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Eduard Márquez



Eduard Márquez, The Volition of Style

Javier Cisneros

Eduard Márquez (Barcelona, 1960) has written books of poetry, collections of short stories and novels for children

and adults.

His early commitment to poetry (*La travesía innecesaria* [The Unnecessary Crossing], 1991) and *Antes de la nieve* [Before the Snow] (1994), both works written in Spanish) has marked his particular way of understanding literature: a poetics of "less is more". His apparently simple, sober prose of forceful sentences shapes an elliptic, synthetic style packed with lyrical density, in which he eliminates everything that is not necessary for attaining the utmost concision. The aim of Eduard Márquez is to tell his story with the minimum possible elements: to achieve a transparent, finely-honed language with nothing superfluous. One result of this stylistic commitment to austerity is his obsession for finding the exact word, the precise expression and lexical purity. To this is added his concern for the musicality and euphony of a prose text that seeks to eliminate repetition and any hint of cacophony. The outcome of all the author's rigorous polishing of the language, very similar to a poet's, is a stylisation of narrative language that comes close to poetic language, which then means that his novels can be read as poems.

This formal commitment also extends to the nuts and bolts of his literature. He designs his narrative structures with engineering precision and astonishing effectiveness, respects them scrupulously but also manages to conceal them from the reader who simply enjoys a text that seems to flow easily and spontaneously.

The working method behind all this is highly exigent rigour, meticulousness, perfectionism, lentitude, accurate design of the narrative devices, and all the correcting that is necessary. It is a way of working that is totally compatible with Márquez's ethics, in other words, his respect for the writer's trade, his esteem for steady toil day after day, and his upholding of the position that readers deserve an honest piece of work. It is not surprising, then, that it takes him an average of three years to write a novel and that none of them exceeds 150 pages. His concern for style is patent, both in the first collections of short stories and in the three novels for adults he has published. It is also noticeable in the nine novels he has written for children.

All of this has the effect that Eduard Márquez's fiction does not permit the reader to skim through his books on autopilot. Instead it demands constant, sustained attention. They are very intense works that can, and demand to be read in one sitting.

Zugzwang and **L'eloqüència del franc tirador** The short-story collections *Zugzwang* (1995) and *L'eloqüència del franc tirador* [The Sharpshooter's Eloquence] (1998) mark the beginning of Márquez's narrative production in Catalan.

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Zugzwang consists of 43 very short stories of an average of three pages each and, even though they are independent, they form a strangely interrelated whole. Irrationality and absurdity seep through the fissures of an apparently real world, playing havoc with everything. The identities of the characters crack and thrust them into the most absolute bewilderment - they don't recognise the world or their own existence, they strive to achieve a face that nobody will mistake, they get themselves killed so as not to have to commit suicide, they watch the video of their own burial, they fall in love with themselves - or they are impelled to copy, to vampirise or set about the crudest usurpation of the lives of others when they can't stand their own, choosing somebody at random to strip him of his existence or to drain her vital energy. Some manage to make clones of themselves so as to be free of their routines while others are victims of the misdeeds of their double. Characters out of literary and art works, or even a ghost, come to life to win the hearts of, or take revenge on real people, thus underscoring the precariousness of their identities. The main characters of the stories are always in *zugzwang*, a chess term that means, however a player moves, it will be a bad move because his or her situation will always be worse than the present one. With all this, Márquez's finely-honed, synthetic and essential prose bears witness to his poetic commitment and becomes a true manifesto of style.

L'eloqüència del franc tirador continues along the same lines of the aesthetic proposal and the universe created in *Zugzwang* (indeed four of the stories return to tales from the earlier book) but the stories are a little longer and conceived of as veritable "micronovels" divided into tiny chapters where Márquez explores a whole range of difficult, complex narrative structures. Echoing the isolated sharpshooter's tale, these are eighteen stories of solitary struggle against the fragility of existence. There is the man who exchanges his identity with another man who leads a quadruple existence - a tribute to Max Frisch; a woman who has herself trailed by a detective so that he can invent reports on her life to replace her tedious reality - a tribute to Sophie Calle; an obsessed individual who kills his double in order not to be supplanted - a tribute to Paul Auster; an amnesiac who runs an ad in a newspaper asking for the memories of all the people who have known him, thereby recovering a life he doesn't recognise; an inflatable doll who takes over the life of her Pygmalion; a reflection in the mirror that, offended, abandons an unfaithful narcissist; a beast that never wins the beauty's love; a fictional character that takes revenge on the creator; and a story that comes true like a fateful prophecy. These are absolutely compact and synthetic fables in Márquez's implacable, perfectionist style, with elements of different genres (mystery, terror, gothic, noir...) in the same world, stripped of context, time and space, as one finds in the previous book.

Cinc nits de febrer The novel *Cinc nits de febrer* [Five Nights in February] (2000) is Márquez's first long work of fiction. It has its origins in the story "Tràiler" from the collection *L'eloqüència del franc tirador*. The main character, Lars Belden, after learning of the death of his former lover Sela Huber, decides to enter her flat by stealth in order to seek answers to his questions about the disturbing relationship that still obsesses him so long after it has ended. Over five consecutive nights he visits the flat trying to work out the whys and wherefores of the mysterious rupture that rocked the very foundations of his existence. There, he is confronted again with a past that is more than disturbing. Sela Huber, obsessed by memory and memoirs, has secreted away in a strange, off-limits room material that bears witness to everything she has experienced: videos, taped conversations and a diary that minutely records her life, down to the tiniest details. In a chaotic and compulsive search through the overwhelming mass of information, Lars Belden and the reader clandestinely advance, night after night, in a reconstruction of this jigsaw puzzle of memory. The fragments are put back into place, the dialogues are completed, suspicions are confirmed and they unveil the enigma of Sela Huber to offer Lars Belden an answer he has not anticipated. The possessive curse of a long-gone lover had prevailed over Sela Huber's existence, mercilessly putting an end to any new relationship

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she embarked upon.

There are three themes that constitute the mainstays of the novel: amorous possession that endures beyond death; guilt that is capable of subjugating conscience; and the fragility of memory, which is impotent when it comes to shaping havens for staving off oblivion.

In formal terms, *Cinc nits de febrer* represents the triumph of taking into the realm of novel-length fiction the committed, spare style that Márquez had achieved in his short stories. The novel is a thriller written to be read as a poem. The musical structure in five movements, with repetitions and variations on themes, accompanies the progressive unfolding of the sinister mystery in a story that, even while it is malefic and perturbing, is still a love story.

El silenci dels arbresIn Eduard Márquez's second novel, *El silenci dels arbres* [The Silence of Trees] (2003, winner of the 2004 Llibreter Prize), the violinist Andreas Hymer returns after some years of absence to his city, which is now under siege, to give a concert in the midst of all the barbarism of war. There he meets again the solo performer Ernest Bolsi, who was also his mother's luthier, and Amela Jenson, a pianist and former lover who gave up her quest for fame. Ernest Bolsi conducts guided tours of a music museum, which the war has left totally empty, with the sole purpose of telling stories to visitors who brave the shooting and bombs to seek the comfort and hope they offer. Amela Jenson survives in a wheelchair, cut off from the world in her flat and drowning in memories. Beneath a rain of missiles and bullets in a contemporary city reduced to rubble - which Márquez never identifies in order to heighten the allegorical dimension of the book - Andreas Hymer recovers the past he has left behind: the story of the mother who had abandoned him when he was a small child, to devote herself body and soul to her music and the hitherto unknown existence of a daughter born to Amela Jenson, the child he can never know.

The everyday horrors of a city subjected to enemy artillery, without water, without food, without electricity, and the fragility of life that, at every corner, is exposed to the chance bullets of sharpshooters are powerfully present in the novel. They enthral the reader by means of a set of letters written by the city's inhabitants who, like the chorus of a Greek tragedy, interrupt the thread of the story to sketch, through the experiences they describe, a choral portrait of life in a city under siege.

The novel constitutes a contemporary re-reading of Orpheus' descent into Hades, a parable about how, surrounded by war and horror, the human being finds refuge in beauty. The power of music and the ability to invent stories and imagine worlds ease the burdens of survival. The stories of Andreas Hymer and his mother speak, too, of the price that is paid for total surrender to a burning passion. The letters written by the city's inhabitants, a backdrop to the story, remind one of how simple it is to learn the art of losing and how easy to accept dispossession when one might very well be dead tomorrow.

The structure of the novel alternates between the main story and the texts of the letters, concealing until the end the bond that joins them. As Márquez had already done in *Cinc nits de febrer*, he remains true to his stylistic commitment, still telling the story in third person and rigorously present tense but on this occasion he takes greater leaps in time and with the frequent flashbacks of his main characters. Despite the difficulty of this challenge, his articulation with the main story is grippingly successful because of the immediacy of the memories described.

La decisió de BrandesMárquez's most recent novel, *La decisió de Brandes* [The Decision of Brandes] (2006), winner of the 2005 Octavi Pellissa Prize and the 2006 Catalan Critics' Prize,

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presents the reader with an elderly, ailing painter who evokes the events that have marked his life. In his first-person biographical account, disorderly and subject to the whims of memory, he gropes for the key piece that will explain and justify his existence. This he finds in a decision he had been obliged to take many years before, in occupied Paris during the Second World War. An envoy sent by Hermann Göring had then offered him the chance of recovering about sixty of his paintings that had been confiscated by the Nazis if he handed over a work in his possession by the German sixteenth-century master Lucas Cranach, the favourite painter of Hitler's henchman. His choice was between submitting to blackmail and losing all his work.

La decisió de Brandes is a moral dilemma with which the painter Georges Braque was faced in real life, although we do not know what happened in the end. Eduard Márquez picks up the story and suggests a possible decision by means of creating an imaginary painter, Brandes, and a life that would justify it, set in the convulsive history of twentieth-century Europe: his experience of two world wars, the National-Socialist context of his family, the death of a son, the Nazi pressure with regard to "degenerate art", exile, his relationship with a concentration-camp survivor, the evolution of his ideas about art, et cetera. Only at the end of the book is the surprising decision taken by Brandes revealed and made understandable.

This novel renders tribute, in the midst of all the megalomania and bombast of today's world, to the grandeur of small revolts and discrete forms of opposition to oppression, to the dignity of defending something we deem to be inalienable, however modest it may be. The story thus becomes a true declaration of its creator's ethical position, one that both Braque and Brandes share with Márquez: constant work, humility, perfectionism and patience.

La decisió de Brandes is the first novel that Márquez has written in first person and given context in space and time. This is all the more reason for appreciating the rigour of documentation and detail that were already evident in *El silenci dels arbres* and that, discretely, without excess, is always in the service of verisimilitude. The narrative device the author constructs and that he faithfully respects in articulating the apparently chaotic discourse of the main character is completely imperceptible to the reader.

Márquez's Work as an Organic Whole Eduard Márquez's literary work constitutes an organic whole. His production of poems, novels for adults and stories for children grows like a living being to create an unmistakable personal universe. Even though he is working with different stories, characters and genres and addressing different audiences, everything he does contributes towards creating a world that is both coherent and full of thematic and stylistic resonances.

One basic thematic concern structures the whole of Márquez's literary production: the issue of identity. Who are we? How can we fill our existence? Why do we do this and not that? How, beyond piling up vital but disjointed acts and episodes, can we try to give sense to our lives? His intuition is that we are what we tell ourselves we are. "Sooner or later every person invents a story that he or she believes is his or her life. Or a whole series of stories", says Genzmer in *Punt de fuga* [Vanishing Point], the story that opens *L'eloqüència del franc tirador*. If the explanation we give ourselves about ourselves is what gives sense to our existence, then the form in which we construct the tale takes on crucial importance, as does the tool we use to do so: memory, Márquez's other declared obsession.

When the story fails, the characters are thrust into irrational adventures in search of an identity, which is what happens in *Zugzwang* and *L'eloqüència del franc tirador*. Only when it is possible to recover the past, as happens with the main characters of *Cinc nits de febrer*, *El silenci dels arbres* and *La*

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decisió de Brandes, is the story completed and then everything makes sense. In the books for children, too - where a fantastic being can become anything it wants, or a knight tires being immortal, or a boy negotiates with his image in a mirror, or a little girl envies the dreams of her friends - we find the author's recurring concerns.

If one of the functions of literature is to make us question our existence and participate with the author in this inquiry so that, in the best of cases, we may share with him some small, helpful finding, then what Eduard Márquez does is Literature with a capital L. He has something to say and a special way of saying it.

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AUDIO: Núria Blanchart Ilegeix *La XXL i l'Octet Maleït*, d'Eduard Márquez

<http://soundcloud.com/lletra/la-xxl-i-loctet-male-t-eduard>



AUDIO: Núria Blanchart Ilegeix *L'últim dia abans de demà*, d'Eduard Márquez

<http://soundcloud.com/lletra/l-ultim-dia-abans-de-dem-eduard>



AUDIO: Núria Blanchart Ilegeix *El silenci dels arbres*, d'Eduard Márquez

<http://soundcloud.com/lletra/el-silenci-dels-arbres-eduard>

Bio-bibliography

Biography



WEB: A la Hiperenciclopèdia

http://www.enciclopedia.cat/fitxa_v2.jsp?NDCHEC=0518191



WEB: Fitxa al "Qui és qui a les lletres catalanes"

<http://cultura.gencat.net/ilc/qqq/FitxaAutors.asp?nom1=M%E1rquez&cerca2=Cercar&quiform=form1&NRegistre=1&idregistre=8777>



WEB: A la Viquipèdia

Nota biogràfica i obra de l'autor al web de l'enciclopèdia lliure.

http://ca.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eduard_Márquez



WEB: The author in the Who's Who of Catalan Literature

<http://cultura.gencat.net/ilc/qqq/FitxaAutorsuk.asp?nom1=m%E1rquez&cercauk2=Search&quiform=form1&NRegistre=2&idregistre=8777>

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WEB: Què hi ha a la Biblioteca de Catalunya

http://cataleg.bnc.cat/search*cat/?searchtype=a&searcharg=M%C3%A1rquez+Eduard&sortdropdown=-&searchscope=13&searchscope2=13&SORT=D



WEB: Què hi ha a les biblioteques universitàries catalanes (CCUC)

http://ccuc.cbuc.cat/search*cat/a?SEARCH=M%C3%A1rquez+Eduard+1960&sortdropdown=-&searchscope=23



WEB: Què hi ha a les biblioteques públiques

<http://argus.biblioteques.gencat.cat/iii/encore/search/C|SM%C3%A1rquez+Eduard|Orightresult|U1?lang=cat&suite=pearl>



WEB: Per comprar-ne llibres

<http://www.llibres.cat/ca/detall-autor/marquez-eduard>



WEB: Articles sobre l'autor (Traces)

http://traces.uab.cat/search?ln=ca&p=M%C3%A1rquez%2C+Eduard&f=keyword&action_search=Cerca&c=Traces+%3A+base+de+dades+de+llengua+i+literatura+catalanes&sf=&so=d&rm=&rg=10&sc=1&of=hb



WEB: Works in the Biblioteca de Catalunya

http://cataleg.bnc.cat/search*eng/?searchtype=a&searcharg=M%C3%A1rquez+Eduard&sortdropdown=-&searchscope=13&searchscope2=13&SORT=D



WEB: The author in The European Library

<http://search.theeuropeanlibrary.org/portal/en/search/%28%22creator%22+all+%22m%C3%A1rquez+eduard%22%29.query>



WEB: The author in the Congress Library (US)

<http://catalog.loc.gov/cgi-bin/Pwebrecon.cgi?DB=local&PAGE=First>



WEB: The author in the COPAC Catalogue (UK)

<http://copac.ac.uk/search?&au=Eduard+M%C3%A1rquez>

Comments on the author

Criticism



WEB: Web de l'autor

Amb una exhaustiva informació sobre totes les seves obres.

<http://www.eduardmarquez.com/>



WEB: Eduard Márquez a l'AELC

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Inclou biografia, obra, premis, entrevistes, referències crítiques i fragments de la seva obra.

<http://www.escriptors.cat/autors/marqueze/>



WEB: Taller virtual amb Eduard Márquez

L'any 2007, lletrA i l'Escola de l'Espectura de l'Ateneu Barcelonès van convidar l'escriptor a parlar del procés creatiu que duu a l'espectura d'un conte.

<http://www.uoc.edu/lletra/especials/colloqui2007/>



WEB: Márquez a De llibres

Márquez conversa amb Vivenc Vilatoro, Natza Farré i Enrique Vila-Matas a propòsit de *La decisió de Brandes*. Al programa *De llibres* de TV3 (27/10/06).

<http://www.tv3.cat/videos/215553250>



WEB: Eduard Márquez on the lletrA website in Catalan

Including more resources.

<http://www.lletra.cat/noms/eduardmarquez/>



WEB: Eduard Márquez's Web Page

With detailed information about all Márquez's works.

<http://telefonica.net/web2/eduardmarquez/>



WEB: Eduard Márquez in AELC (Association of Catalan Language Writers)

Includes biography, works, prizes, interviews, critical references and fragments of his work.

http://www.escriptors.cat/autors/marqueze/pagina.php?id_sec=2317

Miscellaneous



WEB: Márquez, premi de la Crítica 2006

El narrador va guanyar el premi de la crítica 2006 per *La decisió de Brandes*.

http://www.lamalla.net/actualitat_cultural/literatura/article?id=164842



WEB: Márquez in Munich

The Cervantes Institute of Munich invited Marquez to speak about his novel *El silenci dels arbres* [The Silence of Trees] in February 2005.

http://www.cervantes-muenchen.de/de/02_kultur/archiv/01_2005/Markquez.html

Comments



WEB: Eduard Márquez i Georges Braque

Aproximació a *La decisió de Brandes*, la novel·la sobre la persecució de Braque per part dels nazis. A *El Mundo* (24/09/06).

<http://www.elmundo.es/papel/2006/09/24/cultura/2028695.html>



WEB: L'expol·li artístic dels nazis

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Sergi Dòria parla dels personatges de *La decisió de Brandes* a l'*Abc* (20/09/06).

http://www.abc.es/hemeroteca/historico-20-09-2006/abc/Cultura/en-la-decision-de-brandes-eduard-marquez-enfrenta-a-braque-y-goering_1423381147811.html



WEB: "Tu tries"

Ressenya de *La decisió de Brandes* a Vilaweb Lletres (11/09/2006).

http://www.vilaweb.cat/www/noticia?p_idcmp=2052865



WEB: Sobre El silenci dels arbres

Breu comentari i fragment d'aquesta obra de l'autor al bloc Ariadna al laberint grotesc.

<http://laberintgrotesc.blogspot.com/2008/10/el-silenci-dels-arbres.html>



WEB: On Cinc nits de febrer [Five Nights in February]

Review of the German translation of this novel by Eduard Márquez on the Kritische Ausgabe web page.

<http://kritische-ausgabe.de/index.php/archiv/767/>



WEB: On Cinc nits de febrer

Another review of the German translation of this novel by Márquez, on the Eckfenster web page.

<http://www.eckfenster.de/wordpress/?p=38>