

# Catalan Translation and Francoism (1939-1975)

## In brief



 **CAT** [Traducció catalana i franquisme \(1939-1975\)](#)

### abstract

As a measure of political and editorial control, many totalitarian regimes have turned their eye to translation. Considered one of the most efficient tools for modernising cultures it has been either closely watched or directly prohibited across the globe and during all periods of history. This article looks at one of the most exceptional cases in contemporary Europe: Catalan translation under the Franco dictatorship (1936-1975).

For more than two decades the regime carried out double censorship: ideological and linguistic. While books were not permitted for publication if they questioned the religion, morality or politics imposed in any of the languages of the State (Basque, Catalan, Galician or Spanish), until 1962 translations into any of the “other” languages that were not Castilian Spanish were particularly hounded.

From 1962 onwards a change in the legislation, which had allowed the “minority” or “minoritised” languages to be penalised automatically, meant that translation into Catalan experienced a kind of revivification and, making up for lost time, the Catalan language became one of the biggest target languages in translation during the 1960s (as statistical studies have shown).

What were the “official” criteria for censorship and which arguments were put forward? How were the prohibited works singled out? What kind of works were translated? Who were the authors? From which languages? Who was responsible for the translations? Which publishers were the first to dodge the police controls and go ahead with the sale of the books? And what was the reception like at the time, if indeed there was a reception? These are some of the many questions that immediately arise and ones we will try to answer. Because, despite everything, the constant attempts to silence the

transmission of foreign voices by means of a persecuted language did not manage to achieve their final objective: the eradication of otherness and, ultimately, of the language.

 **record**

 Montserrat Bacardí i Tomàs

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# Entry



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## Introduction

Many totalitarian regimes, obsessed with cultural control, from politics down, have kept a close eye on the printed word: books, leaflets, the press, propaganda, etc., both in their original language and in translation. The latter “foreign” corpus has often awakened more distrust given that it is a possible source of “unfamiliar” content or a weapon of renewal. That is why translations have been held under such close observation and even, in some places, prohibited over the centuries. A couple of simple examples are the veto by fascist dictatorships of the diffusion of texts by Marx and Engels and socialist censorship of bibles and religious preparation. Under a wide range of totalitarianisms, publications had to mould themselves to the single, dominant way of thinking. Any space for dissent is a dangerous risk for an omnipresent power.

Francisco Franco, the leading general in the 1936 military “uprising” against the Second Spanish Republic, legislated censorship of any kind of publication in the “occupied” (read “national”) zone using the [Press Law](#) of 22 April 1938, even before the war was won. Afterwards he established a pyramidal system of inspection that was so complex it was difficult to avoid. The ideological control was heavy-handed and inclement as were the reprisals for anyone attempting to diverge from it, sowing terror in publishers, writers and journalists alike.



For more than twenty years that ideological control was complemented by linguistic control of the “other” languages in the Spanish State. Just as the fatherland had to be “one, great and free”, the country had to be governed by a single language—Spanish—not only to the detriment of Basque, Catalan and Galician, but also as a means of dominating and subjugating those languages in situations of daily use (in the street, at school, in the church or at popular festivals) and in situations of cultured use (in science, the press, the theatre and correspondence). In

other words, while you could not publish any books that questioned the imposed religion, morals or politics, either in the original or in translation in any of the four languages of the State from 1939 to 1962, translations into the three “peripheral” Spanish languages were the subject of particularly tenacious persecution: for example, while works by Jean-Paul Sartre or Tennessee Williams could be performed or published in Spanish, they would not be seen or read in the non-official languages until much later.

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## ¶ Repression

After three years of bloodshed, the victory of Franco’s troops caused an unprecedented rupture in Catalan culture. Nothing was ever the same as before the conflict, especially in the many areas in which language played a decisive role: inexorably, everything in Catalan was banned.

So, where did this blindness to language, and in particular all the lesser-spoken languages, come from? The ideological pillars of the regime were built on principles similar to those that defied any expression of Judaism, masonry or communism. That is why written production in these languages during those first few years was so obstinately hunted down, right up until the fall of the Nazi regime and the end of the Second World War. “...the whole country was, until 1946, the most implacable desert of the printed word in Catalan” (Samsó 1994: 53), which led to “the annihilation of publishing in Catalan” (Vallverdú 1987: 112), with the aim of “achieving the destruction of the reading public” (Gallofré 1991: 208).

The purges began with the publishing houses, with lists of prohibited books drawn up by the National Propaganda Service during the first weeks of the Francoist victory. Writers who formed part of the ranks of the defeated, the “reds and the disaffected” were banned both as authors and as translators. The same happened with the bookstores. Suddenly they received long lists of prohibited works both in original and foreign languages, accompanied by searches of the premises and indiscriminate decommissions. The books of some private libraries (the best-known being that of [Pompeu Fabra](#)) were burned in the street. The thinking and the language of the enemy had to be “purified” and deleted from history.

In just a few weeks the cultural machinery of the pre-war period had been shattered and what [Josep Benet](#) in his famous work called *The Francoist Attempt at Cultural Genocide against Catalonia* (1995) had taken form. Many intellectuals were driven into exile, others remained under internal exile, and yet more fled for good. The list of writers and translators that would have found a name before the Republican defeat and who left the country is devastating: [Ferran Canyameres](#), [Carles Cardó](#), [Josep Carner](#), [Lluís Ferran de Pol](#), [Ventura Gassol](#), [C. A. Jordana](#), [Joan Oliver](#), [Irene Polo](#), [Josep Pous i Pagès](#), [Joan Puig i Ferrer](#), [Carles Riba](#), [Pau Romeva](#), [Antoni Rovira i Virgili](#), [Josep M. de Sagarra](#), [Ferran Soldevila](#) and [Rafael Tasis](#). Some of them died during the war or just afterwards, such as [Joaquim Balcells](#), [Carles Capdevila](#), [Pere Coromines](#), [Alfons Maseras](#), [Andreu Nin](#), [Carles Rahola](#), [Bartomeu Rosselló-Pòrcel](#) and [Joaquim Ruyra](#). Others, under the pressure of the circumstances, left forever to become translators into Catalan, such as [Agustí Esclasans](#), [Josep](#)

[Farran i Mayoral](#), [Ernest Martínez Ferrando](#), [Carme Montoriol](#) and [Francesc Payarols](#). In short, the potential of the human capital was left sadly lacking.

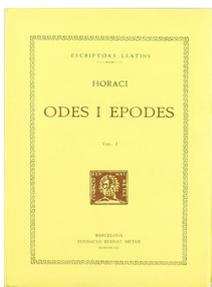
The dictatorial logic would have it that this obsession with banning translations was understandable: since the aim was to annihilate the Basque, Catalan and Galicia cultures and reduce them to mere folklore, simple and entertaining, then any translation would bring with it a taste of modernity and affirmation. The orders of the censors were immutable: it made no difference whether it was a prayerbook, a Greek tragedy or a contemporary novel—they were all banned. Any attempt to bring a translation to light with some kind of permission was useless for most of the 1940s. This is where the path to illicitness began. Somewhat sarcastically, Josep Benet said that [Josep M. de Sagarra](#)'s, “was the only clandestine version of Shakespeare ever to be published in the world” (Benet 1995: 510): an achievement as absurd as it is deplorable. Under this system, new translations appeared with a very limited circulation: private reading material, journals and books with small print runs, and so on. The most common mechanism for defying the prohibition, for making out that the furtive translations did not exist, was to invent false publishing information: city names (Buenos Aires for Barcelona, for example) and dates (before 1936).



Once the Second World War was over, with the defeat of the fascist forces, the so-called *esclètxa* or crack occurred. The need to soothe the criticisms of intransigence by the regime and, above all, attain a minimal international recognition resulted in the government being obliged to tolerate productions in “other” languages to a certain extent: harmless poetry, narrative and theatre, and non-conflictive works on religions and local history, all in line with an order guided by administrative whim, political pressure and personal contacts. Works of science, philosophy, children’s literature and the press continued to be controlled as well as translations: “reducing reading in Catalan of local authors is the same as making it folklore” (Fuster 1992: 68).

The first authorisations to publish translations did not appear until 1948, and even then with strict conditions: the original work and the interpreter had to have unquestionable prestige, the result had to be considered a “literary creation” (a terms that was used to cover vetoed “translations”) and they had to be distributed by means of ‘bibliophile’ publications (with limited print runs and exorbitant prices).

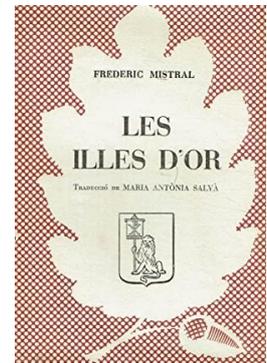
[Carles Riba](#) with his second version of *The Odyssey* (the first was published in 1919) and [Josep M. de Sagarra](#) with his *Divine Comedy*, managed to obtain the first two approvals: two essential works in the western tradition, translated by two recognised translators. To obtain permission there were still some other requirements, however, such as negotiations between the translators and their representatives at the highest political levels in both Barcelona and Madrid, as well as the approval of the censors for works not as translations—a category that did not suit them—but as poetic works (re)written by Riba and de Sagarra. Outside the catalogue and even the publishing house, they became emblems of persecution and resistance; the “rule [...] of the repression” (Parcerisas 2009: 232).



Whatever the case, they had opened a door in the neglected Catalan literary market. From now on the publishers could argue from precedent as could the censors with their bosses. However, the situation was one of tentative steps backwards and forwards, perhaps because the atmosphere of fear and self-censorship did not disappear and inevitably affected the whole of the publishing industry during the thirty-six years of the dictatorship. In 1951 the creation of the new ministry of "[Information and Tourism](#)", marked the end of a period of systematic persecution and the beginning of a new phase of permissiveness, albeit strictly controlled.

At the end of the 1940s, the [Bernat Metge](#) Foundation, which was established in 1923 for the translation of Greek and Latin classics, enjoyed a special status thanks to an agreement between its director, [Joan Estelrich](#), with the regime, and there was a faltering return to business. However, given the reduced "publication of limited editions", "a large part of the diffusive character of ancient classical culture has been lost" (Montal 1961: 59) compared with the glorious pre-war period. Apart from private influences, the governing authorities could justify the existence of the Bernat Metge Foundation as a specialised academic collection aimed at a minority audience, whose influence was purely referential.

[Josep M. Cruzet](#) created the first series of translations in the post-war period—the Biblioteca Selecta Universal, which formed part of the [Biblioteca Selecta](#). The first volumes came out in 1952 after he requested permission from the censor, as he had done on other occasions, to republish versions from before 1939. New translations would still have been impossible. To his surprise the request was granted and Cruzet took advantage of this small gap in the veto of translations to republish some revised versions, obviously without it being noticed. But the mirage of a certain lifting of the censorship did not last long. Following a series of rejections, the collection had to be put on hold that same year after the publication of seventeen titles by canonical authors who were above suspicion of "heterodoxy", such as Hans Christian Andersen, Alphonse Daudet, Daniel Defoe, Frederic Mistral, Edgar A. Poe, Jonathan Swift, Rabindranath Tagore and Mark Twain.



Outside the limits of the classics and republications, each request for the publication of a new translation was closely examined and judged individually according to a whole series of factors, which were not always predictable. In the last resort, there was always one clear mandate hovering overhead: "the regime tried to stop any initiative that would contribute minimally to making public literary and cultural life a reality", and "it was quick to clip the wings of any intrepid adventure that sought homologation or competition in the publishing market" (Feldman & Foguet 2016: 88).

With no tangible changes in the law, there was a cautious change of direction towards the end of the 1950s, meaning that "1957 and 1958 saw the opening up of a new phase of the history of post-war Catalan translations", with the publication of "translations of current works and even works covering current affairs" (Montal 1961: 59). Series such as "[Nova Col·lecció Lletres](#)" (1953-1962), commissioned by [Santiago Albertí](#), and "[El Club dels Novel·listes](#)" (1959-present), directed by [Joan Sales](#), played a major role in this change. They quietly managed to include some foreign works in their catalogues of contemporary Catalan narrative.

But apart from these individual initiatives there was also an unprecedented increase in new translations thanks to the printing of religious books and, specifically, thanks to the appearance of two publishing houses: Estela (1958-1971) and Nova Terra (1958-1978), which focussed on the importation of foreign works. The holding of the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965), the renewed air of the Church under Pope John XXIII, religious ecumenism and all kinds of social changes that followed awakened a clear interest in spiritual, theological, and even pastoral and liturgical topics. The publishers rushed to satisfy the new demand, especially through books from France.

In parallel biblical translations had been taken up again. In fact, they had never been completely suspended in the first post-war period: in 1948 (again thanks to the good work of Joan Esterlich) the publication of the Bible of the Fundació Bíblica Catalana was completed, having almost been finished before the war, and this was followed by the Montserrat Bible. However, it took another ten years before the new versions of a significant number of biblical works saw the light: the popular edition of the Montserrat New Testament (1961) became a best-seller at the time with more than one hundred thousand copies sold.



Outside the world of publishing, changes were also beginning to take place in the theatre. With many restrictions, from 1946 the performance of works by Catalan authors was permitted. The staging of translations took almost a decade longer, and came with inescapable limitations: amateur companies, a predetermined (meagre) number of works and performances, often 'one night only', and small spaces. The idea was to hush

criticism of interception by the regime while ensuring that the permissiveness reached only very circumscribed audiences.

During the 1950s, the Agrupació Dramàtica de Barcelona (1955-1963) stands out among the organisations and companies for putting on fairly regular translated works, with equal measures of audacity and astuteness, and unprecedented numbers. With the complicity of reputable, competent and creative translators every season they programmed the works of such prolific figures as Joan Oliver and Bonaventura Vallespinosa. Oliver brought memorable versions of *Pygmalion*, by G. B. Shaw (1957), *The Threepenny Opera*, by Bertolt Brecht (1963), and different plays by Chekov (1951, 1955, 1959 and 1960). *The Bald Soprano* by Eugène Ionesco, and translated by Vallespinosa (1959), was the work that the ADB performed the most.

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## ¶ Revival

With the passing of the Printing and Press Law on 18 March 1966 the previous 1938 Law was invalidated and the obligatory prior censorship of originals gave way to "voluntary consultation". However, this established that the entire edition of a printed book would be confiscated in the case that it surpassed the established political, religious or moral limits. The system of control had become restored with very little effort. In practice, most of the commercial proposals were submitted

to the censor, just as they had been before, and as a result the action of self-censorship was reinforced in all stages of the publication machinery: authors, translators, editors, readers, reviewers, correctors, etc.

For Catalan publishing, the great change had occurred four years earlier with the designation of Manuel Fraga Ibarne as the new minister of Information and Tourism in 1962. Given the changes in western society and a growing interest in the nascent tourism industry there was a clear desire to give the regime a more modern look. One of the most controversial policies affected books in the “other” languages. It was no longer easy to intervene in works simply because they were written in Basque, Catalan or Galician. With no fuss, from that moment on, the language quietly stopped being a reason for approval or rejection and it gradually became subject to the same censorship measures as books written in Spanish. That change was especially beneficial for children’s and youth literature, interdisciplinary research and translations.

Two decades of “almost complete [...] silence” were over; “the books published in the Spanish State between 1939 (or rather 1946) and 1961 cannot have been more than around 800”. In other words, “it took more than twenty years to achieve a figure comparable with the *annual* production of 1936” (Vallverdú 1987: 112). The real recovery of publishing in Catalan did not occur until the 1960s. Once it had begun, existing and new publishers began to publish translations at a dizzying rate. The reasons must have been a mixture of affective response and economic interest because, for the first time in years, books in Catalan were seen as a commercial concern: they no longer only embodied resistance but also a certain “normality”. This was a change with extraordinary consequences: the fact that “‘Read in Catalan’ became simply ‘read’ without the language factor, with its political and emotional load, was the absolute determinant of that” (Fuster 1992: 73).

The figures on publishing activity in Catalan during those years, presented by [Francesc Vallverdú](#), are well known: in 1963, 42 per cent of production was accounted for by translations and in 1965 that figure reached 55 per cent—figures which were uncommon then, and are even today, for any of the ‘big’ languages (Vallverdú 1987). Once again, as was the case at the beginning of the century with the impulse of Catalan Modernisme and Noucentisme, it was time to get up to date and recover the stimulus and protection of the great translation projects.

Of the numerous publishing companies to emerge or re-emerge during those years, some clearly stood out. Under the auspices of Vergara and directed by the poet-translator [Josep M. Boix i Selva](#), the Isard collection gave great recognition to translations: on the back covers of the books with a note about the “author”, “work” and “translator”, and in translators’ prefaces which form an invaluable corpus on translation theory and practice. In all, 39 volumes were published of which 35 were by foreign authors. Religious, humanist and existentialist



narrative, in a broad sense, held an important place: Nikos Kazantzakis, Graham Greene, Giovanni Papain, Carlo Levi, André Maurois, Antoine de Saint-Exupéry and Albert Camus. The series opened with *La pesta* (*The Plague*) and, with five works, Camus was the most regularly published author.

In 1964, the return to Barcelona of [Edicions Proa](#) and the never-forgotten [Biblioteca A Tot Vent](#) represented a great literary event, widely announced in the press and even in the streets, in a way that had never been seen before. [Joan Puig i Ferrer](#), who had led the glorious pre-war era starting in 1928, had survived for twenty-five years in exile, publishing from his home in Perpignan. Now, he would embark on a new period under the patronage of the industrialist [Joan B. Cendrós](#), with the poet and playwright [Joan Oliver](#) as literary director. Many of the newest works were included to be able to compete with parallel collections from other companies: works by Simone de Beauvoir, Truman Capote, Graham Greene, Ernest Hemingway, Jack Kerouac, Iris Murdoch, Cesare Pavese and Jean-Paul Sartre. Some of these writers “were being published in Spain for the first time” (Llanas 2006: 262). With almost a century behind it, today A Tot Vent has published more the seven hundred titles.

[Edicions 62](#), established in 1962, led the transformation of the Catalan literary map thanks to its innovative spirit and an unprecedented output of new works. The first collection, [Llibres a l'Abast](#), was dedicated to essays—one of the prohibited genres during the first twenty years of Francoism. Reflecting the popular [Que Sais-Je](#), of the [Presses Universitaires de France](#), it aimed to cover all areas of knowledge, with a preference for current affairs and progressive topics, often in the Marxist domain. In most cases the works were available in Catalan for the first time, from the thinking of Simone de Beauvoir, Bertolt Brecht, Friedrich Engels, Betty Friedan, Erich Fromm, Antonio Gramsci, Karl Jaspers, Otto Jespersen, Georg Lukács, Karl Marx, Herbert Marcuse, Emmanuel Mounier, Jean Piaget, Bertrand Russell to Teilhard de Chardin. There was also space for essays on biology, sexology, economics, urbanism, politics, history, sociology, psychology, feminism, art, linguistics, literature, music, cinema, *excursionisme*, cybernetics, and more. This broad range of disciplines was destined to provide basic knowledge to a wide readership for whom, in their own language everything was new.

[La Cua de Palla](#) (1963-1970), was a collection specialising in crime fiction and its aim was to expand the Catalan language market, and the number of readers of popular novels who, after the war, were only reading in Spanish. It was directed by a great reader and cultivator of the genre, the novelist [Manuel de Pedrolo](#), inspired by [Gallimard's](#) [Série Noire](#). Of the 71 titles printed, 69 were translations. Among the most-published authors were Georges Simenon (with two works) and Dashiell Hammett and John Le Carré (with four works each).



In 1965, [Josep M. Castellet](#), literary director of Edicions 62, created *El Balanci*, which remains its flagship collection even today with over eight hundred works published. After being ostracised for so long, Catalan literature was in need of a restorative breath of fresh air. *El Balanci*

published the foreign narrative, fresh from the main European publishers, and which was causing a stir: Heinrich Böll, Michel Butor, Italo Calvino, Marguerite Duras, Friedrich Dürrenmatt, Günter, Grass, Carson McCullers, Henry Miller, Pier Paolo Pasolini, Cesare Pavese, Vasco

Pratolini, Alain Robbe-Grillet, Alan Sillitoe, among others. Once more, translation had a gap to fill in this renaissance, as Castellet himself declared years later: “at the start, it seemed to us that we had to accentuate translations as a means of universalising the little production that there was in Catalan” (Castellet 1987: 51). The stagnation caused by censorship obliged a change to a new starting line, one that was on a par with advanced and prosperous cultures.

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## ¶ The turn of the century

After the frenetic imports of the 1960s, there were noticeable oscillations in the numbers of translations: in 1973 they fell to 8 per cent and in 1977 recovered to 16 per cent (Vallverdú 1987: 117-118). They obeyed the laws of supply and demand in a fragile market, but it was a market that did exist and gradually, with steps both forward and back, it made up for the Francoist disaster.

Following the return of the autonomous government, individual and collective freedoms and the return of the Catalan language in schools, during the 1980s a number of different collections appeared with a view to establishing a new canon of fundamental works of literature and thought, such as the *Millors Obres de la Literatura Universal* (1981-1986), *Textos Filosòfics* (1981-2005), *Clàssics del Pensament Modern* (1982-1991), *Clàssics Moderns* (1985-1993), *Millors Obres de la Literatura Universal. Segle XX* (1986-2009) and *Clàssics del Cristianisme* (1988-2005). Translations were revived and reached levels of production almost comparable of those in the 1960s: in 1990 the percentage of all works translated reached 26.5 per cent (Vallverdú 1992: 92).

By the 1990s, and especially from the turn of the century, with growing globalisation, what was being read in one country was pretty much the same as what was being read in any other. More or less pre-fabricated best-sellers, world fiction and “international literature” have filled the shelves of bookstores everywhere. Most of them come from English, the lingua franca and the most studied language on the planet, and are published by large publishing groups with equally large economic interests.

To redress the balance, in recent years groups of “vocational” publishers have emerged, prioritising the intellectual and literary value of the chosen works independently of tastes and trends, striving to establish new relations with “their” collaborators and “their” readers. These publishers are often loyal to their authors and translators. On the front cover the name of the translator tends to appear alongside that of the author as a guarantee of solvency, and is in itself a remarkable gesture of approval of the profession and the discipline.

In all, and in perspective, there has been a huge step forward since 1939 when “cultural genocide” seemed to be unstoppable. Against all the odds, Catalan translation survived the repression of the

harshest years of the dictatorship; it resisted and increased during the second Franco period. And in recent years it has revived a literary system which, with all the limitations of minority and minoritised languages, is not dragging behind it the irrevocable sequels of forty years of prohibition and censorship.

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## **Research potential**

Since the 1990s, research into contemporary Catalan translation has undergone notable changes, thanks to the efforts of research groups and scholars in the field, who have made the subject of their investigations a few general and numerous specific studies (one translator, one translated work, a specific aspect of that work, and so on). The effects of censorship on translation has been one of the topics to attract most research, especially in case studies rather than broader investigations. What are needed are joint, far-reaching project (difficult to carry out individually), that address, for example, censorship by periods, genres, types of author and translators, the intervention of specific censors and the provincial governments, the role of religious censorship and cases of self-censorship. The huge volume of censorship material held at the General Administrative Archive of Alcalá de Henares must be exhumed and studied assiduously.

From a sociological perspective there are also interesting links between the publishing industry and translation and several valuable studies have been published. The publishers' archives should also be examined to find the origins of many translations and how they were carried out: commissions, contacts, original versions, proofs, corrections, correspondence, etc. Along the same line we should broaden the focus beyond strict "literary" translation and study the translation of religious works, theatre plays, children's and young people's literature and the press. Neither should the different translations made from exile—both Europe and America—be underestimated. Nowadays they are disperse, appearing on volatile platforms that are hard to locate.

One subject that has also received specific attention is the model of literary language used in some translations. it would be interesting to expand this interest to a more panoramic focus: the language of the translations of a particular period, translations from a particular language, and the role played by the correctors during a period in which some of them became prescribers. Naturally the working procedures of other translators is always a subject for analysis along with the works they have translated. This is an inexhaustible field where, apart from their intrinsic value, each new contribution illuminates the whole.

Finally, from the view of heritage the censorship archive, publishing archives and the personal collections of the translators must be thoroughly searched to find unpublished translation which, as far as they are still valuable and valid, should be carefully republished with contextualising introductions.

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## Credits



### **Montserrat Bacardí i Tomàs**

Professor at the Faculty of Translation and Interpreting of the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona (UAB). She graduated in Catalan Studies before earning a PhD in Hispanic Studies. She is the coordinator of *Quaderns. Revista de Traducció* and the Contemporary Catalan Translation Research Group. Among her publications are: *Cent anys de traducció al català (1891-1990)* (1998), *Anna Murià: El vici d'escriure* (2004), *El Quixot en català* (2006), *Catalans a Buenos Aires* (2009), *La traducció catalana sota el franquisme* (2012), *Gràcia Bassa, poeta, periodista i traductora* (2016), *Maria Dolors Orriols, viure i escriure* (Mercè Rodoreda Foundation award, 2019) and, with Pilar Godayol, *Diccionari de la traducció catalana* (dir.) (2011, Crítica Serra d'Or 2012 award), *Les traductores i la tradició* (2013) and *Traducció i franquisme* (ed.) (2017). She has edited works by Jordi Arbonès, Pere Calders, Joaquim Carbó, Anna Murià, Teresa Pàmies, Rafael Tasis, Joan Triadú and Manuel Valdeperes.



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