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# CROSSING BORDERS: IDENTITY AND CULTURE IN TRANSLATION IN JOAN MARGARIT'S BILINGUAL POETRY

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**Abstract** || Joan Margarit (Sanaüja, 1938) is arguably one of the best well-known contemporary poets from Catalonia. Margarit started his literary career in Spanish, then moved on to Catalan, and finally published self-translated bilingual editions of his work. He has been successful in navigating the problematic linguistic and cultural borders that divide Catalan and Spanish literary fields, and his poetic publications are highly acclaimed across both spaces. This article considers issues of literary translation, cultural identity, prestige and the influence of aesthetic trends as elements that permitted Margarit such a successful transition from one literary space to the other. Ultimately, the article will also offer some considerations on what this poetry represents for Catalan—and also for Spanish—literary traditions within the context of border cultures, by focusing on the political, literary and cultural complexities that surround them.

**Keywords** || Bilingual poetry | Cultural borders | Translation policies | Contemporary poetry | Aesthetic trends.

Joan Margarit (Sanaüja, 1938) is arguably one of the best well-known Catalan poets who initiated their literary careers in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Although Margarit began his poetic trajectory writing in Spanish in the mid-1960s, he moved on to publications in Catalan in 1980, and finally published self-translated bilingual editions of his works regularly from 1999 onwards.<sup>1</sup> Representing quite an isolated case within Catalan and Spanish contemporary poetry,<sup>2</sup> Margarit has succeeded in crossing the vastly problematic linguistic and cultural borders that divide the distinct Catalan and Spanish literary fields, a feat particularly relevant given the recent political and historical events in Catalonia. It should be acknowledged from the outset that Margarit performs different functions and roles within the two literary systems. In the Catalan literary field, he is seen as an unquestionably Catalan poet—belonging firmly to the Catalan tradition—who started writing in Spanish but later switched to his native language; whereas in the Spanish literary field, he is seen as a writer from Catalonia who writes in Spanish as well as in Catalan and who has gained access to the Spanish literary system as well as earned a role in its literary tradition. Nonetheless, and despite the diverse positions the author occupies, his poetic publications are highly acclaimed in both spaces. Looking at issues of literary translation and self-translation, cultural identities in transit and aspects of translating cultures as well as literary prestige and the possible influence of leading influential aesthetic trends, my arguments in the present article aim to analyse the particular elements that allowed Margarit such a successful transition from one space to the other whilst retaining his success in both. The article will also seek to draw some considerations on what this poetry represents for Catalan—and also for Spanish—literary traditions at the crossroads, focusing on the political, literary and cultural complexity that surrounds these border cultures.

Margarit, alongside his role as a prominent Catalan poet, has developed a very strong profile as a bilingual author in the rest of the Spain, and his dual-language editions are particularly well-known within the Spanish cultural market. The move towards bilingual editions came seemingly by chance to the author when Columna Edicions—where the poet used to publish his work in Catalan since 1980—was acquired by Grupo Planeta and their poetry series was discontinued towards the end of the 1990s. Such an event forced Margarit to find a new publisher for his work and thus he approached Hiperión, a publishing house in Madrid specialising in poetry in Spanish. He submitted a proposal to Hiperión for a bilingual publication that would not be merely a self-translation of his work from Catalan into Spanish but rather the publication of a work written in two languages almost simultaneously (Margarit, 2011: 251). Hiperión's acceptance of his proposal would mark Margarit's return to poetry in Spanish, a not entirely unexpected or unusual move for an author whose first poems had been written precisely

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1 | Joan Margarit had published a bilingual poetry collection at the end of the 1980s, *Llum de pluja* (1987). The poet, however, did not publish bilingual editions regularly until 1999.

2 | Another case, albeit somewhat more complex than Margarit's, is that of Pere Gimferrer (Barcelona, 1945), who started writing in Spanish in the 1960s but later on switched to Catalan.

in that language and who had already published a bilingual edition in the 1980s (*Llum de pluja*, 1987). Furthermore, the poet himself claimed that the use of two different language systems was simply “el resultado de las circunstancias lingüísticas de muchas de las personas que como yo nacieron de familia catalana durante o al terminar la guerra civil española” (Margarit, 1999: 9). Nonetheless, the poet decided to justify the linguistic change in a prologue very aptly titled “Sobre las lenguas de este libro” included in *Estació de França* (1999), where he claimed that he started writing in Spanish “como una respuesta normal desde el punto de vista cultural” (9). Joan Margarit openly stated that he felt he lacked cultural models in any other language—as it is to be expected for anyone educated under Francisco Franco’s dictatorship—and that he crossed over to Catalan in the 1980s “buscando lo que una persona tiene más profundo que la cultura literaria” (9). The mention of a lack of cultural referents in Catalan grants his initial adherence to Spanish undeniable common sense, and to some extent it de-problematizes his initial linguistic choice for the Catalan public. The most fascinating part of the prologue, however, is the explanation of how Margarit views and conceives his bilingual book, a key aspect of his publishing proposal to Hiperión: “[é]ste es un libro de poesía bilingüe. No se trata de poemas en catalán traducidos al castellano, sino que están escritos casi a la vez en ambas lenguas” (Margarit, 1999: 9). Such an assertion begs some questioning: is this a true reflection of his thoughts and understanding of self-translation, or does the statement seek a specific outcome or effect in the literary field? In addition, does the intention behind self-translation obey a desire to be active within two different markets, or even to have access to separate and independent literary traditions? In any case, if Margarit’s statement is taken at face value, it provides interesting details regarding his ideas on bilingualism and translation policies (or how he wants his ideas to be perceived), within the Iberian context: the two forms of the poem—the Catalan and the Spanish—are born almost at the same time, coexisting in an autonomous form but linked in their origin, a practice that seems to involve a high element of creative writing in both languages rather than a pure translation process. This would unquestionably please Spanish readers, as the author is providing them with a nearly tailor-made product rather than a translation that could be considered second-rate:

Accedo en catalán a ese lugar [the creation of a poem] y enseguida planteo en esa lengua el esqueleto del poema. Lo trabajo mucho, y, en general, se parece poco la versión final a la inicial. En este libro, todas las versiones, modificaciones y vueltas a empezar que sufre en mis manos un poema las he realizado en catalán y en castellano a la vez (9).<sup>3</sup>

Such a practice seems to allude to the genesis of the text as much as to what Simon calls “translational writing”, which corresponds to “the

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3 | Formal and more technical aspects of self-translation also come into play at this point, and they force us to consider whether a less narrative and more technically challenging poetry than Margarit’s would allow such process with the aforementioned ease. For an account of some of the challenges involved see Abbasi and Manafi Anari (2004).

zones where creative writing and translation mesh” (Simon, 2012a: 8) and imply a highly creative translation process. Grutman divides self-translations into “consecutive” and “simultaneous” groups. Whereas the first group comprises texts translated after an original version has been finished, the second includes texts produced when the writer constantly switches between both versions and thus incorporates the translation process into the creation (2009: 259), that is, the process Margarit claims to be following.<sup>4</sup> Margarit’s words also echo another common aspect of self-translation: the reluctance of self-translators “to speak of ‘translation’ when describing the textual relation between the two versions” (Gentes, 2013: 266-267) and their understanding of such practice as “a double writing process in which each text produced is a variant of the other” (Wilson, 2009: 187). Some scholars working in Translation Studies have also highlighted how, in many cases, publishers present bilingual collections as “originals” in both languages, making no reference whatsoever to what is the original and what is the translated language within the text (Arenas, 2006: 92, Gentes, 2013: 267). Significantly, Margarit feels compelled to justify his choice of language in *Estació de França* (1999) and in other collections such as *Barcelona amor final* (2007) and *Tots els poemes (1975-2010)* (2011), but in many other instances there is no mention to this regard, which goes some way towards supporting Gentes’ claim.<sup>5</sup>

Despite being considered for a long time “as something marginal, a sort of cultural or literary oddity, as a borderline case of both translation and literary studies” (Wilson, 2009: 187), self-translation has gained considerable critical and academic attention in the field of translation studies in recent years (Cordingley, 2013, Gentes, 2013: 266, Walsh Hokenson and Munson, 2007). Bilingual editions have become quite successful even in the literary market,<sup>6</sup> although the publication of self-translated texts in bilingual format remains a “highly complex endeavor” (Gentes, 2013: 266) that might depend on “personal, literary, pragmatic, political, and/or economic factors” (268). One of the main advantages of self-translated bilingual publications is obviously the increased number of readers that will be able to engage with the text when it is published in two languages, but in the case of Joan Margarit—and indeed in Catalan literature in general—self-translated editions may respond to other and multifaceted aims. Such aims may include, for instance: maximizing the visibility of a minority language, conveying a certain sense of identity—even a dual identity—, negotiating cultural distinctiveness, establishing a dialogue between linguistic communities in a border context, or even attempting to conform to two different literary traditions. The impossibility of publishing monolingual versions of his poetry in Catalan was what pushed Margarit into bilingual editions in the first place—it has already been noted that “[a]ra més que mai [...] la traducció es troba a Catalunya sotmesa a les pressions del mercat” (Parcerisas,

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4 | Interestingly, another well known bilingual Catalan and Spanish writer, Carme Riera, seems to follow similar steps when writing in—or translating into—Spanish. Riera stated that when she wrote *Qüestió d’amor propi* (1987/1988) she wrote and translated at the same time, a process that afforded her a different perspective and allowed her to reflect on various aspects of the novel: “El filtre que suposava passar per un altre idioma em feia, segurament, objectivar molt més, em convertia en una receptora i no en una emissora del text en question” (Riera, 1997: 51).

5 | It should be noted, however, that decisions such as this one do not always depend solely on the author and that editors and publishing houses also have a say in it.

6 | After publishing *Estació de França* and *Joana* with Hiperión, Margarit changed publishing houses and moved to Visor, arguably the most important publishing house specialising in poetry in Spain. He continued publishing bilingual editions, and since 2009 his books have appeared in Visor’s exclusive ‘Colección Palabra de Honor’ (directed by Luis García Montero), being so far the only poet in the series who publishes in bilingual format. There have also been very popular bilingual or multilingual publications by different authors and editors in Spain recently, such as Noemí Trujillo’s *Xarnegos/Charnegos: Antología* (2010)—in Spanish and Catalan, with a preface by Margarit—, or Manuel Rivas’ *La desaparición de la nieve* (2009)—which included the translations of the Galician original into Spanish, Catalan and Basque. Significantly, some publishing houses have launched bilingual editions, such as Amargord Editores and their ‘Colección Galeuscas’.

2010: 31)—, but one cannot ignore that this reality enabled Catalan poetry to visibly cross linguistic and cultural frontiers, becoming a physical presence within the poetic field in Spanish. According to Gentes, a bilingual edition can appear in different formats: en face editions (in corresponding or non-corresponding facing pages); split-page editions (which might be divided vertically or horizontally); successive versions; and reversible editions. In addition, the order in which the versions appear might indicate a form of hierarchy between them (2013: 275). Margarit's bilingual publications usually follow the corresponding face arrangement, with the Catalan version appearing on the left-hand side, the space traditionally assigned to the original.<sup>7</sup> However, some of the peritextual elements in these bilingual editions—such as prologues, epilogues or notes—appear, although not by norm, only in the dominant language of the edition: Spanish. Interestingly, peritextual elements may not always work to the disadvantage of the minority language, as many of Margarit's works—despite prologues written solely in Spanish—appear with only Catalan titles on the cover. Such was the case for all his books published by Hiperión, although they are listed in Spanish by Visor, which suggests that these traits largely depend on the editor and the specific requirements of each publishing house in particular. All in all, within a cultural border context such as the one Margarit's poetry inhabits, the inconsistency of the peritextual elements has the redeeming grace of challenging powerful hierarchies. These inconsistencies bring some modicum of attention to minority languages and cultures as well as an awareness of literatures at the crossroads, and they might ironically add significance to dual-language publications.

Bilingual editions, particularly those in complex linguistic, political and cultural contexts, raise important questions regarding readership. In Joan Margarit's case, Catalan readers will have had access to his monolingual publication first—the author has taken to publishing Catalan-only versions before the bilingual edition is released—and will therefore not require the dual-language publication. Thus, can it be considered that his bilingual books are aimed mainly at a Spanish audience? Gentes claims that readers of the original language always remain potential readers of bilingual publications (2013: 271), since it can often be the case that monolingual editions are not available or might be difficult to find. In addition, bilingual readers who want to explore nuanced elements of the text revealed by a translation—or a creative translation process—will also be attracted to dual-language publications:

the self-translated text exists in a refracted relation both to its “native” language and to the language it recreates—as an itinerary of exchanges between languages, cultures, and agents—and the (self-)translator has the possibility of enriching the source text by, for example, “activating”

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7 | *Barcelona amor final* (2007) and *Llum de pluja* (1987) seem to be only exceptions to this. Regarding the latter, Gentes underlines the hierarchical stance of the text: “[t]his publication begins with the Catalan version, in which each poem is presented on an entire page. The Spanish poems, however, are printed at the end of the book, one below the other. Line breaks are indicated by only a slash; thus, the Spanish versions lose their status as autonomous poems, being reduced to a mere comprehension aid for language learners” (2013: 276-277). *Barcelona, amor final* also begins with the Catalan version occupying entire pages, and the Spanish and English versions appear on facing pages at the end of the book.

meanings which were only “between-the-lines” in the original (Wilson, 2009: 192).

Self-translation, particularly in the case of minority languages, cannot be disassociated from issues of identity, as the practice unquestionably lies at the heart of the idea of identities and cultures in translation. Unlike some of his other writings—such as the “Pregó” Margarit read at the *Festes de la Mercè* in Barcelona in 2010 (Margarit, 2010), which had a strong nationalist facet and openly requested independence for Catalonia—a radical “Catalan-ness” is not immediately obvious in Joan Margarit’s poetry. Rather, it is a latent and quiet presence whose more noticeable attribute is the constant appearance of Catalan toponymy and geography—particularly Barcelona—in the verses, sometimes disguised as mere cosmopolitanism. Very pertinently, Montserrat Guibernau classified territory as one of the five clusters—language, history, territory, culture and art—used by intellectuals as emotional arguments to develop nationalist identities and movements (Guibernau, 2004: 28-32). Such arguments, according to the scholar, build a collective sense of identity: “[b]elonging to a nation, which is real in the minds of its members, confers on them a sense of continuity grounded upon the sentiment of being part of a group portrayed as an extended family” (29). And indeed, in Margarit’s poetry the Catalan capital “no és la Barcelona que registren els mapes, sinó una Barcelona inventada: [...] una Barcelona moral”, a city that “acaba convertint-se en un mirall del mateix poeta sota la superfície del qual es dibuixa [...] una mena d’autobiografia moral” (Cercas, 2007: 11). The physical space becomes here almost another layer of skin the poetic persona can wear, creating a strong and solid bond between the poetic persona and the aforementioned territory: for this reason, Margarit claims that “la ciutat és una superposició d’estats d’ànim i de sentiments” with which one can establish a dialogue (Margarit, 2007: 17). The presence of Barcelona is so relevant in Margarit’s work that in 2007 the poet published an anthology in Catalan, Spanish and English called *Barcelona amor final* (Margarit, 2007), a compilation of poems about the city divided into chapters or parts that correspond to particular areas of the town or key aspects representative of the Catalan capital. Significantly, this can also be seen as a historical tradition within Catalan literature, as a great number of poets—such as Jacint Verdaguer or Joan Maragall—have written odes to the city of Barcelona. In Margarit’s anthology, it becomes obvious that the city leaves its imprint on the characters that inhabit it—such as in “Elegia de l’alba” (19/230), “Barcelona era una festa” (20/232) or “Guerra perduda” (22/234). Not completely unexpectedly, the past emerges as almost another character in this city, creating a bond between territory and history, another of the emotional arguments listed by Guibernau as essential for the creation of a national identity (Guibernau, 2004: 28-32). In fact, Margarit himself stated that “La

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ciutat és el meu passat” (Margarit, 2007: 17), and the poem “Últims ecos” (27-28/240) is a perfect example of this, as is “Balada de Montjuïc” (155-156/402, 404). In the latter poem, also included as the preface for the bilingual anthology *Xarnegos/Charnegos: Antología* (Trujillo, 2010), the territory of Barcelona and the landscape of the Montjuïc cemetery mix with the history of the land, the poetic voice’s identity and its personal trajectory. The poem begins with the poetic voice travelling to the cemetery at dawn, surveying its surroundings whilst evoking key moments in the history of Catalonia, emphasising the idea that “[p]articular landscapes are emotionally charged and portrayed as embodying Catalan traditions, history and culture” (Guibernau 2004: 31):

He arribat a l'alba per no trobar ningú.  
Hi ha encara llums encesos als dipòsits de gas  
i a les grues del port.  
El mar enfronta la ciutat boirosa.  
Tot és com sempre, penso: no calia venir.  
Però el cert és que torno, m'agrada retrobar  
aquest morro estripat per barrancs i pedreres,  
promontori amb gangrena de cementiri al flanc.

No vol ser un parc d'estàtues fora del temps. Defensa  
el seu passat de fars, afusellats, barraques.  
L'exacta i empedrada memòria dels murs,  
tots els senyals gravats en els troncs dels xiprers.  
(Margarit, 2007: 155)

Por no encontrarme a nadie vengo al alba.  
Hay luces encendidas todavía  
en los depósitos de gas y en las grúas del puerto.  
El mar se enfrenta a la ciudad entre restos de niebla.  
Es como siempre, pienso: no era necesario haber venido.  
Pero vuelvo, me gusta reencontrar  
el morro al que desgarran barrancos y canteras,  
un promontorio cuyo flanco gangrena el cementerio.

No quiere ser un campo intemporal de estatuas.  
Defiende su pasado de barracas y fusilamientos.  
La exacta y empedrada memoria de los muros,  
las señales grabadas en troncos de cipreses.  
(Margarit, 2007: 402)

Montjuïc, first an Iberian settlement in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century B.C., later home to a medieval Jewish cemetery, and more recently the site of many executions during the Spanish Civil War, has played a key role in the history of Barcelona. In the poem, Margarit highlights such events, and its landscape is depicted as a figure that retains all its memories and refuses to let them go. The poetic voice’s identity becomes entangled with the territory through this history, producing a situated identity that incites overwhelming feelings; indeed, in the notes that accompany a whole section on Montjuïc in *Barcelona*

*amor final*, Margarit claims that “[q]ui pertany a aquesta ciutat du un Montjuïc a dins” (153)/ “Quien pertenece a esta ciudad lleva un Montjuïc dentro” (398). Moreover, as Margarit explains in that portion of the anthology, the place also holds personal significance for him, as his two daughters are buried there. Montjuïc, then, becomes a powerful symbol charged with personal and historical relevance, one that generates emotional roots and helps to set the limits of both personal and national identities.

The city—or the territory—in the poetry of Joan Margarit is also closely connected to the language, yet another of the emotional arguments classed by Guibernau. Barcelona, just as Margarit’s poetic trajectory, boasts close ties with Spanish language, and as Simon has stated, “a city is a space of connecting and converging communities, of directionality and incorporation” (Simon, 2012b: 127). Due to his bilingual poetry in Spanish and Catalan, in Margarit’s work the city has been explored and depicted through a double lens. However, the city remains an unchanging presence in the verses despite the different linguistic expressions employed:

Tens al passat finestres que en la tarda s’encenen  
com mansos animals. Finestres que recorden  
tots els nostres triomfs –pobres triomfs efimers–  
encesos als carrers. T’he estat fidel, ciutat:  
en una o altra llengua sempre he parlat de tu.  
(Margarit, 2007: 69)

Tienes en el pasado ventanas que se encienden  
como animales mansos. Ventanas que recuerdan  
aqueellos, nuestros triunfos –pobres triunfos efimeros–  
ardientes en tus calles. Te he sido fiel, ciudad:  
en una u otra lengua, hablé siempre de ti.  
(Margarit, 2007: 290)

Barcelona is also home to thousands of inhabitants who migrated to the city from other parts of Spain between the 1950s and 1975, the so-called *xarnegos* or *charnegos*—children of Spanish immigrants in Catalonia that have not yet been successfully “catalanised”, according to the *Diccionario de María Moliner*. *Xarnegos*, who have been linked to Catalan identity and Catalan cultural production (Cullell, 2011), are key in the usage of Catalan and Spanish languages around the city, and they are a group that seems to have caught Margarit’s attention<sup>8</sup> frequently. The use of two languages that their presence might imply, together with Margarit’s education in Spanish, calls for some bitter lines regarding language in his poetry whilst bringing to mind what Simon defines as “cultures of circulation”, the links existing between the city and translation (Simon 2012b: 129), that “special intensity that comes from shared references and a shared history” (130):

Si la desesperança té la força

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8 | “Balada de Montjuïc” featured as the preface of *Xarnegos/Charnegos: Antología* (Trujillo, 2010). Margarit has written a number of poems on the topic of *xarneguisme* and the peripheral neighbourhoods *xarnegos* tend to inhabit in Barcelona, highlighting the linguistic but also the social status of the *xarnegos*. The section ‘Els llums de les obres’ in *Barcelona amor final* (99-106), for example, revolves around this issue. In the mid-1970s, Margarit also wrote the lyrics to a song called “Els qui vénen”/ “Los que vienen”, dedicated to the *xarnegos* and sang by Enric Barbat. Francisco Candel’s *Els altres catalans* (1964) remains the most complete work on *xarnegos* and *xarnegusime* to date—and a key reference for any study that deals with the matter.

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d'una certesa lògica,  
i l'enveja un horari tan secret  
com un tren militar, estem perduts.  
El castellà m'ofega i no l'odio.  
No en té la culpa de la seva força:  
de la meva feblesa encara menys.  
L'ahir era una llengua ben travada  
per pensar, per pactar i per somiar,  
que ningú ja no parla:  
un subconscient de pèrdua i de cobdícia  
on ressonen bellíssimes cançons.  
El present és la llengua dels carrers,  
maltractada i espúria, arrapada  
com l'heura a les ruïnes de la història.  
És la llengua en la qual escric.  
També és una llengua ben travada  
per pensar, per pactar i per somiar.  
I les velles cançons se salvaran.  
(Margarit, 2012: 38)

Si la desesperanza  
tiene el poder de la certeza lógica,  
y la envidia un horario tan secreto  
como un tren militar, es que estamos perdidos.  
Me ahoga el castellano y no lo odio.  
No tiene culpa alguna de su fuerza  
y menos todavía de mi debilidad.  
El ayer fue una lengua bien trabada  
para pensar, pactar, soñar,  
que ya no habla nadie: un subconsciente  
de pérdida y codicia  
donde suenan bellísimas canciones.  
El presente es la lengua de las calles,  
maltratada y espuria, agarrándose  
como hiedra a las ruinas de la historia.  
La lengua en la que escribo.  
También es una lengua bien trabada  
para pensar, pactar. Para soñar.  
Y las viejas canciones se salvarán.  
(Margarit, 2012: 39)

Language makes an appearance in the poems as a theme, but more importantly, it is also an intrinsic aspect of each of Margarit's books. In the prologue to *Estació de França* within his collected poems, Margarit stated that "Sobre les llengües d'aquest llibre" was intended to explain to Spanish-speaking readers the complex issues that surround bilingualism in Catalonia and how it affected his poems (Margarit, 2011: 251). This seems to establish very interesting connections between Margarit's poetry and the work of Sherry Simon on translation and the city, as the Canadian scholar claims that "[t]o discuss cities as a translational space is to use language passage as a key to understanding political and cultural tensions of conflict and dialogue" (Simon, 2012b: 137). In the aforementioned prologue, Margarit employs the Catalan word "frontissa" (hinge), a

term with great connotations in terms of a literature at the crossroads: he seems to place himself and his work at a border between two cultures, a pivoting element that allows him to link separate literary spaces as well as present a culture in translation. Without a doubt, his poetic work embodies a culture in translation, as “the coexistence and competition among meaning systems heightens awareness and appreciation of difference” (Simon, 2012a: 160) and any form of translation “becomes an integral part in the creation, embodiment, and voicing of meaning and identity” (Wilson, 2009: 187). Kathryn Cramer stated that translated texts are themselves powerful tools of identity, as it is possible “to get a sense of the alternative voices present in any translated text” (2007: 222), and Margarit’s poetry in Spanish certainly does so. Cramer alludes to traits that make up an identity even in translation, and they

include not only obvious things like settings or the names of characters, but also more subtle elements such as historical events that are treated from a Catalan rather than a Castilian perspective, or the description of social relationships that only make sense in relation to Catalonia’s own class structure and the position of “old” and “new” Catalans within it. These elements are not linguistic and are therefore not lost in translation (222).

In this sense, “[t]he translated text can be understood as a contact zone, a third space, which is an overlapping of cultures” (Simon, 2011: 50), one that boasts great hybridity.<sup>9</sup> Nonetheless, the hybridity achieved in Margarit’s poetic work does not exclude any group of readers, rather it manages to strike a balance that allows readers from all backgrounds to approach and enjoy his poetry without having to face nationalist ideas that could be considered problematic, divisive or isolating.

Margarit’s poetry’s success outside the Catalan borders has been far-reaching, and he is highly acclaimed and esteemed in the Spanish literary field. Part of such success is due to the support and backing that his poetry has received from well-established publishing houses, poetic figures, as well as his adherence to the dominant poetic trend in Spanish literature during the last 20 years, that of “poesía de la experiencia”. A review of critical works and poetic publications throughout the last two decades in Spain demonstrates that “poesía de la experiencia” is the label that has created the greatest controversy in Spanish contemporary literature, and it has also single-handedly dominated the literary field. The term “poetry of experience” was first employed in relation to Spanish poetry in 1959 by Jaime Gil de Biedma, one of the most important poets in Spanish of the 1950s and 1960s, in an article linking Robert Langbaum’s work *The Poetry of Experience: The Dramatic Monologue in Modern Literary Tradition* (1957) to the poetry being written at the time by the Generation of ‘27 author Luis Cernuda. According to Gil de Biedma,

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9 | In fact, hybridity and the notion of a third space have been used by many scholars to refer to Catalan literature from the point of view of post-colonial studies (Culllell, 2011: 88-89), although the scope of this article does not allow an exploration of Joan Margarit’s work from such perspective.

Cernuda's poetry was a perfect representation of what Langbaum had called "poetry of experience": a poetry "constructed upon the deliberate disequilibrium between experience and idea, a poetry which makes its statement not as an idea but as an experience from which one or more ideas can be abstracted as problematical rationalization" (Gil de Biedma, 2001: 35-26). During the following years, Gil de Biedma theorised and practised what he had described as the Spanish experiential trend, focusing on the ways in which poetic material was being used, rather than its themes. Nevertheless, in the following decades the label of "poesía de la experiencia" slowly faded, only to be re-appropriated suddenly at the end of the 1980s by new young poets. In the late 1980s, the tag was used to encourage a commonsensical understanding of poetry, "'un arte sensato' capable of giving voice to experiences which are verisimilar to the common reader" (Mayhew, 1999: 347) in the face of the elitist and very cultural poetry that had prevailed in Spain in the previous decade. The label of "poesía de la experiencia" would then be used to refer to what would become in the 1990s the dominant poetic trend of the time, one focused on everyday life and the lived experience of the common man, with conversational and narrative tones. This new "poesía de la experiencia", despite having little resemblance to the aesthetics theorised by Gil de Biedma in relation to Langbaum and Cernuda, proved to be incredibly popular amongst readers in Spain. The new "poesía de la experiencia" quickly developed a strong theoretical framework and following in the country, becoming beyond any shade of a doubt the dominant trend (Cano Ballesta, 2001, García Martín, 1988, García Martín, 1998, García Martín, 1999, García-Posada, 1996, Martínez, 1997, Villena, 1986, Villena, 1992). Joan Margarit has repeatedly been associated with the trend, and his work has been described as one that "parteix d'una història o anècdota –gairebé sempre històries o anècdotes personals, tretes del pou temible de la memòria– i n'extreu una reflexió que, essent també personal, acaba atenyent a tothom" (Cercas, 2007: 12), very close to what "poesía de la experiencia" intended. Margarit has been associated with this poetic trend in the Spanish field through obvious aesthetic similarities—from the use of a narrative and unassuming tone in his poems or the presence of an ordinary poetic voice similar to that of a normal citizen, to a strong element of social commitment in his verses, all of them traits exhibited by "poesía de la experiencia" (Cullell, 2010: 28-32). But the Catalan author has also been linked to the trend via public friendships and literary connections to some of the main Spanish experiential poets, with whom he has produced co-publications, or with whom he has participated in events and homages to one another, to name but a few activities.<sup>10</sup> A publication that exemplifies such a connection is the anthology *El sindicato del crimen: antología de la poesía dominante* (Rabanera, 1994), to which Margarit contributed a poem in Catalan. This anthology, which brought together 49 poets pertaining to "la experiencia", included

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## NOTES

10 | His friendship with Luis García Montero has been well documented, and they have dedicated countless poems to each other as well as read together at different events or collaborated in diverse projects. Also, Spanish poets and critics have lauded the Catalan author in many occasions: one of the most relevant examples was the special issue of *Coloquio de los perros* in 2007, fully dedicated to the Catalan poet and very significantly titled "Joan Margarit, uno de los nuestros" (Various authors, 2007). The special issue drew attention to the welcome and inclusion that Margarit enjoys within the Spanish literary system.

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an ironic self-deprecatory prologue that mocked all the accusations of dominance, abuse of power and compliance with political parties that had been levered at “poesía de la experiencia” during the early 1990s. The prologue, however, also touched upon the friendship that united all the authors who participated in the collection. It is interesting to emphasise here the fact that when approaching the idea of Catalan independence during the “Pregó” that Joan Margarit read in Barcelona in 2010, the poet encouraged a political independence that would still allow links between literary systems within the Iberian Peninsula, one that would be supported precisely by friendship. Margarit felt compelled to highlight “el que em va dir el meu amic i gran poeta castellà Luis García Montero en acabar una de les nostres converses sobre aquesta qüestió: ‘Joan, garantízame que tu amistad nunca se independizará de nosotros’” (Margarit, 2010: 7). Thus, the Catalan poet was privileging links built on friendship and literary affinities rather than linguistic or political ones, alliances that make for easier and much more fluid border crossings and that allow dialogues and links to take prominence in the relationship between literary traditions. Margarit’s poetry in bilingual Spanish and Catalan editions has been published and therefore also supported by very strong publishing houses—Hiperión and Visor feature amongst the most important presses for poetry in the Iberian Peninsula—, and his poetic works have received important prizes not only in Catalan but also in Spanish—he was awarded the Premio Nacional de Poesía in 2008, for example. Elements such as the backing of important poetic figures, the support of relevant publishing houses, and the award of key prizes are obvious indicators of prestige according to Mark Verboord (2003: 265). Thus, they strengthen Joan Margarit’s position in the Spanish literary field and, by extension, in the Catalan literary field as well. They afford the author an unparalleled safety net and provide his work with essential critical acclaim—many of the “experiential” authors regularly write literary reviews in national newspapers—, securing his esteem and praise across the Catalan border.

All in all, the reader finds in Joan Margarit a bilingual Catalan and Spanish poet who has managed to navigate the turbulent waters of parallel literary systems and language borders successfully. Margarit has claimed that he has never felt marginalised for writing in—or simultaneously translating into—Spanish as well as in Catalan (Lafarque, 2007), but as this article has attempted to demonstrate, the lack of marginalisation may be due to the strategies he has followed and the complex literary and extra-literary scaffolding that surrounds his bilingual work. On the one hand, with regards to the usage of different languages, Margarit seems to maintain a healthy relationship towards translation or the creation of a poem in two languages to cater to different audiences—although he also publishes his work in Catalan editions only before the bilingual ones see the light, thus

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preserving Catalan readership. More to the point, one cannot forget that his return to poetry in Spanish (or to bilingual editions that included Spanish) was prompted by the closure of Columna's poetry series in Catalan, and therefore the move to another literary system was not seen as a voluntary decision—a fact that might exculpate him in the eyes of the Catalan public. His poetry, very significantly, has been widely translated into other languages as well—such as English, Hebrew and German—, and this notably eases the way for his work in Spanish, as the translations into the dominant language in the Iberian Peninsula can be seen as one of many possible versions and not the only alternative to his work in Catalan. With regards to his acceptance by a Spanish readership, self-translation becomes for Joan Margarit a device that allows the author the crossing of borders in a way that a translation of his work by someone else would not: it is a means of finding approval amongst Spanish readers in his come-back to literature written in Spanish, as he is offering poetry written at almost the same time as the Catalan version, and therefore a truthful poetic product rather than just a plain translation. Another interesting aspect is the fact that Margarit has never attempted to alter the roles or positions he occupies in the Catalan and Spanish literary systems, keeping them separate and seemingly independent from each other, linked only through the bilingual editions of his works. On the other hand, and with regards to the different factors that ensure his welcome and strong position in the different literary systems—particularly beyond the Catalan borders—, Margarit enjoys an arguably unprecedented support in the Spanish poetic market from key coetaneous literary figures and publishing houses, both of them indicators of prestige that facilitate Margarit's entrance into the Spanish poetic market and ensure his permanence in it. In addition to all the aforementioned characteristics, Margarit's poetry, unlike some of his other writings and speeches, does not explicitly convey a strong Catalan nationalism, and therefore Spanish readers do not find what could be classed as a problematic or uncomfortable aspect in the Spanish versions. His is a quiet translation of culture, and indeed it can be claimed that his poetry functions as a contact zone between the Catalan and the Spanish literary systems. In such a contact zone, translation becomes an essential aspect as it “cannot be separated from the material, political, cultural or historical circumstances of its production, that it in fact represents an unfolding of these conditions” (Seidman, in Simon, 2012a: 8). In this sense, his translations also function—precisely—as a response to the complex institutional, political, historical, cultural and literary context that surrounds his work. Such context-sensitive translations offer an example of how bilingual authors can negotiate, and position themselves in, different literary systems. Margarit's success at the crossroads demonstrates that a profile built on literary aesthetics and affinities, markers of prestige and a translation policy that acts cautiously on both sides are key to building a healthy relationship

between Catalan and Spanish literatures and cultures—particularly relevant given the recent political and historical events in Catalonia regarding its bid for independence. His success in navigating the troubled waters that define literary and linguistic borders between Spain and Catalonia provides an encouraging example of a culture in translation that can pave the way for other authors and enhance a dialogue between cultures at the crossroads, one that could continue to develop and strengthen even if Catalonia were allowed its independence.

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