

## Carme Riera

*Dins el darrer blau* (In the Last Blue, 1994) represents Riera's debut in the historical genre, as it is a work based on the events that occur in the city of Majorca between 1688 and 1691, when a group of crypto-Jews who wanted to flee from the island were judged and condemned to the stake by the Inquisition. To write this book, the author spent five years dedicated to studying and documenting these events.

In this novel, Riera confronts the challenge of an omniscient narrator point of view, which allows her to create an objective and autonomous world, within which the lives of the characters develop and a polyphonic discourse is heard. *Dins el darrer blau* is a choral novel, and as such it has no single protagonist, because each character is the hero or heroine of the vicissitudes of his or her life, a personal and non-transferable drama.

Thus it is worth highlighting the purity of her style that, without losing spontaneity, irony or lyric effusion, is enriched with a rigorous lexicon that intensifies the effect of historical truth, considering that she does not use words that date later than the seventeenth century. Neither do the literary materials incorporated into the text come from anything beyond the books or conversations that could have been read or heard by the people of the time. For example, the sea adventures of Pere Onofre Aguiló on board the ship of captain Esteve Fàbregues are very similar to those that we may find in a Byzantine novel. Similarly, Rafel Onofre, to frighten his listeners, recites a beautiful traditional song in a low voice, the same song he intones when his beloved's window is attacked: "Vós que amb so mirar matau / matau-me sols que em mireu, / que m'estim més que em mateu, / que viure si no em mirau..." (You who by looking kill / kill me then you who look / for I'd rather you kill me / than live without being looked at).

Although the action develops unsteadily, what really surprises is how individual discourse develops the flow of consciousness of all the characters—more than 40—who speak with features that allow us to distinguish their idiolects: the prattle of father Amengual, which hides his small mind, incapable of seeing beyond his ridiculous ambition; the sly speech of Costura, the long-winded denouncer; the clear and direct expression of "La Coixa," the Cripple; the sweetly disoriented voice of Sara dels Olors; the whispers of the besotted young men; the carefree and intelligent tone of the gentleman Sebastià Palou, representative of an almost untouchable social class; or the melancholy irony of Valls, called the Rabbi, whose words empty themselves of hope and fill with the thick bitterness of agnosticism; among many others.

Above everything one hears the Jewish voices, which sound different to us because they spring from the dramatic experience of oppression that was exercised over them in a city that is theirs, the city where their ancestors established themselves long before those who now would marginalize them. Some of the oldest have already tasted such humiliation; others, the youngest, still have not had time

to develop as people, but they are all the same obliged to choose exile in order to avoid death. Thus the journey to Liorna is presented as the only possibility for beginning a new life.

Considered by critics as one of the highlights of twentieth-century Catalan literature, *Dins del darrer blau* was born, according to the author, from the desire to revisit the roots of Majorcan identity, while demanding an act of collective contrition not so much for the tragedy experienced by that group of crypto-Jews—martyrs to the intolerance of some, the cloudy interests of others, and general cruelty and incomprehension—but for the fact that, more than three hundred years later, their descendants, the so-called “xuetes” or “xuetons,” are still marginalized and humiliated by a good part of the island's population.

The novel can be interpreted, then, as a re-writing of the present, where the dialectic between the powerful and the downtrodden often hides unspeakable transactions and contradictory paradoxes, which perpetuate situations of injustice and violence under an immense crush of submission, silence, and indifference.

In the great game of dice that is human existence, Riera insists more than ever on the need for the only ethical position possible: refusing monolithic discourse, defending the multiplicity of heterogeneous voices, and accepting otherness in order to prevent the ruin of exile and death.

Translated by Robin Vogelzang