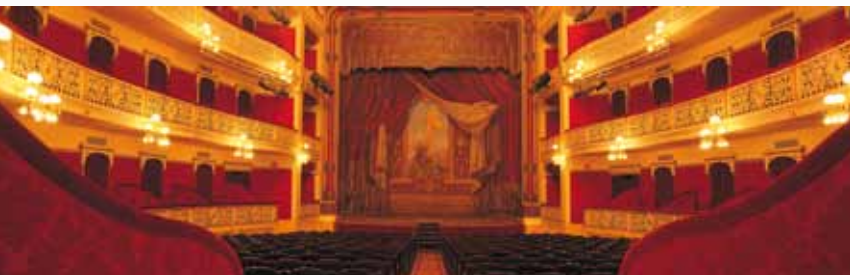
[...]

These gentle climes along the Mediterranean shore are undoubtedly the place to come in order to enjoy the true poetry of existence. Nothing caused me greater pleasure than the extemporaneous late-afternoon ambles with my colleagues around country houses, or “torres” as they call them here, three or four miles from the city, among orchards of orange, fig and pomegranate trees; they all have terraced gardens full of fountains and flowers. How I enjoyed sitting on those flower-decked terraces, gazing over the lush and varied plain! The city, gilded by the western sun, was visible in the distance, and beyond it, the vivid blue of the sea. There is nothing purer, gentler or sweeter than breathing in the evening air in such privileged spots.

Letters, 1844



Barcelona. Auditorium of the Gran Teatre del Liceu



Reus. Teatre Fortuny

Richard Ford

Great Britain, 1796-1858

The English Hispanicist and traveller Richard Ford fell in love with Andalusia and resided in Seville and Granada (the Alhambra) from 1831 onwards. He was the author of famous travel guides and rode thousands of miles across the Iberian Peninsula on horseback. His works were among the first to create the hackneyed image of Spain that has come down to the present day. Here he talks about Reus, Montblanc and Poblet in a somewhat conventional vein.

Reus is the capital and the centre of its rich and highly-cultivated *campo* or *comarca*. The older portion of the town was built in 1151; the more modern rose during the last century, when many enterprising English settled there and established a commerce in wines, brandies, and leathers, the firm of Harris taking the lead. The new portion, with its wide plazas and streets, glaring in summer and cold in winter, contrasts with the tortuous lanes of the earlier town. There is a theatre and decent inns and cafés, for it is a busy place with its silk and cotton works. Pop. above 25,000. Monday is the best day to go to Reus, as being the market; the sea-port is Salou, and the rival and bane of Tarragona.

[...]

Another excursion may be made on horseback to Valls and Poblet. Valls is a thriving town of 8,000 souls; [...] 3 L. from Valls is Montblanch, and about 2 L. more lies the once celebrated Cistercian monastery of *Poblet*, which is placed at the entrance of the rich valley *La Conca de Barbara*. [...] This monastery is now in a deplorable state of neglect, having been exposed to popular fury at the recent suppression, [...] but let no artist or antiquarian fail going to Poblet, or forget at dinner to drink the rich red wine *del Priorato*.

Handbook for Travellers in Spain, 1844

Aurore Dupin, George Sand

France, 1804-1876

The French authoress travelled through Catalonia in 1838 on her way to Majorca with her lover, the distinguished pianist and composer Frédéric Chopin. In her impressions she describes Catalonia and Barcelona during the long civil war between Liberals and Carlists. Even so, the picture she paints of Barcelona at the time is vivid with local colour.



Barcelona. Marítim Museum

Once we were past the vast and impressive fortifications round Barcelona, with their countless gates, drawbridges, posterns and ramparts, there was nothing more to suggest that we were in a city at war. Encircled by a triple battery of cannons and cut off from the rest of Spain by bandits and a civil war, the city's shining youth strolled in the sun along the Rambla, a long avenue lined with trees and houses, similar to our boulevards. The women, who were beautiful, graceful and coquettish, were concerned solely with arranging the folds of their mantillas and fluttering their fans, the men with smoking their cigars, laughing and chattering, and ogling the ladies as they discussed Italian opera, as though they had no idea what was happening beyond the walls. But after night fell, when the opera was over, the guitars had faded into the distance, and the city was given over to the night-watchmen's vigilant patrols, then, against the monotonous murmur of the sea, one heard nothing but the sinister shouts of the sentries and the even more sinister sound of intermittent gunfire – isolated shots or volleys, sometimes near and sometimes far away – which invariably went on until the first light of dawn. After that for an hour or two silence fell again, as though the middle classes were fast asleep, while the port was waking up and the bustle of seafarers began.

Un hiver à Majorque, 1841



Castellfollit de la Roca

Élie Reclus

France, 1827-1904

The ethnographer Élie Reclus was the brother of the great geographer Élisée Reclus, who is much better known. He travelled through Spain from October 1868 to March 1869, just after the successful September 1868 Revolution had removed Isabel II from the throne and set up the first Spanish Republic. In this passage he describes his journey through the Catalan regions of Garrotxa and Alt Empordà.

We set out early for Tortellà. Above Olot the mountain crests were dotted with snow, clearly revealing all manner of details of their geological make-up. An icy gale was blowing and our poor horse had to stop repeatedly to avoid being blown along. The travellers we met were running at a brisk pace. Little by little, however, the wind dropped, the sky cleared and the sun appeared. As we drove through Castellfollit de la Roca it was shining and imparting a gentle warmth.

As far as I could see from a distance, the village was built on a basalt rock promontory 40 m high, which jutted out towards the plain above the river Fluvià like the prow of a ship. This perpendicular rock had halted the advance of Mina, who was in charge of crushing the revolt.

1869

José Martínez Ruiz, ‘Azorín’

Spain, 1873-1967

‘Azorín’ was sent to Catalonia by the Madrid newspaper *ABC* in 1906 to investigate and provide a first-hand account of what was known – then as now – as the “Catalan question”. The result was a series of interviews with contemporary Catalan political and cultural personalities. This text relates his meeting with Enric Prat de la Riba, later to become the President of Catalonia’s semi-autonomous government, the *Mancomunitat*.

And Señor Prat de la Riba continued his leisurely chat: When the Spanish State was set up, all the dominant currents were in favour of unification, that is, social unity through the assimilation of inferior groups.

[...]

Well then, despite the numerous forms of power and persuasion exercised, despite the facility that arose from the humble acquiescence of inferior peoples, despite the economic and spiritual poverty which these peoples, foremost among them Catalonia, were undergoing at the time, assimilation made absolutely no progress; the ethnic groups emerged from three centuries of absolute monarchy without being denationalized.

[...]

Outer unity and inner freedom: this is Catalonia’s proposal to Spain, this is the idea it wants to triumph. Peoples rise up when individual energies are kindled by a collective ideal. Catalonia feels and lives out this ideal. Catalonia offers this ideal to the other regions.

En Barcelona, 1906



Castellterçol.
House of Prat de la Riba

Winston Leonard Spencer Churchill

United Kingdom, 1874-1965

The celebrated Nobel prize-winning writer and British prime minister spent the troubled 1930s far away from the world of politics. During this time he travelled with his wife virtually all over the world and wrote a magnificent account of his journey. He stayed in Barcelona and described the city in highly positive terms.



My wife and I passed this exciting week at Barcelona. Several of my best friends advised me not to return. They said I should only do myself harm if I were mixed up in this violent conflict. Our comfortable Barcelona hotel was the rendezvous of the Spanish Left. In the excellent restaurant where we lunched and dined were

always several groups of eager-faced, black-coated young men purring together with glistening eyes about Spanish politics, in which quite soon a million Spaniards were to die. Looking back, I think I ought to have come home. I might have brought an element of decision and combination to the anti-Government gatherings which would have ended the Baldwin *régime*. Perhaps a Government under Sir Austen Chamberlain might have been established at this moment. On the other hand, my friends cried, "Better stay away. Your return will only be regarded as a personal challenge to the Government." I did not relish the advice, which was certainly not flattering; but I yielded to the impression that I could do no good, and stayed on at Barcelona daubing canvases in the sunshine.

The Second World War,
1948-1954



Barcelona. 1930

William Somerset Maugham

United Kingdom, 1874-1965

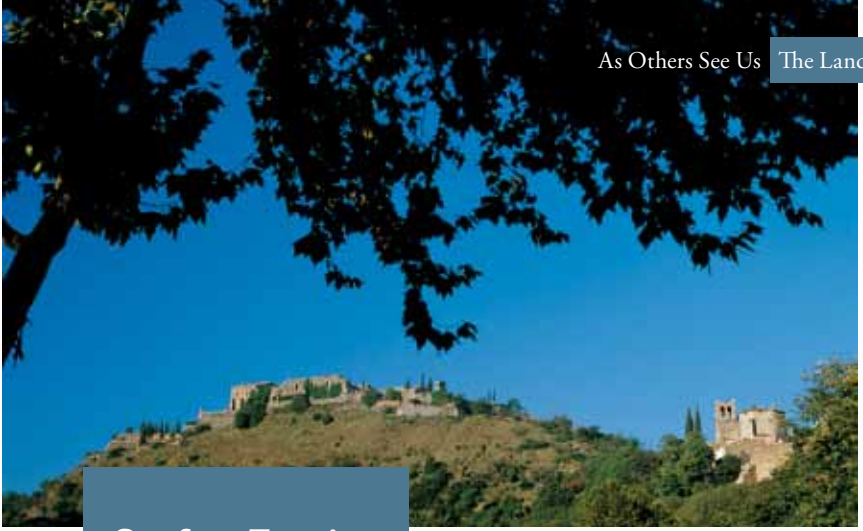
The English novelist Maugham was born in Paris and died at Cap Ferrat in Provence. He describes his sensations as he visited Girona through the experiences of one of the characters in his novel *Of Human Bondage*.



Girona

Clutton had disappeared. [...] To make the step easier he had quarrelled with all his friends in Paris [...] and was settling in Gerona, a little town in the north of Spain which had attracted him when he saw it from the train on his way to Barcelona. He was living there now alone.

Of Human Bondage, 1915



Stefan Zweig

Austria, 1881-1942

Hostalric

In his book of short stories *Amok*, Zweig describes a high spot in the struggle of Catalan guerrilla forces against Napoleon's troops. As in the rest of his output, he evokes a man subjected to chance circumstances which invariably predominate over his will. The fighting he refers to took place in Hostalric, a town of great strategic importance on the route from Girona to Barcelona.

It was the war year 1810. An enormous cloud of burnt dust floated over the royal highway at Hostalric, in Catalonia, the village the Spanish were so fiercely defending and the French were relentlessly besieging. From time to time a lazy puff of wind parted the white veil, and from beneath it emerged the blurred shapes of heavy carts, isolated groups of soldiers, horses wearily pulling their loads, a shipment of food supplies protected by an experienced colonel and his troops. The white track wound crookedly on, leaving behind the muddy ground of the rolling hills and heading for a thicket that shone with a purple light, while its edges were tinged red by the sun

as it dropped into the west. The cloud of dust slowly drifted into the shadow of the trees, which silently awaited the creaking cortège.

Suddenly a shot rang out of the shadows, like a rocket. A sign, undoubtedly. A second later, a volley of deadly gunfire hit the trapped column. The soldiers fell in disarray before they had time to seize their rifles, the frightened horses reared and whinnied, causing the carts to overturn and crash into one another with dull thuds.

“The Cross”, in *Amok*, 1921

Rose Macaulay

USA, 1881-1958

Rose Macaulay won fame, among other things, as a travel writer. *Fabled Shore* is the chronicle of a journey along the eastern and southern coasts of the Iberian Peninsula, from the Pyrenees to the Algarve, in 1949. In this passage she gives a masterly description of the bustling crowds in Barcelona.



The famous Ramblas are delightful; divided by a shady grove of plane trees, two narrow one-way streets run north and south, through the length of the Old Town, crowded with cafés, shops, kiosks, people, trams, motor vehicles, boot-blacks and sellers of lottery tickets. On the dividing promenade people stroll, among brilliant flower stalls, newspaper kiosks, *estanquillos*, and stalls crowded with birds in cages – parakeets, pigeons, blue, green and yellow tits, who fill the air with their liquid twitterings. Beside them swim goldfish, crabs and water tortoises; white mice, guinea-pigs, little dogs, and tiny chimpanzees run to and fro in their boxes, and all is animation. Secretive youths sidle up; insinuatingly they try to persuade you to buy a watch, or a fountain pen, or a ring, for three hundred pesetas; they come



Barcelona. La Rambla

quickly down to thirty, twenty, ten; they end by seeming to beg you to take it as a gift, as if the police were (as perhaps they are) hot on their tracks.

[...]

I don't think they ever sleep, and they probably never go to bed. [...] One morning I was awakened at four by loud conversation; going out on to my balcony and looking down, I perceived that the Rambla was still full of people sitting at café tables or on seats beneath the trees, or strolling to and fro.

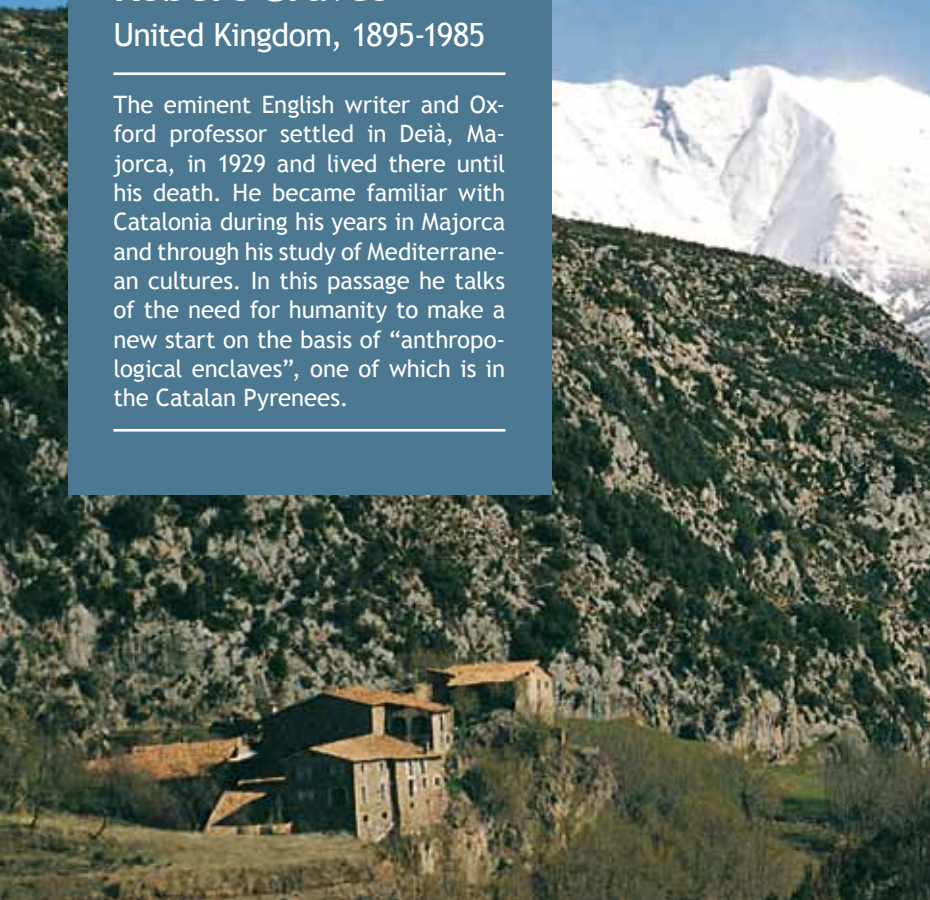
It was a pretty and fantastic sight, this crowd bewitched into perpetual nocturnal animation.

Fabled Shore, 1949

Robert Graves

United Kingdom, 1895-1985

The eminent English writer and Oxford professor settled in Deià, Majorca, in 1929 and lived there until his death. He became familiar with Catalonia during his years in Majorca and through his study of Mediterranean cultures. In this passage he talks of the need for humanity to make a new start on the basis of “anthropological enclaves”, one of which is in the Catalan Pyrenees.



Then an Israeli Sophocrat named ben-Yeshu wrote a book, *A Critique of Utopias*, that greatly impressed his colleagues in Southern Europe, America and Africa a from a detailed and learned analysis of some seventy Utopias. [...] He traced the history of man’s increasing discontent with civilization as it developed and came to a practical conclusion: that ‘we must retrace our steps, or perish.’

He recommended ‘anthropological enclaves’, the setting aside of small territories in Lithuania, North Wales (which had escaped the devastation of South Wales and England), Anatolia, the Catalan Pyrenees, Finland and Libya. [...] These enclaves were to represent successive stages of the development of civilization, from a Palaeolithic enclave in Libya to a Late Iron Age one in the Pyrenees.



The Pyrenees

[...]

The palaeolithic and neolithic enclaves were never, in fact, occupied, but those of the Bronze and Early Iron Age proved so successful that it was found easy to recruit colonists, mostly from Catalonia, for the Middle and Late Iron Age enclaves.

Seven Days in New Crete, 1949

John Dos Passos

USA, 1896-1970

Dos Passos was the author of the famous novel *Manhattan Transfer* (1925). At the beginning of America's involvement in the First World War, Dos Passos was travelling in Spain. He enlisted as a volunteer and returned to the Iberian Peninsula when the war was over. Here he draws a masterful comparison between Catalonia and Greece and lauds the trading spirit of the Catalans.

Catalonia, like Greece, is a land of harbours and mountains, where in the morning the farmers and shepherds can hear the sound of oars and the creaking of rigging, as wing-shaped sails are hoisted on their great yards to the top of the worn masts of fishing-boats. Barcelona, with its magnificent port sheltering beneath the high hills of Montjuïc, has been a trading city since far-off times. In the Middle Ages the fleets of its stout merchants were the hidden financial mainstay of the pomp and heraldry of the great maritime kingdom of the Aragonese.

[...]

[The Catalan poet] Maragall lived nearly all his life in Barcelona, where he wrote articles for various newspapers. From what we know, he was married and led a very peaceful life. That peace was disturbed only by a certain political agitation over Catalan independence.

Rosinante to the Road Again, 1923



COSTA BRAVA

OFICINA DEL TURISME DE CATALUNYA · FITZCHATO NACIONAL DEL TURISMO

Pablo Neruda

Chile, 1904-1973

The Chilean poet and diplomat Pablo Neruda (Ricardo Elicer Neftalí Reyes) won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1971. In 1934 he was appointed consul in Barcelona and the following year was sent to Madrid. During the Civil War he sided with the Republic, so much so that the Republican government appointed him consul in charge of Spanish émigrés in 1939. Here he sings the praises of the church of Santa Maria del Mar. The text has the additional merit of describing the votive offerings sailors used to leave there, which were destroyed at the beginning of the Civil War.



Barcelona. Santa Maria del Mar

I went to find my friend the painter Isaías Cabezón and we both headed for Santa Maria del Mar. We bought two enormous candles, almost as tall as a man, and armed with these we entered the semi-darkness of that curious church. For Santa Maria del Mar was the cathedral of seafarers. Fishermen and sailors built it stone by stone many centuries ago. It was subsequently decorated with thousands of votive offerings – little boats of all shapes and sizes, sailing through

eternity, which entirely cover the walls and ceilings of the beautiful basilica. It occurred to me that it would have been the ideal setting for the vanished poet, his favourite spot, had he known it. We had the candles lit in the centre of the basilica, alongside the clouds of the moulding, and as my friend the painter and I sat together in the empty church, each with a bottle of green wine beside us, that silent ceremony seemed in some mysterious way to bring us closer to our dead friend, despite our agnosticism. The candles that burnt in the highest reaches of the empty basilica were something alive and shining, as though the eyes of that mad poet, whose heart had fallen silent for ever, were looking down on us from the shadows in the midst of the votive offerings.

Confieso que he vivido, 1974

Truman Capote

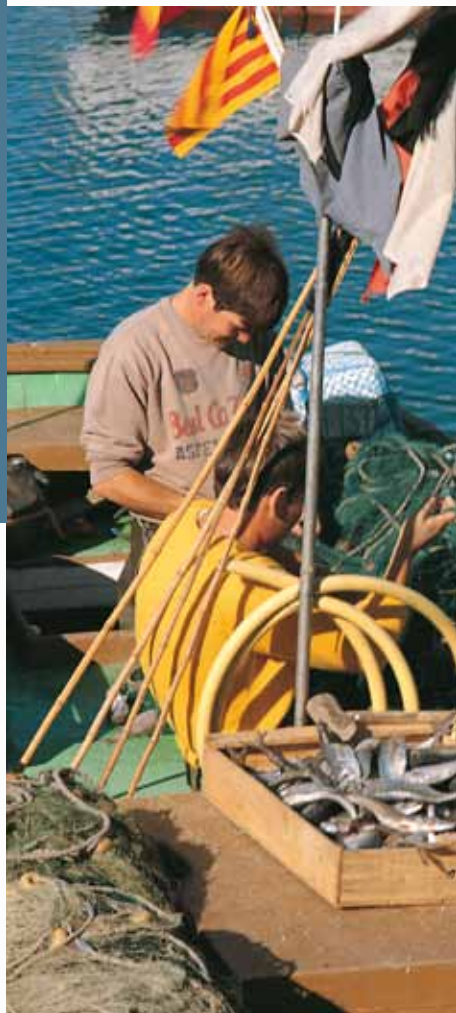
USA, 1924-1984

This great American author wrote his best known work, *In Cold Blood*, at Palamós on the Costa Brava, where he had gone in search of the peace and quiet the task required. Here we reproduce one of the letters he wrote to his friends during his stay there.

Palamós, 28 April 1960

My dear Deweys,

How pleasant! When I arrived there was a letter from Marie awaiting me and wishing me welcome. I'm sorry to hear about your mother and hope you'll be able to visit them this year. But the tale of the burglary in Syracuse was truly hilarious: I'm going to keep the list of the stolen goods, it might come in useful for the book which, by the way, I began writing this morning. It took us four days to drive here across France. A delightful trip, spring everywhere, green meadows, wild flowers and splendid weather. We had a picnic lunch every day: just bread, cheese and plenty of cool wine. And in the evening, a feast. I must have put on about seven pounds.





It's a shame Spanish cooking isn't much good, unless you like everything cooked in olive oil. I don't. Even so, the house has its charms. It's in a fishing village, right by the beach. The water is as blue and crystal-clear as a mermaid's eye. I get up very early, because the fishermen sail out to sea at 5 in the morning, and they make such a racket that not even Rip Van Winkle could go on sleeping. But it's good for my work, *n'est-ce pas?*

A Fleeting Pleasure. Correspondence, 1966

Barack Hussein Obama

USA, 1961

Obama will go down in history as the first black (or Afro-American) president of the United States but also for having brought a breath of fresh air to American politics, as also happened in the period from 1960 to 1963 dominated by John F. Kennedy. In 1988 Barack Obama undertook a journey of initiation to Africa and Europe. One of the places he visited was Barcelona. It is claimed that his political vocation was consolidated on Barcelona's Rambla.



In the end we travelled to Barcelona together, but neither of us talked much. [...] Shortly before daybreak they dropped us off at an old bus station, and my friend motioned to me to approach a stubby palm tree growing on one side of the highway. [...] We both had a wash in the morning mist; then, with our kit on our backs, we set off for the city.

What was his name? I can't remember. Just another hungry man, far away from home, one of the many sons of the former colonies — Algerians, Indians, Pakistanis — opening a breach in the barricades erected by their former masters, staging his own ragged, hazardous invasion. And yet, as we walked towards the Rambles, I felt I knew him as well as you can know any man. As though, despite coming from opposite sides of the



Barcelona. La Rambla

world, in one way or another we were making the same journey. When at last we parted company, I remained in the street for quite a while, watching his slim, bow-legged figure disappear into the distance.

[...]

The man from Senegal had bought me coffee and offered me some water, that was all, and perhaps it was all either of us was entitled to expect:

a chance to meet, to share a story, an insignificant act of kindness...

*Dreams from My Father.
A Story of Race and
Inheritance, 2008*



The Landscape

Julius Caesar

Rome, 100-44 BC

During the Civil War between Julius Caesar and Pompey, the fate of Rome was largely decided in the land that is now Catalonia, notably at the Battle of Lleida, which Caesar relates in detail in his great work *The Civil War*. This excerpt describes *Ilerda* [Lleida], the scene of the battle against the troops of Pompey's generals Afranius and Petreius, as it was in the first century BC.

Between the citadel of Ilerda [Lleida] and the closest hill, where Petreius and Afranius had their camp, lay a plain about three hundred yards wide, and virtually in the centre of this plain rose a fairly high hillock. Caesar hoped that by occupying and fortifying this hillock, he could cut his enemies off from the city and bridge, and the provisions they had stored in the city. With this

in mind he took three legions from the camp and, after lining them up in a suitable spot, he ordered the assault troops of one legion to rush forward and occupy the hillock. On observing this, the cohorts of Afranius, who were on guard in front of their camp, were urgently dispatched by a shorter route to occupy the same position. Fighting took place, and since Afranius's men had reached the hillock first, they drove our troops back, and after receiving fresh reinforcements, they forced them to turn round and withdraw towards the legion's ensigns.

The Civil War, 49-46 BC

Lleida. La Suda Castle



Arthur Young

United Kingdom, 1741-1820

The great English economist and minister of agriculture, Arthur Young, was one of the foremost representatives of the British Enlightenment. He travelled untiringly in search of new agricultural techniques. In 1787, in the course of a journey to France, he briefly crossed the border into Catalonia, entering it through the Val d'Aran, before travelling to Barcelona, and leaving again from La Jonquera. From that journey, which lasted only two weeks, he left behind a work of great documentary value: *Tour in Catalonia*.



Val d'Aran

This valley [Val d'Aran] is well tilled. There is nothing prettier than looking down on it from a height, which makes everything seem more interesting. The great trees that throw their arches of greenery across the road open up new vistas at every moment. The cool valley, stretching away at our feet, contrasts with the deep shade of the woods, the boldness of the rocks, the sublimeness of the surrounding mountains.

[...]

From here onwards we followed the river Garonne, which is pretty, though very fast-flowing; the mountain folk float the tree trunks down to the saw mills, which are kept very busy. The whole Val d'Aran is well cultivated; it is narrow, but the arable land reaches up the mountain sides to our left. There is no fallow land; not much wheat; plenty of rye; and much better oats than in the French mountains.

[...]

We went through some of the thirty-two villages that cluster together in the Val d'Aran. This density of population is due to the great division of property and the yield of the pasture land and woods belonging to each parish, not to the existence of factories, which have often been thought to be the sole cause of large populations. Many hedges are made from the same plants as in our own country. The mountains offer good grazing right up to near the snow line.

Tour in Catalonia, 1787

Wilhelm von Humboldt

Germany, 1767-1835

This German man of letters and politician was the brother of the distinguished geographer Alexander. While staying in Catalonia in 1800, he was so fascinated by Montserrat that he wrote a well-known essay entitled “Der Montserrat”. He shared this interest with Goethe and Schiller and commented to them that Montserrat had been dealt with very superficially by other travellers and writers. The attraction of Montserrat was also expressed by German Romantic authors in poetry and opera. Montserrat is believed, for instance, to have been Wagner’s “Montsalvat”.

We were beginning to feel annoyed because the difficult ascent yielded insufficient rewards when suddenly the path made a sharp bend and we found ourselves facing a wide recess in the mountainside. I have never enjoyed such a splendid view! Imagine two graceful foothills stretching out towards the plain on either side of the mountain, crown them with thickets as romantically as your fantasy is able, and picture the valley of the Llobregat extending between the two as far as the sea, which lies majestically on the horizon. I spent a long time leaning against the trunk of an oak tree in the middle of the recess, for the observation point has everything to lend majesty and beauty to a landscape. The mountain slopes are wild and perilous because of the rocks whose unusual shapes, like pyramids or cylinders, can be seen especially clearly from this spot. The foothills and riverbanks bestow charm and warmth on the perspective, while further away the gaze is lost in the boundless plain of the sea.





Montserrat

[...]

It is believed that the church and monastery were originally founded in this spot because of the discovery of a statue of the Virgin Mary, which is still preserved there. This event is thought to have occurred at the end of the 9th century.

Der Montserrat bei Barcelona, 1800

Henri Beyle, 'Stendhal'

France, 1783-1842

Between 1836 and 1839, Stendhal was on leave from his consular post in the Papal States and wrote some of his finest works, such as *The Charterhouse of Parma* or the *Italian Chronicles*. During this same period – in 1837 – he paid a brief visit to Catalonia, including Barcelona.



Cork oak

I admired the fine cork oak woods and the greyish colour of the tree trunks that had just been stripped of their valuable bark. The hedges of prickly pears pleased me greatly. To tell the truth, I liked everything, but was I perhaps being rash? In every village the houses had just been whitewashed and this gave them an extraordinarily clean and joyful look, the appearance, in other words, of everything they were not. But this mattered little and the appearance of those rows of white houses, in the midst of rolling hills clad in cork oak woods, was enchanting.

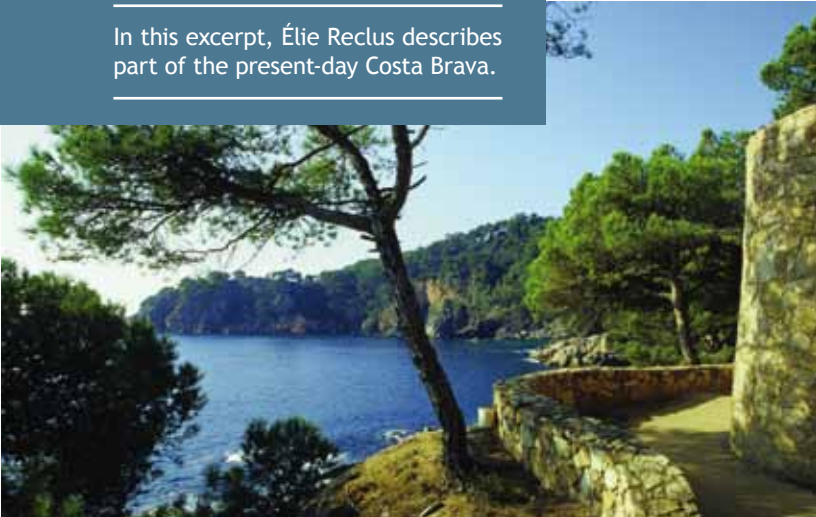
Mataró, where the houses are perfectly whitewashed both inside and out, stands on the coast but is perched forty feet above sea level, and this gives it excellent views and makes it a very pleasant little town. There we were served a very plentiful meal; there were fifteen or twenty meat dishes for eight travellers.

Mémoires d'un touriste,
1837

Élie Reclus

France, 1827-1904

In this excerpt, Élie Reclus describes part of the present-day Costa Brava.



Coastguards' path

[Sant Feliu de Guíxols] We visited the harbour. It is a cove shaped like a cut-off circle. Two granite rocks rise proudly at either end. The harbour is connected to another inlet by a tunnel. [...] This passage was opened by Saint Philip. The Emperor Diocletian tied a millstone round his neck and threw him into the sea. But Philip, without losing his presence of mind, swam to the rocks on the beach. Since it did not seem a suitable spot to land, he continued through the wall to the other side, still with the Emperor's millstone round his neck... There is some doubt, however, about the season at which this took place. Some people say it was in summer, others in winter.

The path ran along the coast. The waves of the fickle Mediterranean crashed at our feet. That morning the sea was grey and glistened in the sun, breaking down into something like streaks of silver and gold, then immediately taking on a deep blue shade... Here proud, barren rocks rose up from the water. There a small valley of olive trees and greenish alfalfa sloped down to the beach, fields stretched all the way to the cliffs, while twisted fig trees and pines reminiscent of parasols stood out against the vast mirror of the fields...

Correspondence, 1869

Eugenio Montale

Italy, 1896-1981

Italian poet and winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1975.



Llobregat Delta

Beside the Llobregat

From the unfading green of the camphor tree
two notes, the interval of a major third.

A cuckoo, not a barn owl, I told you, but suddenly
you stepped on the accelerator.

Tutta la poesia, 1984

Federico García Lorca

Spain, 1898-1936

The great playwright and poet, who was shot for being a supporter of the Republican cause at the start of the Spanish Civil War (1936), was a close friend of Salvador Dalí and his sister Anna Maria. In 1925, Dalí invited him to spend Holy Week in Cadaqués. Lorca was stunned by the beauty of the scenery and expressed his admiration in his poems.

Cadaqués

I think of Cadaqués. To me it seems a landscape both eternal and present but perfect. The horizon rises up, built like a great aqueduct.

1926

Cadaqués, in the pointer between water and hill,
 raises stairs and hides conch shells.
 Wooden flutes soothe the air.
 An old rustic god gives fruit to the children.
 Its fishermen sleep, dreamlessly, on the sand.
 On the high seas a rose serves them as a compass.
 The horizon, undefiled by wounded scarves,
 unites the great glass panes of the fish and the moon.

Ode to Salvador Dalí, 1938

Ernest Hemingway

USA, 1899-1961

The American writer, who won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1954, apparently wrote the following text at the station of Móra la Nova (Ribera d'Ebre) as he gazed at the long, white, elephant-like hills round the Móra basin (the Mola de Colldejou and Serra de Llaberia).



The hills across the valley of the Ebro were long and white. On this side there was no shade and no trees and the station was between two lines of rails in the sun. Close against the side of the station there was the warm shadow of the building and a curtain, made of strings of bamboo beads, hung across the open door into the bar, to keep out flies. The American and the girl with him sat at a table in the shade, outside the building. It was very hot and the express from Barcelona would come in forty minutes. It stopped at this junction for two minutes and went to Madrid.

“What should we drink?” the girl asked. She had taken off her hat and put it on the table.

“It’s pretty hot,” the man said.

“Let’s drink beer.”

“Dos cervezas,” the man said into the curtain.

[...]

The woman brought two glasses of beer and two felt pads. She put the felt pads and the beer glasses on the table and looked at the man and the girl. The girl was looking off at the line of hills. They were white in the sun and the country was brown and dry.

“They look like white elephants,” she said.

“I’ve never seen one,” the man drank his beer.

[...]

“All right. I was trying. I said the mountains looked like white elephants. Wasn’t that bright?”

“That was bright.”

[...]

The girl looked across at the hills.

“They’re lovely hills,” she said. “They don’t really look like white elephants. I just meant the colouring of their skin through the trees.”

Hills like White Elephants, 1937



Mandiargues

France, 1909-1991

The poet and essayist Mandiargues won worldwide fame – and the Goncourt Prize – with his novel *The Margin* (1967). Set entirely in Barcelona, more specifically in the lower part of the Raval district that was once nicknamed the “Barri Xino”, the book was banned by the Franco regime and could not be translated into Spanish until after the dictator’s death. In it Franco is referred to as “the Führuncle”.

On a plaque on the corner, between a cinema and a café, he reads the name of the street: Marquès del Duero [now Avinguda del Paral·lel]; when he recognizes the long thoroughfare running crosswise on the city map, he remembers that this is the Avinguda Paral·lel, a street about which his cousin had given him a nostalgic account, assuring him that “thirty years earlier” every possible form of pleasure was offered to strollers there.

Cinemas, variety theatres, restaurants, bars and an amusement park line the opposite pavement of that broad, disorderly popular street. And indeed, does

not everything these establishments, with their flashing lights and noisy music, offer in exchange for a few banknotes or coins bearing the effigy of the Führuncle [Franco] fall into the vast category of pleasure?

[...] But what does “every possible form of pleasure” mean? And if it means free indulgence in sex, why is the choice more limited nowadays than before? What strikes one about the women and men, boys and girls, who sit on the café ter-





Barcelona. Paral·lel

races and walk to and fro, is their air of availability. They are indistinguishably easy-going and proud, with stormy gestures: that is what their gestures and glances reveal, and that is what their parents, who often revolted against the people of Castile, must have been like too. The vigilance of the Führuncle's police, present both here and everywhere else, fails to prevent them from displaying their character. Moreover

the Paral·lel – fierce and festive, ancient and modern at one the same time, and as disorderly as a major thoroughfare in some eastern or Latin American city – suits them. Because of its spaciousness and perhaps the air one breathes there, it is in sharp contrast to the narrow streets of the *barrio*, where the female sex is omnipresent, like a trap ready-set or even an open grave.

The Margin, 1967

Anthony Burgess

United Kingdom, 1917-1993

The writer and musician Burgess is known throughout the world for his novel *The Clockwork Orange* (1962), which was adapted for the screen by the great Stanley Kubrick. In this text he praises Barcelona and the Catalans.

We catch a taxi to go to a place we thought was outside the city, but ten miles up in the hills we are still within the city limits. The taxi-driver is Andalusian [...] and he came to Catalonia because that is where Spaniards who want jobs always go: the rest of Spain, he tells us, is impenitently lazy. He takes us to the Tibidabo, right at the top of the Collserola range, from where you get a view over the whole city with the sea behind it.

[...]

Now I am beginning to understand the nature of Catalan pride. The creative energy that was capable of producing the Tibidabo is not precisely what the ignorant would call a typically Spanish quality, and the Catalans, rightly or wrongly, consider it a very rare fruit on Iberian soil. They do not want their own achievements to merge into the overall glory of Spain or see Madrid pointing to Catalonia and saying: "See what the Spanish are capable of doing?" The Spaniards can't do it, say the Catalans, but the Catalans can. Our Andalusian taxi driver agrees.

[...]

Barcelona offers the kind of day and night-life that was previously associated with Paris. Call it the Paris of the Mediterranean and you won't go far wrong. It is not a prisoner of Spain, it is free to reign over the cultural multiplicity of the sea out of which all of us initially emerged.

Homage to Barcelona, 1978



Barcelona





Gabriel García Márquez

Colombia, 1927

The Colombian author, who was awarded the 1982 Nobel Prize for Literature, spent a long time in exile in various places in American and Europe, one being Barcelona. Here he talks about the moments before the strong north wind called the Tramontana starts to buffet the coast of the Cap de Creus.

Some fifteen years ago I was one of the most regular visitors [to Cadaqués], until the Tramontana got in the way. I could feel it before it arrived, one Sunday at siesta time, in the form of an inexplicable foreboding that something was about to happen. My spirits fell, I felt sad for no reason, and it seemed to me that my children, who were less than ten at the time, were following me round the house with hostile looks. Shortly afterwards the concierge came in carrying a tool box and some nautical ropes to secure the doors and windows. My state of prostration did not surprise him.



Cap de Creus. Tramontana

“It’s the Tramontana,” he said. “It’ll be here in less than an hour.”

He was a very old man, a former sailor who had retained from his calling his oilskin jacket, cap and tub, and a skin tanned by all the salt in the world. In his spare time he played boules on the square with the veterans of several lost wars, and drank aperitifs with the tourists in the taverns on the beach, because he had a flair for making himself understood in any language by meansing of his rough and ready Catalan. He boasted of knowing all the ports in the world, but not a single inland city. “Not even Paris in France, great though it is,” he said. Because he was suspicious of any form of transport that did not sail on the sea.

Doce cuentos peregrinos, 1991

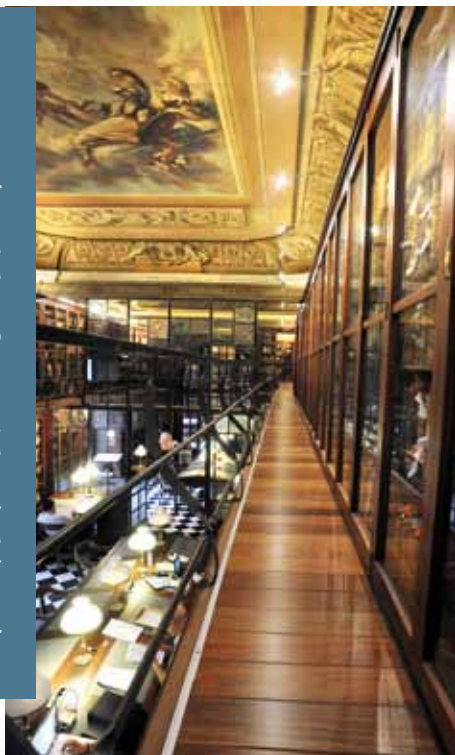


The Culture

Prosper Mérimée

France, 1803-1870

Mérimée was an archeologist and inspector of historic monuments and a widely travelled man. He found in Spain (especially Andalusia) the necessary ingredients to conjure up the exotic, orientalized imaginary world that was to fascinate French readers. In the opera *Carmen*, passion, glory, revenge and all the clichés about Spain converged. He had only summary contact with Catalonia, on the other hand, no doubt because of its cultural proximity to France.



Barcelona. Library of the Ateneu

30 April 1835. Letter to Stendhal

Valencia is undoubtedly the city I would choose to live in, after Madrid and Cadiz.

[...]

It's useless to look for learned men or artists in Valencia. You can find both in Barcelona, but of indifferent quality. The people of Malaga, being Andalusians, are more lively, but they know as little about geology, astronomy, etc. as the Valencians. In Barcelona there is an Italian opera house, but in Valencia there's hardly even a theatre. No library and no museum.

[...]

In Valencia Spanish is spoken very little but everyone understands it, whereas in Barcelona nearly everyone speaks Catalan and few people understand Spanish. Because of that I took a dislike to the city. As you can see, I'm making comparisons between Valencia and Barcelona.

[...]

In short, I would go to Valencia. Once I was there I would ask permission to go and spend two or three months in Madrid (the journey lasts three days). If you're really interested in talking to intelligent people, then ask for Barcelona.

Lettres libres à Stendhal, 1992

Hans Christian Andersen

Denmark, 1805-1875

Barcelona. Barri Gòtic



In 1862 Andersen embarked a long trip through Spain with funding from the Danish government. The places he visited included Barcelona and other parts of Catalonia. He is one of the many authors to compare Barcelona to Paris.

[Strolling along the Rambles]

When I visited Turin for the first time last year, I felt as though I were in the Paris of Italy; now I had the impression that I was in the Paris of Spain and everything looked French. The streets became much narrower: the houses seemed to be avoiding the sun, for they did not boast many windows, but they did show off their thick walls and had canvas awnings over their courtyards.

[...]

I continued along my way and entered a street that was even narrower and busier than the previous one; let's call it "Churchgoers Lane". Hemmed in between tall houses I found Barcelona Cathedral, a building devoid of grandeur which did not attract attention; one could walk past it without seeing it; someone would have to nudge you before you noticed it, as happens with certain celebrities.

I Spanien, 1863

Edmondo de Amicis

Italy, 1846-1908

The author of *Dagli Appennini alle Ande* drew on his experience as a soldier in the articles he wrote for the magazine *Italia Militare*. Later, in 1868, these were collected into book form. The book was so successful that he decided to devote himself entirely to literature, writing travel books and other genres. Here he talks about the Catalan capital.

To look at, Barcelona is the least Spanish city in Spain. Large buildings, very few of them old, long streets, regularly shaped squares, workshops, theatres, spacious, splendid cafés, the continual bustle of people, carriages and carts from the seafront to the city centre, and from there to the outlying districts, as in Genoa, Naples or Marseille. One very long, straight street known as the Rambla, shaded by two rows of trees, runs virtually through the centre of the city, from the port upwards. A spacious promenade, lined by new houses, stretches along the seafront on a walled terrace-like dyke against which the waves break. A very large district, almost a new city, stretches away to the north, and everywhere new houses are bursting through the ancient walls, scattering over fields and hillsides, and forming long rows that end when they reach the adjoining villages. And on all the surrounding hillsides, towns, mansions and factories rise up, vying for land, huddling together, springing up one after the other and forming a magnificent crown around the city. Everywhere things are being manufactured, transformed, renovated: the people work and prosper. Barcelona flourishes.

Spagna, 1872

Barcelona. La Rambla





Miguel de Unamuno

Spain, 1864-1936

The Basque writer Unamuno maintained a rich correspondence with the Catalan poet Joan Maragall, who forced him to take position on what at the time was already termed the “Catalan question” or the “Catalan problem”. How little things change!

The notion that Catalans take pleasure in speaking their own language in the presence of Castilians, who do not understand it, in order to annoy them is one of the many absurdities invented by the touchy distrustfulness of the Castilians. One can accuse the Catalans of many things, but not of such premeditated, ill-intentioned acts of discourtesy. The most unbearable thing of all is usually the presumption of Castilians, who insist that even strangers must speak in their presence in such a way that they can understand them, and immediately come out with the familiar slight: “Talk like a Christian, son of God!” And let it be clear that I am above suspicion, because I am one of those who believe that the tongues spoken all over Spain will ultimately be united and that no official validity should be granted to any language except Castilian, the national language. Let the other languages manage as best they can, but without any official protection from the State. When, a few years ago, the Mayor of Barcelona addressed His Majesty the King in Catalan, greeting him in the name of the natives of Barcelona, I protested more strongly and vociferously than anyone, on the grounds that the Mayor represents all the inhabitants of the city, not just the natives, and there may be inhabitants who are not Catalans and do not know Catalan, and even the Mayor himself might not know it, whereas nobody who lives in Barcelona is unfamiliar with Castilian.

*Unamuno y Maragall.
Epistolario y escritos complementarios, 1976*



Ángel Ganivet

Spain, 1865-1898

Ganivet, an essayist, novelist, playwright and diplomat, came into contact with the Catalan Modernist movement through the artist and writer Santiago Rusiñol. Here he evokes Sitges as it was in the Modernist era, under the influence of Rusiñol and his home, the Cau Ferrat.



Sitges. Cau Ferrat

As soon as you're in Sitges, you'll find out, if you didn't already know, that the Cau Ferrat put on a performance of Maeterlinck's *Intruder* on such and such a day; and on another day it organized a parade to welcome the arrival of El Greco's paintings with palm and olive branches, or staged Maestro Morera's opera *La*

Fada, or a festival in which Catalonia's foremost men of letters competed and which gave rise to a delightful book. And now, to mark the unveiling of a statue of El Greco by the gifted sculptor Reynes, they're planning an exhibition of all the works by that outstanding painter that can be assembled and a performance of a Greek tragedy with chorus. The town of Sitges contributes its graceful anatomy to these remarkable undertakings – its sun-drenched beach, its breezy palm-lined promenade, its streets as white as the foam on the sea – but the spirit comes from elsewhere and dwells in the Cau Ferrat.

[...]

The most interesting aspect of the Cau Ferrat is the fascination exerted on those who visit and understand it by the art collection Rusiñol has built up there, which is exceptionally varied and yet highly personal and includes works of his own and others he admires or acquired on the strength of a whim.

Obras completas, Vol. II, 1962

José Martínez Ruiz 'Azorín', Spain, 1873-1967

Here Azorín again compares the cultural milieus of Madrid and Barcelona, this time in favour of the Catalan capital.



Barcelona. Library of Catalonia

A distinguished Catalan writer said to me not long ago: “To get an idea of what people read in Barcelona, you need only bear in mind that the city has two French bookshops – exclusively French establishments that are branches of Parisian bookshops”. In Madrid there are no French bookshops and can be none [...]. And what is true of books is also true of newspapers. [...] In Barcelona, it is different. People read, do research, keep abreast of the latest artistic trends, and the development of philosophy. Before Maeterlinck had even been heard of in Madrid [...], the journal *L’Avenç* had already published a youthful translation of one of his works by Pompeu Fabra [...] and the group of artists at the Cau Ferrat had already performed that translation in Sitges.

Avisos de Este, 1899

Thomas Mann

Germany, 1875-1955

Mann, the 1929 winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature, opposed German nationalism from the First World War onwards. In his masterpiece, *The Magic Mountain*, he made Barcelona the venue for a meeting of a league for the betterment of society.

This spring a solemn general assembly of the League [League for the Organization of Progress] took place in Barcelona. As you know, Barcelona is justifiably proud of its special relationship with the political ideal of progress. [...] The task of the meeting was to lay the bases for human happiness, in other words, to make the appropriate social endeavours to combat and ultimately eliminate human suffering. Furthermore, since this can only be accomplished through sociological science, which aims at establishing the perfect State, the League decided in Barcelona to publish a work comprising many volumes and entitled *The Sociology of Suffering*. This work will carry out a systematic and exhaustive study of the ills of humanity, whatever their category or variety.

The Magic Mountain, 1924

Grief. Josep Llimona, 1907



Max Jacob

France, 1876-1944

Jacob, a poet, novelist, art critic and painter, became a member of the colony of artists residing in Montmartre as a result of his friendship with Picasso, Apollinaire and others. He visited Catalonia with Picasso in the summer of 1913, and in 1922 published *Honneur de la sardane et de la tenora*.



I will remember the musical instrument they call the “tenora” as long as I live. It is the length of a clarinet but could hold its own, as one musician put it, against forty trombones. It has a dry sound, like a set of bagpipes. I heard the tenora in the Catalan town of Figueres, in a small ensemble that was playing on the square. The ensemble also included a cello, a cornet, other brass instruments and a flute that played short, attractive solo passages. People were dancing the *sardana* and before each dance the ensemble played a long, grandiloquent introduction. The tenora held forth, with support from the other instruments, all crowded together.

[...]

After the introduction, the dance rhythm begins; the beat, I think, is as steady as one could wish for – the rhythm of a polka, interrupted by sudden pauses and long embellishments. Sardana music includes rousing passages that conjure up thoughts of splendour. The sardana is danced in a circle, the dancers hold their arms erect like the branches of a chandelier and barely move, except during these rousing passages. [...] In the middle of the circle there is another circle, and in the middle of that, yet another. The movements of the circles are the same, yet they do not coincide because the dance leaders do not all interpret the music in the same way. There were several of these rose-like concentric circles that evening on the paved square in Figueres.

Le Laboratoire central, 1921



Massimo Bontempelli

Italy, 1878-1960

Bontempelli, a novelist, writer of short stories, poet, literary reviewer, playwright and journalist, began to discover Catalonia in the 1920s. He is considered one of the forerunners of magic realism.

Barcelona, city of sun and night. Barcelona, the westernmost boundary of the Europe of action, for immediately beyond the Ebro contemplative Arabia begins. Barcelona, city of sound: each morning the machines take up the note of the final chord of the night-owls' dance music (sometimes there is a short silence, interspersed by bomb-blasts in the empty air). In Barcelona I discovered a live human being who symbolized the mechanical conversion of action into contemplation.

Through him I found out that the lift is the best device for turning action into contemplation. Pressing one or more buttons to go up to a room, or down, or stop, is unquestionably a part of practical life. The man I'm referring to was the lift operator in a large hotel in Barcelona, the Milan of Spain. His was a contemplative nature. All other lift operators at different latitudes and longitudes are rosy-cheeked adolescents.

[...]

The lift, sir, is the only device for moving people about that does not derive from any species of animal. It is made entirely by human intelligence, in other words, by the soul. That is why it is the means and the symbol of ascent, in other words, of self-perfection. Dante symbolizes contemplation, Man's approach to God, by stairs because at the time there was nothing better; it is obvious that nowadays he would have given Saturn a lift.

La donna dei miei sogni e altre avventure moderne, 1925

Jorge Luis Borges

Argentina, 1899-1986

Borges, who wrote poetry, short stories and essays, was one of the most significant and extensively quoted authors of the 20th century. From 1919 to 1920 he stayed in Majorca, where he came into contact with Jacob Sureda and the avant-garde circles of the period. He gave the following candid account of his experiences in the brothels of Barcelona's "Barri Xino".



Barcelona. "Barri Xino"

Barcelona, 2 March 1921

My dear brother: from this right-angled, squalid city, I cast my heart towards you like a net. I set out the day after tomorrow. I left Palma with great regret. Alomar, Sureda and I wrote the Manifesto you know about and the amazement and scandal it raised were magnificent... I was also exceptionally lucky – for me – at roulette (60 pesetas from a capital of 1 peseta!) and this enabled me to enjoy three triumphant nights in a row in a brothel. A sumptuously lewd blond and a dark girl we called The Princess, whose anatomy I rode as if she were an aeroplane or a horse! (I'm sorry, she was a Catalan!)

But now the exultation has dwindled. I feel like "a poor orphan without his big sister". I really loved that Luz: she treated me like a child and her gestures were so naïvely indecent. She was reminiscent of a cathedral and a bitch.

Correspondence, 1921

Anaïs Nin

France / USA, 1903-1977

The writer Anaïs Nin was the daughter of the Catalan pianist and composer Joaquim Nin. She settled in the United States when she was 11 but in the 1930s moved to Paris where she became acquainted with avant-garde writers and artists. In this text she comments on the vitality of Barcelona.



Barcelona. Plaça del Pi

We moved to a small apartment of our own, clean and new. Barcelona was gay and lively. From the balcony I could look at the sea and at people walking by, hear the music from the cafés. I began to write, poems, memories. I went to a convent and learned Catalan. Letters of instructions came. In Barcelona I did not feel my father's absence as final. He might come any moment, and we saw his family, his parents, his sister, my cousins. It was his native land. I was learning his language

The Diary of Anaïs Nin (1931-1934)

Pinhas Sadeh

Israel, 1929-1994

Sadeh was one of the foremost modern Hebrew poets. He visited Barcelona several times and incorporated his familiarity with the city into his work.



Barcelona. Sardanes outside the Cathedral

26-05-70

Towards ten in the evening, after I had returned to the hotel and was strolling round the Cathedral area, suddenly a melody reached my ears. I followed the sound and, on reaching Plaça de Crist Rei, I was surprised to see a band of musicians standing on the Cathedral steps and the square full of men, women and children dancing to the music.

The trumpets, trombones and double bass were playing a tune with a strong beat that was joyful and yet sad and sweet, and everybody was dancing in time to it. It struck me as a strange, unfamiliar dance. They were dancing in circles, but the circles did not revolve, and each dancer remained in the same spot. There were young people and children, bald men, smartly-dressed ladies, and even an old man about eighty; they moved in a very sober manner, with circumspect, concentrated expressions.

From time to time there was a brief pause in the music before it started up again – the same music and the same dance. And so they went on dancing, time and again, unchangingly, as though in a ritual, and without uttering a word.

Nesia ["Journey"], 1971

George Steiner

Jewish writer of
Austrian descent,
born in France, 1929

Steiner made a journey to Catalonia during the 1990s which he relates in his memoirs. Here he describes his impressions of Girona Cathedral as he contemplated the recumbent statue of Countess Ermessenda (the mother of Count Berenguer Ramon I of Barcelona) and goes on to focus on the Call, or Jewish quarter, and the cabbalist Isaac the Blindman.



Girona. Jewish quarter

The Countess's face, carved in alabaster, is the visage of slumber, of the pleasing solemnity of repose beneath closed eyelids, with a mouth that still appears to breathe and gives a hint of a smile. But maybe 'smile' is not the right word. It is a secret light, beaming forth from within the hewn stone.

[Later he describes the *call*, or Jewish district:]

I had escaped from a party. I got lost in the narrow streets and hidden courtyards of the medieval Jewish quarter which, puzzlingly yet logically, was close to the cathedral precinct (medieval clerics offered 'their' Jews protection on the basis of extortion). The archways and cobbles were dyed by the deep shadow and the rain. A sign said that the narrow passageway bore

the name of the famous Cabbalist, Isaac the Blindman. In some nearby spot the sightless prophet had celebrated his occult mysteries. A handful of disciples Cabbalists were not allowed to offer instruction to more than two or three followers had made their way through that silent maze of streets. They, like me at that precise moment, must have heard the Cathedral bells chiming for vespers as they practised their more complex arts.

Errata: An Examined Life, 1997

Eric Clapton

Eric Clapton

United Kingdom, 1945

In this interview Clapton, a guitar player, singer and composer of rock music and blues, stresses his fascination with the works of Antoni Gaudí.

Santa Coloma de Cervelló.
Crypt of the Colònia Güell



- I heard you went to Park Güell this morning. What did you think of it?

- I liked it a lot. Gaudí's unbelievable. I wonder how he managed to get such strange things to stand upright and how they're still standing up, it seems impossible.

- There's another building of his that you'd like even more: it's a church about ten miles from here that very few people know about, in a place called the Colònia Güell.

- What's it like?

- Well, it has crooked columns and...

- There are people you'd think came from another planet, they land here and make things that last for ever. I can't get over Gaudí, he's wonderful, all the elements are so different, one's this shape, another's that shape. Nothing like the bricks they use nowadays. Listen, during the half-hour I spent in the park, I was completely stunned; I was so tired when I got back to the hotel that I slept for three hours. It's so great it's exhausting.

Interview published in *Vibraciones*, 1978

Rosa Alice Branco

Portugal, 1950

In this work the Portuguese poet, essayist and professor describes the view from Gelida castle over the countryside of the Penedès region.

Gelida Castle



We strolled around the castle,
sometimes we had to watch our step
because there are loose stones in the ruins
and we could easily lose our balance.
Montserrat followed us on that mistless day
and we travelled back into time,
a time without fireworks, without haste,
without destiny, our laughter and the laughter
of the children who draw patterns on the ground,
the house close by, the cool wine, the table on the lawn,
Biel and Gina playing boisterously on the ground
with small implements and perfect chatter
learnt at the official school. I say that in the midst
of a poem because we are in the heart of Catalonia
and the prodigal daughter reaches the ruins of Gelida
in the clear voices of the children, in the bright hands
with which time gradually polishes the diamond of the house.

Soletrar o dia. Obra poética, 1988-2002

Ko Tazawa

Japan, 1953

The Catalanophile and translator Ko Tazawa was awarded a doctorate in Hispanic Studies from the University of Osaka and another in Catalan philology in 1999 from the University of Barcelona. In 2007 he produced a complete Japanese translation of *Tirant lo Blanc*. In this passage he reflects on the culinary tastes of the Japanese.



Do you like the food here? Don't you miss Japanese food? Those are the questions people ask most often. Just imagine! I don't think we miss it much. Of course that's probably because we can cook Japanese food at home with local ingredients. But there are Japanese people who need to feed almost entirely on Japanese food. They eat Japanese food at home, and when they go out, they go to a Japanese restaurant. There are quite a few in Barcelona nowadays. It's not a matter of which of the two habits is more correct. It's just a question of taste, or flexibility over food. I think we're quite flex-

ible in this respect. You and Kei more than us, I would say. [...] Of course we fancied a bit of Japanese food from time to time. But it wasn't essential. We made fun of my Japanese bosses at the bank where I worked who couldn't go without Japanese food for a single day.

*Cartes a Yu i Kei:
experiències d'una família
japonesa a Catalunya, 1995*



The People



Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra, Spain, 1547-1616

The great Cervantes describes Catalonia in his universally famous *Don Quixote*. Both the *hidalgo's* entry into the city and the events which took place in nearby spots would have been readily visible from the third floor of the building where he is thought to have stayed, which is traditionally called Cervantes' house (now number 2, Passeig de Colom).



In the end Roque, Don Quixote and Sancho, with six squires, set out for Barcelona along disused roads, short cuts and hidden paths. They reached the seashore on the eve of the feast of Saint John, under darkness, and Roque embraced Don Quixote and Sancho and gave the latter the ten *escudos* he had promised him but had not previously given him. And then he left them after they had all offered each other all manner of services.

[...]

Don Quixote and Sancho gazed all around them. They saw the sea, which they had never seen before: it seemed vast and wide,

considerably more than the lagoons of Ruidera that they had seen in La Mancha; they saw the galleys near the beach, and when the awnings were lowered, they saw they were decked out with pennants and streamers that fluttered in the wind and dipped and trailed in the water. On board, bugles, trumpets and shawms sounded out and filled the air, both near and far, with gentle but warlike notes. They began to move and engaged in a sort of skirmish on the calm waters, and at almost the same time, in a similar movement, a bevy of knights rode forth from the city on handsome horses with colourful liveries.

[...]



Barcelona. *Barcino que vulgo Barcelona dicitur* (14th century?)

I went straight to Barcelona, that treasure-house of courtesy, refuge for strangers, hospice of the poor, homeland of the brave, and champion of the outraged, a pleasant source of firm friendships, a city unique in its setting and beauty.

The Ingenious Hidalgo Don Quixote of La Mancha, 1605

The courteous Catalans are fearful when annoyed, but gentle towards the peaceable; they readily give their lives for their honour, and will surpass themselves in order to defend both, which amounts to surpassing all the nations in the world.

The Wanderings of Persiles and Sigismunda, 1616

Francisco de Quevedo

Spain, 1580-1645

In 1641 the Castilian writer and polemicist Quevedo published a lampoon about the revolt that had taken place in Catalonia the previous year. Entitled “La rebelión de Barcelona ni es por el güevo ni es por el fuero”, it contains a fierce attack on the Catalans.



Corpus de sang. Museu de Sabadell

In political terms the Catalans are a monstrous freak. They are free men, but with a lord, so that the Count of Barcelona is not a dignitary but a mere term, a plain word. They have a prince as the body has a soul in order to live, and just as the body combats reason with appetites and vices, so they combat their lord with privileges. They say they have a Count as a man says he has a particular age, when in fact it is age that has him.

“La rebelión de Barcelona ni es por el güevo
ni es por el fuero”, 1641



Francisco Manuel de Melo

Portugal, 1608-1666

Barcelona.
Catalan parliament

This Portuguese writer and soldier accompanied the troops of King Philip IV during the War of Separation, or War of the Reapers, in 1640-1641. He travelled as a chronicler with the Marquis of Los Vélez and witnessed the Catalan victory at the Battle of Montjuïc (January 1641), the first defeat suffered by the Spanish infantry.

The Catalans, for the most part, are men of very harsh characters and few words, and their own language seems to accentuate this, for the clauses and sentences are very short. They show great feeling when offended and consequently are prone to be revengeful; they set a great price on their honour and their word, and no less on their privileges, and for this reason are more attached to freedom than any other nation in Spain.

Though there are still differences of opinion in Catalonia, they display fearful unity and agreement in their own defence. It is worth noting that, despite the wide differences in opinion and feelings, they have adapted so well to a single course of action that this diversity and past conflicts have never created grounds for division; and this good example should be taught so as to enable other nations to overcome pride and disparity in those undertakings where success depends on unanimity.

*Historia de los movimientos,
separación y guerra de Cataluña, 1645*



François Marie Arouet, 'Voltaire'

France, 1694-1778

The writer and philosopher Voltaire was the father of the movement of the French encyclopedists. In one of the many books he wrote – *Le Siècle de Louis XIV*, devoted to the Sun King – he refers to the Spanish War of Succession and the struggle waged by the Catalans to defend their freedom.

Cabrera range (Osona)

Catalonia is one of the most fertile lands on earth and one of the most favourably located. It is watered by beautiful rivers, streams and springs, just as Old and New Castile are lacking in them, and produces everything essential to man and everything he can desire for: trees, cereal crops, and all kinds of vegetables. Barcelona is one of the most handsome ports in Europe and the country provides everything necessary for shipbuilding. In the mountains, quarries of marble, jasper and rock crystal abound, and many precious stones are also found there. Iron, tin, lead, alum and sulphate mines are plentiful and coral is found on the eastern coast. Catalonia, in short, can do without the entire universe, but its neighbours cannot do without it.

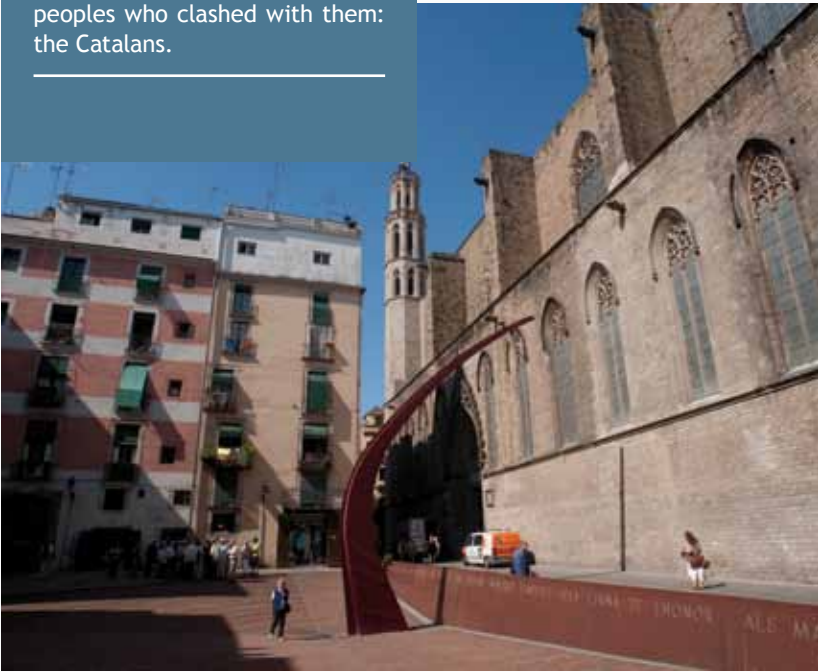
Abundance and delights have not enfeebled the inhabitants of Catalonia, who have always been warriors, the mountain dwellers being especially fierce. But despite their courage and their tremendous love of freedom, they have been subjugated throughout history: the Romans, Vandals and Moors all conquered them.

Le Siècle de Louis XIV, 1751

Joseph-Napoléon Fervel

France, 1811-1877

One of the topics dealt with by this French historian was the French revolutionary armies and he inevitably refers to one of the peoples who clashed with them: the Catalans.



Barcelona. Fossar de les Moreres

Deep down the Catalans' fondness for freedom is merely an exclusive love of total independence.

*Campagne de la Révolution française
dans les Pyrénées-Orientales, 1861*

Piotr A. Kropotkin

Russia, 1842-1921

This revolutionary activist was one of the fathers of European anarchism and was in touch, personally and by letter, with members of different European workers' organizations, including those of Catalonia. Here he describes the situation of those organizations in Catalonia at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries.

In Catalonia alone these organizations had more than a hundred thousand members [...] I can talk about these groups because I knew them personally in the field, and I know they were ready to proclaim the United States of Spain, to grant the colonies their independence and, in some more advanced regions, to take firm steps to establish collectivism.

In Spain, similar organizations spread through Catalonia, Valencia and Andalusia and received support from the powerful unions in Barcelona, who had already introduced the 8-hour day in labour agreements in the construction sector. There were at least 80,000 fee-paying members of the International in the country. These comprised the active and thinking element of the population, who had won the sympathies of the masses by refusing to take part in the political intrigues of 1871-72. Their provincial and national congresses and the manifestos they issued were models of a criticism founded on logic that took a bleak view of existing conditions and set out the ideals of the proletariat with admirable lucidity.

Memoirs of a Revolutionist, 1899





Barcelona

If I had time and sufficient strength to tell you everything the Spanish government has done in Barcelona in the past twelve years – because of its highly developed working class, Barcelona is the most intelligent city in Spain – and if I could describe the full extent of its wickedness, you would burn with anger and say it is a pity the rebellion in Barcelona has not yet overturned this shameful government.

Speech at Memorial Hall in London, 1909



Henry Miller

USA, 1891-1980

Miller was the author of such well-known works as *Tropic of Cancer* and *Tropic of Capricorn*. He lived in Paris before the Second World War and there made contact with the European intelligentsia of the period. In a letter to his friend Alfred Perlès, written in 1954, he refers to a meeting that took place in Barcelona in May that year and describes the city.

That evening, back on the Rambles, we sat down to have one last drink. We were splitting our sides, on the verge of tears. Everything seemed comical, and staggering. Suddenly the shoeshine men appeared, one by one, like large, slow flies; then two by two, like a swarm. Things kept happening, as though in a dream, one of those delicious dreams that can be switched on and off at will. We had returned, in our dreams, to days from other dreams. There were thousands of them, and we had endless time to readjust them. It was an interregnum that recalled the Devachan we used to conjure up at the Vil·la Seurat. The same cigars, the same excellent coffee, the same wonderful love games, except that these were dream cigars, dream coffee and dream women. And so were the Rambles, the conversation, the laughter, the shoeshine men walking up and down. What brought us sharply back to earth was the sound of hammers hitting our soles and heels. There they were, both of them those incredible ruffians banging away like a couple of blacksmiths. Had they asked our permission to ruin our good soles with hunks of cheap rubber? Perhaps they had. Perhaps we said yes, dreaming that we were horses instead of butterflies. In any event, the waiters did not join in the dream. They were furious. Firstly with the shoeshine men and secondly with us for our utter stupidity. When you invited the ruffians to a drink, that was the limit. It was too much, even for a Spaniard. It was time to leave. The dream had turned to dust.

Reunion in Barcelona, 1959

Ernest Hemingway

USA, 1899-1961

Hemingway formed a friendship with Joan Miró in the 1920s and was an American press correspondent during the Spanish Civil War on various battle fronts and in the rearguard (Madrid). Here he talks about the Ebro front.



I was watching the bridge and the African-looking country of the Ebro Delta and wondering how long now it would be before we would see the enemy, and listening all the while for the first noises that would signal that ever-mysterious event called contact, and the old man still sat there.

“What animals were they?” I asked.

“There were three animals altogether,” he explained. “There were two goats and a cat and then there were four pairs of pigeons.”

“And you had to leave them?” I asked.

“Yes. Because of the artillery. The captain told me to go because of the artillery.”

“And you have no family?” I asked, watching the far end of the bridge where a few last carts were hurrying down the slope of the bank.



Ebro Delta Natural Park

“No,” he said, “only the animals I stated. The cat, of course, will be all right. A cat can look out for itself, but I cannot think what will become of the others.”

“What politics have you?” I asked.

“I am without politics,” he said. “I am seventy-six years old. I have come twelve kilometres now and I think now I can go no farther.”

“This is not a good place to stop,” I said. “If you can make it, there are trucks up the road where it forks for Tortosa.”

“I will wait a while,” he said, “and then I will go. Where do the trucks go?”

“Towards Barcelona,” I told him.

The First Forty-Nine Stories, 1938

Eric Arthur Blair, George Orwell

United Kingdom,
1903-1950

The well-known author of *1984* came to Catalonia as a volunteer to defend the Republic and participate in the social revolution. He fought on the Ebro front and left a magnificent description of revolutionary Barcelona in his *Homage to Catalonia*.

I was five or six days in [Lleida]. It was a big hospital, with sick, wounded, and ordinary civilian patients more or less jumbled up together. Some of the men in my ward had frightful wounds. In the next bed to me there was a youth with black hair who was suffering from some disease or other and was being given medicine that made his urine as green as



Lleida. Ambulance on the main street

emerald. His bed-bottle was one of the sights of the ward. An English-speaking Dutch Communist, having heard that there was an Englishman in the hospital, befriended me and brought me English newspapers. He had been terribly wounded in the October fighting, and had somehow managed to settle down at Lérida hospital and had married one of the nurses. Thanks to his wound, one of his legs had shrivelled till it was no thicker than my arm. Two militiamen on leave, whom I had met my first week at the front, came in to see a wounded friend and recognized me. They were kids of about eighteen. They stood awkwardly beside my bed, trying to think of something to say, and then, as a way of demonstrating that they were sorry I was wounded, suddenly took all the tobacco out of their pockets, gave it to me, and fled before I could give it back. [...] I discovered afterwards that you could not buy tobacco anywhere in the town and what they had given me was a week's ration.

Homage to Catalonia, 1938

Pablo Neruda

Chile, 1904-1973

The great Neruda could not fail to exalt the heroic death of Lluís Companys, the President of Catalonia, arrested by the Gestapo in France and shot by Franco's regime at Montjuic castle.



Olive trees

Song on the death and resurrection of Lluís Companys

Young father, fallen with the flower on your breast,
 with the flower of Catalan light on your breast,
 with the carnation drenched in inextinguishable blood,
 with the living poppy on the shattered light,
 your brow has received the eternity of man,
 among the buried hearts of Spain.

Your soul had the virginal oil of the village
 and the rough dew of your golden land
 and all the roots of wounded Catalonia
 were watered by blood from the spring of your soul,
 the stellar caves where the battled sea
 melts its blues beneath the savage foam,
 and man and olive tree sleep in the fragrance
 that the blood you shed left on the land.

Obras completas I, 1999

Octavio Paz

Mexico, 1914-1998

The Mexican writer Octavio Paz won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1990. His close friendship with the Catalan author Pere Gimferrer gave rise to a rich correspondence. He made frequent visits to Barcelona and other parts of Catalonia.



Barcelona. Fundació Antoni Tàpies

If anything in Hispanic culture is alive and important, it is poetry in Catalan.

Ten lines for Antoni Tàpies

On the surfaces of the city,
the leafless leaves of the days,
on the flayed walls, you draw
charcoal signs, numbers in flames.
The indelible writing of the fire,
its testaments and prophecies
transformed into taciturn resplendence.
Incarnations, disincarnations:
your painting is the Veronica's cloth
of that faceless Christ who is time.

Obras completas, Vol. VII, 1996

Italo Calvino

Italy, 1923-1985

Calvino, a novelist and essayist and the author of *The Baron in the Trees*, devoted one of his short stories to Floquet de Neu ['Snowflake'], the only albino gorilla in the world, who until his recent demise was one of Barcelona's most unusual attractions.



Barcelona. Floquet de Neu

In Barcelona Zoo you can see the only known albino monkey in the world, a gorilla from equatorial Africa. Senyor Palomar makes his way through the crowd around the gorilla's cage. On the other side of a glass panel is Floquet de Neu, a mound of flesh and white fur. He is sitting with his back against a wall, taking the sun. His mask-like face is pink like human skin and furrowed with wrinkles; the skin of his chest is also smooth and pink, like that of men belonging to the white race. His face, with its enormous features, is like that of a sad giant and he turns it now and then towards the

throng of visitors on the other side of the glass, less than a yard away; his gaze, laden with misery, patience and boredom, expresses his deep resignation at being what he is, the only specimen in the world of a form he never chose, or wanted, his profound weariness at bearing the burden of his own singularity, his acute distress at occupying space and time with his loud, awkward presence.

Palomar, 1983



Gabriel García Márquez

Colombia, 1927

Berga. Patum
festival

Ramon Vinyes, “the old man who had read every book there is”, was born in the Catalan town of Berga in 1882. He arrived in Barranquilla (Colombia) in 1914 and opened a bookshop there. García Márquez, whose mentor he was, immortalized him as the “Catalan sage” in *A Hundred Years of Solitude*.

Melquiades told him his visits to the room were almost over. But he would set out for the pastures of definitive death with his mind at ease, because Aureliano would have time to learn Sanskrit in the years that would elapse before the parchments were a century old and could be deciphered. It was he who told him that in the lane that ended at the river — a place where fortunes were told and dreams were interpreted in the days of the banana company — there was a bookshop run by a Catalan sage. And in that shop there was a *Sanskrit Primer* that would be eaten by moths within six years unless he hurried up and bought it. For the first time in her long life, Santa Sofia de la Piedad allowed her feelings to show and looked amazed when Aureliano asked her to bring him the book she would find between *Jerusalem Delivered* and Milton’s poems, at the far right end of the second row of bookshelves. Since she could not read, she learnt her speech by heart and raised the money by selling one of the seventeen little gold fishes that were still in the workshop, in the spot, known only to herself and Aureliano, where they had put them the night the soldiers searched the house.

A Hundred Years of Solitude, 1967

Pinhas Sadeh

Israel, 1929-1994

Here the Jewish author discusses some of Catalonia's identifying traits.



Barcelona. Sagrada Família

22-05-70

As I waited at a crossroads for the light to go green, a small man of about sixty, carrying a briefcase, spoke to me in Spanish. I answered in English, saying I did not understand him. And believe it or not, he spoke English, and asked me where I was from, and what I was doing there, and then he told me he worked for a Spanish firm that made champagne and he was on his way to the office.

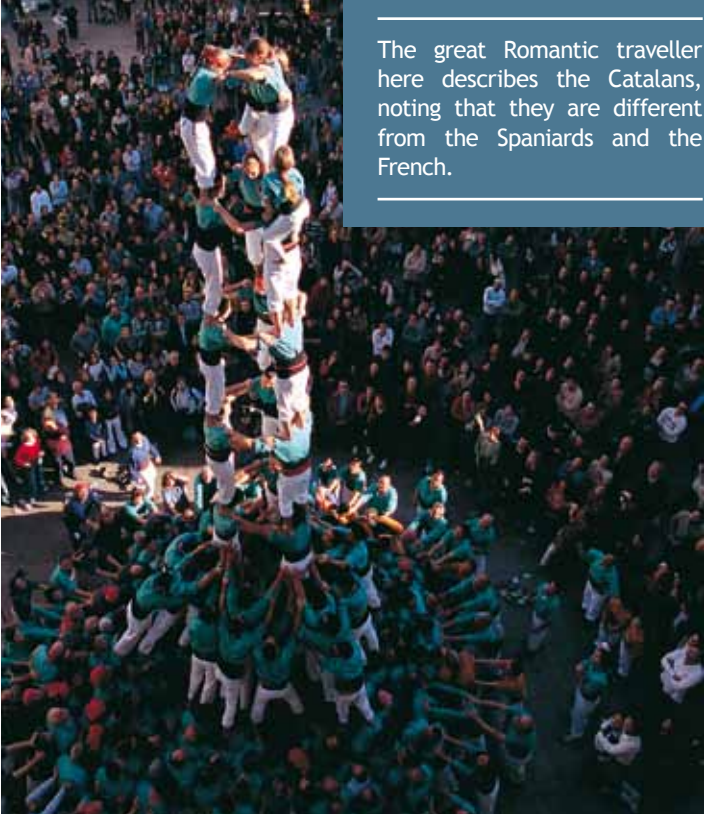
I told him I had come to discover Spain, but that Barcelona was not Spain. His face lit up and he said “No, it’s Catalonia”, and he added: “In Barcelona, as in all large cities, there’s nothing to see. What do people visit in Paris? Notre-Dame. Here it’s the Sagrada Família”.

Nesia [“Journey”], 1971

Richard Ford

Great Britain,
1796-1858

The great Romantic traveller here describes the Catalans, noting that they are different from the Spaniards and the French.



'Castells' (human pyramids)

The Catalans are not very courteous or hospitable to strangers, whom they fear and hate. They are neither French nor Spaniards, but *sui generis* both in language, costume, and habits; indeed the rudeness, activity, and manufacturing industry of the districts near Barcelona, are enough to warn the traveller that he is no longer in high-bred, indolent Spain. [...] However rude their manners, it is said that when well-known, they are true, honest, honourable, and rough diamonds. Their language is suited to their character, as they speak a harsh Lemosin, with a gruff enunciation. [...] The Catalonians, powerfully constituted physically, are strong, sinewy, and active, patient under fatigue and privation, brave, daring, and obstinate, preferring to die rather than to yield.



Paulo Coelho

Brazil, 1947

Though the Brazilian writer's constant activity has brought him to Catalonia on several occasions, in his output the image of Catalonia is often confined to cryptic references. We found these lines about the eminent Catalan musician Pau Casals, the composer of the United Nations anthem, in one of his works of reflection.

Sant Salvador (El Vendrell)
Museu Pau Casals

This passage was written by the cellist Pau Casals:

“I am constantly reborn: every new morning is the time to start living again. For eighty years I have been beginning my days like this. This does not mean it is a mechanical routine, but something essential to my happiness.

I get up, I go to the piano, and I play two preludes and a fugue by Bach. These pieces are like a blessing on my house. But they are also a way of resuming contact with the mystery of life, like the miracle of being part of the human race.

I have been doing this for eighty years, and yet the music I play is never the same, it always shows me something new, fantastic, and incredible.”

Maktub, 2002

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