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David Castillo



The Poet David Castillo

Ferran Aisa

David Castillo is a journalist, critic, novelist and poet. From his youth he has been a tireless cultural activist and hence has brought together a range of alternative groups

organising and directing poetry festivals while also working as director of cultural supplements in the mainstream press. His poetic and novelistic works are characterised by a sparseness of form, relentless sincerity, rock motifs and Barcelona settings.

David Castillo imbibes of the very essence of life and, wherever he is, he gleans the poetic spirit transforming it into a geographic imaginary: Barcelona's Barri Xino (once the old city's red-light district), the neighbourhood of Carmel, the Rambla, the seaside town of Castelldefels, and Montevideo, New York or Manila. *Downtown* (Icaria, 2005) is his latest book, written in Catalan and Spanish, and its poems were born in long walks around the city of skyscrapers, before and after 11 September.

Downtown is no tourist jaunt but a journey through human desolation that invites the reader to listen to life's heartbeat: in the Nuroyican Poets Cafè, Spanish Harlem, the Bronx and Times Square. In "Loisaida", Castillo moves between memory and the melancholy of time. The second part of the book includes a song to the young inmates of Barcelona's Trinitat prison, while the collection ends with the Spanish-language piece "Montevideo blues" and the reappearance of David "Dylan" Castillo, while "Dejemos hablar al viento" (Let the Wind Speak) is a performance by the absurd Camusian of *El malentendido* (The Misunderstanding).

David Castillo (Barcelona, 1961), is a poet and journalist. His first writing was published in 1975 when, at fourteen years of age, he was working as an office boy in the Banco Ibérico. In 1976 he joined the CNT (the anarchosindicalist National Labour Confederation). This was the period of libertarian "barricades", permanent parties on the Rambla, the first demonstrations (after the Franco dictatorship), Ocaña's Carnival, the Café de l'Òpera, Christa Leem's stripteases, counter-propaganda stalls in the streets, counterculture performances, Libertarian Sessions and everyone dragging on collective hash. Alternative publications were making their presence felt: *Ajoblanco*, *Viejo Topo*, *Alfalfa*, *Topo Avizor*, and *Star* ... and then there were the fanzines *Cloaca*, *Fuera de Banda*, *Trotón*, *Tricopo* and the comic *El Rollo enmascarado*. All of this went hand-in-hand with the soundtracks of Bowie, Dylan and Lou Reed, among others. It was a time of continuous debates, never-ending discussion emanating from libertarian ideas, situationism and nexialism. Castillo's involvement in radical politics led to his arrest. That Republic "A" on the Rambla was so free that it was "militarily" occupied by the police. Jaume Sisa described it in one of his songs: "They have closed the Rambla / everyone's thrown out / they have emptied the trees / of the flowers and the birds."

The young poet's education is completed with his methodical reading of the world's great poets: Cernuda, García Lorca, Aleixandre, Vallejo, Larrea, [Vinyoli](#), [Bonet](#), Rimbaud, Ashbery, Blake, Milton, Yeats, Coleridge, Auden, Corso ... and he then mixes them together with the metaphysical ingredient of pure philosophy and the dynamic power of pop music. The poet's path is marked by his contact

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with real-world circumstances, in the neighbourhoods of his city and in suburbs elsewhere in the world to which he would be no stranger. Castillo, born in Poble Nou, has harvested the imaginary of the working-class districts of his city, among them Carmel, la Ribera, la Barceloneta, and the Barri Xino.

At the beginning of the 1980s he started to participate in poetry readings in libertarian venues, the bars of the Gràcia neighbourhood and other parts of the city. In this poetic journey, he was accompanied by Jesús Lizano, Pope, [Enric Casasses](#), Joan Vinuesa, "Oaixí", etc.. Àngel Carmona, director of La Pipironda, also organised poetry and theatrical events that did the rounds of the alternative spaces of Barcelona. In 1985, David Castillo joined the board of the Junta de l'Ateneu Enciclopèdic Popular (AEP - People's Athenaeum), which was then housed in the Casa de Caritat. His period in the AEP coincided with meetings held by old anarchist militants, who were always generous with young people who wanted to take the road to Ithaca. By this time, Castillo was embarking on his career as a journalist and he was writing for *El País*, *La Vanguardia* and, after 1988, *Avui*, while also being published in the reviews *El Món*, *El Temps* among others. In the 1990s he became director of the Culture Supplement of *Avui*, director of *Lletra de Canvi*, and wrote for the prestigious literary publications, *Quimera*, *Insula*, *Leer*, *Qué leer?*, etc.. He has coordinated the Barcelona Poetry Week since 1995 and has become an outstanding member of the Catalan literary world.

In 1992, David Castillo brought out *La muntanya russa* (The Roller-coaster) with the Lleida-based publishing house Editorial Pagès. This book is full of city images from Valencia, Rome, Barcelona? Castillo says that, at this stage of his life, he wanted to laugh, cry and experience high-speed changes of mood. The poems in *La muntanya russa* are from the 1980s and one of them is even from "long-ago 1978". The persistence of time slides over the verses and rushes down the roller-coaster slopes. "La destrucció i l'amor" (Destruction and Love), a title inspired by Alexandre, is a baroque poem, a kind of continuation of the tableau of Saint Jeronimo. The poems in *La muntanya russa* highlight limitless creation and memory's wanderings in time. "La Riba de Sant Nicolau de Bari" (The Shore of Saint Nicholas of Bari), which, in "Menta", is titled "El Riu" (The River), is a poem with biblical connotations filtered through Rimbaud and Dylan. The title poem of the collection, "La muntanya russa", which is imbued with Descartes' thought, has the same rhythm. Castillo's second collection of poems, entitled *Tenebra* (Dark - Els llibres de l'Óssa menor, 1994), sets out from the previous path, with time again as protagonist, this time seen through the prism of Bergson, with hints, between light and shadow, of Hegel, and the literary creativity of Dylan Thomas. In *Tenebra*, we again find references to Rome, the mythical Café Greco, the Via Condotti, Santa Maria del Popolo and San Luigi de Francesi, Caravaggio and Castell de Sant'Angello. In the second part of the collection *Rapsodies canalles* (Scoundrel Rhapsodies), the voices of Lou Reed, Pasolini and Bob Dylan make a reappearance and there is a pervasive presence of the tragic verses to which Gypsy women dance to the beat of a Maquisard ballad that takes us to the figure of Bobby Sands, the IRA militant who died on hunger strike. In the poem "Calze d'absenta" (Absinthe Cup), while apocalyptic angels from the Bible stroll through the Barri Xino, the poet reveals his generational "ego" and, perchance, invites the Evangelist John to an absinthe at the Marsella.

David Castillo has also published a biography of Bob Dylan (Caixa de Catalunya, 1992). The myth of Dylan is part of the Barcelona poet's landscape and hence the biographical symbiosis is not just desire but also reality. His narration of the American singer's life can be read like a song *Love minus zero / no limit*, the expression of his great passion for the poet from Minnesota.

In his Prologue to the collection *En terra de nadie* (In No Man's Land), David Castillo states that if *La*

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mntanya russa and *Tenebra* are sisters, *Game Over* and *El pont de Mühlberg* (Mühlberg Bridge) are twin sisters. With *Game Over* (Proa-1998) he was awarded the Carles Riba Prize, the most prestigious award for Catalan poetry. Castillo's Barcelona imaginary moves through the verses of *Game Over*, which delves into the poetry of the Bible and then brings it down to the world of the street. A blend of Anglo-Saxon and local culture is the literary stuff of the book along with Castillo's literary myths and fantasies: Fonollosa, Artaud, Burroughs, Tennessee Williams, Lorca and, above all, Dylan, are all present in the verses of *Game Over*, which is perhaps his best book. David Castillo's poetic myths are shades that have taken refuge in the spirit of his verses: Rimbaud, Christ, Commander Zero, Dylan, Reed, Dostoevsky, The Ramones, Prince, Bakunin, John Keats, Yeats, Che Guevara and more. In "En via morta" (At a Dead End) the poet moves on to a no-exit track, a cul-de-sac of feelings. The poem "Bandera negra" (Black Flag) is not just about the colour of the flag but also a state of mind, black, pitch black, the poet's fierce struggle with his most intimate self. Leonard Cohen is not far from the poem that closes the book, "Last Ball", which might be the waltz of the last night of a lost love. Once again we find the path of angels in *El pont de Mühlberg* (Proa, 2000), along with obsession, desire, reality, fable, love and indifference. Desolation and life are concepts that seem to be antithetical, and yet there are times when they complement one another. The poems in *El pont de Mühlberg* are a sample of the poetic spirit that runs through his earlier work in *Game Over*, especially in the poem "Els estigmes sense passió" (Passionless Stigmas). David Castillo is a poet who works with ideas while managing to avoid ideological pitfalls because that would be to diminish the quality of his poetry. His epic spirit is marked by an acid romanticism that situates him at a far remove from post-modern poets and empty poets with nothing to say. Castillo, the poet from Carmel, narrates the reality of a Barcelona epic with its main thrust residing in *El pont de Mühlberg*. In this book he physically moves through the most intimate and seamy corners of the city, in quest of an impossible dream, cursing his own despair. It is an itinerary through the path of love and indifference, sex, drugs and rock. Thus the poet finds escape in his "Place Contrescarpe" (Place de la Contraescarpe). This book is also a literary itinerary through the neighbourhood of Carmel, which has recently been submitted to the voracious assault of "progress". The emblematic poem "Rambla del Carmel" (Carmel Rambla) is a song to despair.

El pont de Mühlberg begins with the artillery of an air raid shelter from the Civil War, but now it is a lookout. It is war, it is war! Love, rage, indifference, fortune and misfortune, anger? In "Malles de pell de lleopard" (Leopard-skin Tights) Castillo clings to his sorrows drowned in gin. Gregory Corso is present in some of these poetic musings and this is how the American writes. In the poem "La realitat i el desig" (Reality and Desire), we find Cernuda, the poet of love and doubt and also of the languid memory of time. The craft of the poet has no quarrel with irony, or with sarcasm or with cynicism. Salvat-Papasseit said that the useless sense of art was what really gave it value. Castillo says in an interview with *Solidaridad Obrera*, that this useless trade is his *raison d'être*. And in the end notes of *El pont de Mühlberg* he reveals that, with these poems, he has written an elegiac canto to friends who have fallen by the wayside, friends who had so much influence on his literary beginnings (Pere Marcilla, Albert Subirats and Ángel Crespo). David Castillo is steeped in noble sentiments and is the best friend of his friends. He has published a portrait of Pere Marcilla, founder of the no-longer existing bookshop Cosa Nostra, in *Poètica de la contracultura* (Counter-culture Poetry) published by Genís Cano and the University of Barcelona press.

David Castillo has not specialised in any one genre. He is also a prize-winning novelist with *El cel de l'infern* (Hell's Sky, 1999), winner of the Joan Crexells Prize, and *No miris enrere* (2001), winner of the Sant Jordi (Saint George) Prize. Recently, he has published several bilingual (Catalan and Spanish) anthologies of his poetry, *Bandera negra* (Madrid, 2001) and *En Tierra de nadie* (Malaga, 2002), with poems from published and unpublished collections, *Doble Zero* (Double Zero) and *Esquena nua*

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(Bare Back). In *Bandera negra* is the poem "Mala memòria" (Bad Memory) from *Seguint l'huracà* (Following the Hurricane) (Tarragona, 2000).

Ferran Aisa (published in *Caravansari* N° 1, Primer Semester, 2006)

A selection of texts

Text



WEB: "La sinceridad es una herida suave"

Versió en castellà d'un poema del llibre *Bandera negra*. A la revista *Lateral* (abril 2001).
<http://www.circulolateral.com/revista/tema/076castillo.htm>



WEB: "Tango de la Barceloneta"

Un inèdit aparegut a *El País* (24/06/2006).
http://www.elpais.es/articulo/narrativa/Tango/Barceloneta/elpbabnar/20060624elpbabnar_13/Tes/



WEB: Pàgina de Magisteri Teatre-Mag Poesia

Inclou poemes i citacions de l'autor.
<http://www.mallorcaweb.com/magteatre/castillo/index.html>



WEB: Al Daltabaix Poètic!

Quatre poemes de l'autor en aquest web de poesia que acull poetes de tendències ben diferents.
<http://www.sant-cugat.net/daltabaix/castillo.htm>



WEB: "L'ull en el cel"

Un poema de l'autor al web *Viu la poesia*.
http://www.viulapoesia.com/pagina_2.php?itinerari=8&tipus=1&subtipus=2&idpoema=53



WEB: "Tango de la Barceloneta" (Barceloneta Tango)

Previously unpublished poem in *El País* (24/6/2006).
http://www.elpais.es/articulo/narrativa/Tango/Barceloneta/elpbabnar/20060624elpbabnar_13/Tes/



WEB: David Castillo in Daltabaix Poètic!

Four poems by David Castillo offered by this independent poetry website.
<http://www.sant-cugat.net/daltabaix/castillo.htm>

Bio-bibliography

Biography



WEB: A la Hiperenciclopèdia

http://www.enciclopedia.cat/fitxa_v2.jsp?NDCHEC=0247084

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

<http://cultura.gencat.net/ilc/peq/FitxaAutors.asp?nom1=cas&cerca=Cerca&quiform=form1&NRegistre=57&idregistre=4303>



WEB: A la Viquipèdia

Breu biografia i obra de l'autor al web de l'enciclopèdia lliure.

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



WEB: David Castillo a l'Institut Ramon Llull

Nota biobibliogràfica dins l'espai dedicat a la Fira Internacional del Llibre de Guadalajara 2004.

<http://fil04.llull.cat/cat/02protagonistes/CastilloDavid.shtm>



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

<http://cultura.gencat.net/ilc/peq/FitxaAutorsuk.asp?nom1=castillo&cercauk2=Search&quiform=form1&NRegistre=2&idregistre=4303>



WEB: Poetes catalans d'ara

Exposició amb referències biobibliogràfiques i enllaços d'Internet, elaborada per la Biblioteca d'Humanitats de la UAB.

<http://ddd.uab.cat/pub/expbib/2009/poetes/davidcastillo.htm>



WEB: David Castillo in the Ramon Llull Institute

Biobibliographical note on this author on a page devoted to the Guadalajara International Book Fair.

<http://fil04.llull.cat/eng/02protagonistes/CastilloDavid.shtm>



WEB: Catalan Poets of Today

Exhibition with bio-bibliographic references and Internet links, produced by the Humanities Library of the Autonomous University of Barcelona.

<http://ddd.uab.cat/pub/expbib/2009/poetes/davidcastillo.htm>

Bibliography



WEB: Què hi ha a la Biblioteca de Catalunya

http://cataleg.bnc.cat/search*cat/?searchtype=a&searcharg=Castillo+David+1961&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=Castillo+David+1961&sortdropdown=-&searchscope=23



WEB: Què hi ha a les biblioteques públiques

<http://argus.biblioteques.gencat.cat/iii/encore/search/C|SCastillo+David|Orightresult|U1?lang=cat&suite=pearl>

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WEB: Per comprar-ne llibres

<http://www.llibres.cat/ca/detall-autor/castillo-david>



WEB: Articles de l'autor (Traces)

<http://traces.uab.cat/search?f=author&p=Castillo%20David&sc=1&ln=ca>



WEB: Articles sobre l'autor (Traces)

http://traces.uab.cat/search?ln=ca&p=Castillo%2C+David&f=keyword&action_search=Cerca&c=Traces+%3A+base+de+dades+de+lengua+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=Castillo+David+1961&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+%22castillo+david%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=David+Castillo>

Comments on the author

Criticism



WEB: L'autor al Corpus Literari Ciutat de Barcelona

Biografia, enllaços i transcripció d'articles sobre Castillo.

http://www.ducros.biz/corpus/index.php?command=show_news&news_id=456



PDF: "Panorama des del vell antiaeri"

Ressenya de J. J. Isern sobre la novel·la *No miris enrere*. A l'*Avui* (07/03/2002).

<http://www.traces.uab.es/tracesbd/avui/av04010.pdf>



PDF: Menta i altres poemes

Sam Abrams parla sobre la nova antologia de David Castillo i del seu disc compacte *Menta*. Al diari *Avui* (28/09/2005)

<http://www.traces.uab.es/tracesbd/avui/av06251.pdf>



WEB: David Castillo in the City of Barcelona Literary Corpus

Biography, links and transcription of articles on this author.

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http://www.ducros.biz/corpus/index.php?command=show_news&news_id=456



WEB: Magisteri Teatre-Mag Poetry Page

Includes poems by Castillo and quotes.

<http://www.mallorcaweb.com/magteatre/castillo/index.html>



WEB: Activitats per treballar "L'ull en el cel"

Un poema amb propostes al web *Viu la poesia*.

http://www.viulapoesia.com/pagina_6.php?tipus=1&subtipus=2&itinerari=8&idpoema=53