

## Lluïsa Cunillé

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Lluïsa Cunillé is a key reference in Catalan literature. She is an author who, starting out from basic coordinates that gave birth to a theatrical generation, has acquired an extremely personal style which constantly evolves and enriches itself, from not only textual and dramaturgical points of view but also a thematic one – her style is increasingly more universal.

She has more than forty releases, seventeen awards, more than forty works published in Catalan and the majority of them translated into Spanish, French, English, German and Italian. A large number of her works have also had debuts France, England, German and Italy. On the contemporary Catalan drama scene, Lluïsa Cunillé is considered to have some of the most solid values.

On October 28th 1961 Lluïsa Cunillé was born in Badalona (Barcelona). However, her theatrical achievements did not begin until between 1990 and 1993 when she attended drama courses taught by José Sanchis Sinisterra at the Sala Beckett in Barcelona. Cunillé would be considered, in her first stages, as the best and most faithful exponent of Sanchis Sinisterra's theatrical theories whilst her own theatre would then have a strong character which would develop into significant maturity.

Her name appeared publicly for the first time in 1991 when she was awarded the Ignasi Iglésias Prize for her work *Berna*. Soon after, in 1992, she obtained the Calderon de la Barca Prize for *Rodeo*, a work which alongside José Sanchis was released in the same year. It provoked a panorama of different reactions given the surprising way in which she had manipulated, controlled and measured the cryptic theatrical language used. It was a language which seemed empty, but in fact, it is extremely solid.

Cunillé's characters are nameless. More than often they are no more than archetypal situations of daily life. Undetermined space and time also speak volumes about our world and our challenging lifestyle.

A fragmented structure, uncertain and undefined spaces, timeless abstract time and a subtext which is much richer than the text itself fused with anonymity, solitude, the impossible search for one's identity, confinement, and overly ambiguous language containing certain sense of magic were traits of her work which first bore fruit with *Liberació* (Liberation, 1993). A circumstantial and recurring encounter of two women from different worlds also results in the constant meeting of a hermetic tenderness and appearance of a symbolic object: a rocking chair whose swaying movement changes each day at the stroke of midnight. A metaphor of a changing destiny – a destiny we long after even though we know it will destroy us. After this, Lluïsa Cunillé became a true cult writer.

It is possible to assign stages and moments of evolution to Lluïsa Cunillé's work. *Liberació* was a peak in her early stage. Later she experienced another important evolution with *La venda* (The Sale, 1996) - an empty space in a flat for sale where three lonely souls meet - and later on in *Passatge Gutenberg* (2000), a key metaphor concerning words, writing, death, and love as well is discovered.

In Cunillé's work we can spot a trajectory based on formal articulation of a text, fragmented dialogues, silences and anonymous characters. In *Passatge Gutenberg* she communicates a personal feeling of solitude, love and death to the reader. Then, without any sharp change of direction, her trajectory gains an enviable sense of firmness and which reinforces the impact of polysemy found in her works.

When it comes to *Barcelona, mapa d'ombres* (Map of Shadows, 2005) such an admirable work cannot be highly enough commended. In this case, she takes a step towards a type of theatre that is no longer minority theatre; it is now a type of theatre that unveils the human conflict in such a way that it is understood by everyone. Two elderly people threatened by their ever approaching death, and at the same time, the problems encountered by the owners of the flat the elderly couple have rented from turn the characters into real beings of flesh and blood. They all have their geographical roots planted in Barcelona and they also focus on the idea of how absurd the world is, how it is capable of uniting us all but also destroying everything, even our most intimate secrets. Cunillé's attitude is seemingly unrelated to political agendas, however, at the end of this work she exposes the city of Barcelona in the background whilst the father, now close to death, listens to a fascist speech at the end of the Civil War.

Political aspects do not stop there; in fact, they are further developed in her following pieces of work. In a constantly positive evolution, we find one of her most recent and undoubtedly best works: *Après moi, le déluge* (2007). The title reders to Mobuti who, and when he leaves the Congo says: "*après moi, le deluge*"; when the main character's husband abandons her, she says the same thing. The work revolves around solidarity and exploitation, and reveals how the natural affluence of a country is in contrast to the misery of its inhabitants. The differences between Europe and Africa are also highlighted. The whole story takes place in a hotel in Kinshasa. There are three main characters but only two actors: a European man in the coltan trade and an indifferent European interpreter who has been resident in the hotel for many years. Other characters see the inner feelings of these characters from the point of view of the audience or reader. The work brings the depth of the West versus Africa conflict to the forefront. The text is highly dramatic and according to Cunillé, it is the best she has ever written.

In 2008 Cunillé released *El Bordell*. It is based on a sharp farse inside a brothel which is about to be bought by three men of different political standings just after 23F (a failed attempt at a coup d'état in 1981) which we see with 25 years of hindsight. The text demonstrates the absolute decadence of a microcosm representing a section of a population to which democracy has not yet reached. That was her forty first release, whilst *Rodeo* was her first. It came out in 1992.

Lluïsa Cunillé plays part in the Catalan generation that began in 1989 with Sergi Belbel, however, her style is always extremely personal and the evolution of her works for theatre always own an absolute coherence and rigor. She is a serious, hard-working, prolific author who, apparently, will never cease to write. Cunillé creates her own style which has made a positive and consistent impact without betraying any of the constant features of her work. She started off as a cult author in her first works and has ended up as an author who touches all types of audience. Her works are contemporary Catalan theatrical patrimony.

Translated by Christina McGown