

BALTASAR PORCEL'S ENCHANTED MEDITERRANEAN

BALTASAR PORCEL WAS BORN ON THE ISLAND OF MAJORCA IN 1937. HE HAS WRITTEN NOVELS, PLAYS, ESSAYS AND BIOGRAPHIES AND IS ONE OF THE BEST-KNOWN JOURNALISTS IN CATALONIA; AN INDEFATIGABLE TRAVELLER WITH AN ALMOST INSTINCTIVE GRASP OF REALITY.

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From the coast, the soft phosphorescence of the Mediterranean by night speaks of ancient sea-voyages and of men who became heroes in their struggle to survive. The writer Baltasar Porcel spends the summer in his ancestral home, beside the sea across which the men of his village travelled in search of treasure and a new life. He is one of the most prolific and significant Catalan writers alive, rooted in the landscape, the night and the dream of ancestors who lived and died there for centuries. Baltasar Porcel's novels investigate the complexity of the world, but always return to the shelter of his own country, a revivifying return after the deceptions of the international odyssey. "We are an insignificant particle of the

universe, a deceptive, possibly useless stirring of the universal magma. The history of man has distilled rules and moralist interpretations. There are feelings, love and hunger. Then, men embrace or violence emerges. Then there is good or evil", says the novelist Baltasar Porcel, and one of his protagonists sacrifices the life of his children but dies killing. "Yes, man is capable of making sacrifices but he also kills. Good and evil mixed are a reality that, at the same time, overcomes the distinction between good and evil. This is man, his feelings and his cruelty." Baltasar Porcel was born on the island of Majorca in 1937. He has written novels, plays, essays, biographies and is one of the best-known journalists in Catalonia; an indefatigable traveller with an almost

instinctive grasp of reality. Nowadays, novels like *Difunts sota els ametllers en flor* (Deceased beneath the flowering almonds), *Cavalls cap a la fosca* (Horses towards the dark), *Els dies immortals* (The immortal days) or *Les primaveres i les tardors* (Springs and autumns) are the tender, caustic chronicle of a magical, baroque world which, from its Mediterranean microcosm, watches over a universality as fabled as it is tangible. "Those of us who live beside the Mediterranean all have a lot in common. The Mediterranean is the axis of western civilization. Then came the Anglo-Saxon—later Anglo-American—deviation based on pragmatism, protestant ethics and free interpretation, all a sense of reality. On the other hand, our world of ideas



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is based on fable and tends towards mythicism. In the north, the opposite happens: everything revolves around a practical interpretation of human existence. I believe firmly in the Mediterranean sense of unity", Porcel declared, just after a long journey round the Mediterranean. The nightly will-o'-the-wisps seemed to him to be a warning across time, and Porcel wandered in his garden, like a return to his origins, to the wisdom of ancient man, who knows that he lives off the earth and that the earth never lies.

"I am this field, these ancestors of mine. We are the past. It magnetizes me to think I am treading on that same earth that was trodden by those I have loved. I am fascinated by the permanence of the stones, the trees, the magnificence of the landscape, all the vitality of our planet and many of the structures man has built on the surface of the Earth, eternalized, omnipotent structures. Everything passes and everything becomes history. Life today, or tonight, will become history. A man

passed this way in the night of time and he may have been a thief or a king." In the great adventure of his argonauts —the sailors and adventurers of his home town— and the intense passion of the landscape where he was born, Baltasar Porcel's work moves further and further away from ideological nothingness and literary fashions. He reshapes his world image, writing of adventures and dangers, ironies and lyricisms. "Life is a complex coming and going of fairies and demons... We are all fairies and demons" says the man who tells of lives that are no more than a brief twinkle in the universe and can suddenly become a despotic, angelic king in the small kingdom of the world.

He has, for example, lived the Chinese cultural revolution at first hand —the same as the Arab-Israeli conflict and the events of May '68 in Paris— and saw, with the conviction that life always goes ahead of systems, how people ran from utopias because utopias go against life: "Ideal or

perfect forms are just another aspiration. Arbitrariness is as fundamental as reason: the same happens with lyricism. The imperfection of reality —with its seething wealth of diversity— is as indispensable as any wish for ideal perfection" remarks Baltasar Porcel. The suggestion of a Homeric verse fills the night with confidences. The garden, the novels, the journeys, the rustling of the pines: the writer's whole world speaks of the breath of life and the eternal passion of men. "Writing is a passion and an instinct. The world is infinite. In the history of mankind, there are elements of regeneration and dissolution. The Roman Empire disappeared and the Western World could disappear or go through a profound transformation. Summing up, there are always certain continuities: the species, the clouds, the same river always carrying different water, as Heraclitus said". The enchanted islands of Baltasar Porcel —like his novels— now have the fullness of the elemental night. ●