



Interview

WRITER VICENÇ PAGÈS TALKS TO CATALONIA TODAY ABOUT HIS LATEST BOOK, "FROM ROBINSON CRUSOE TO PETER PAN"

■ "I am particularly bothered by the fact that highschools present horrible books about anorexic girls, drugs or gender violence as literature."



De Robinson Crusoe a Peter Pan

By Vicenç Pagès. Proa. 256 pages. €14

De Robinson Crusoe a Peter Pan is a canon of teenagers' literature, in which the author carries out an analysis of present reading tastes and suggests different ways of encouraging younger generations to read 19th century classics.

"Bad readers make incomplete citizens"

MARCELA TOPOR

● – How do you define the book and what are you trying to say?

My aim is to save a set of books from oblivion, that have been enjoyed for generations and that have been substituted by other minor works, that deal with present times and are deceptively easy. I am particularly bothered by the fact that high-schools present horrible books about anorexic girls, drugs or gender violence as literature.

—What exactly does the title mean?

It reflects the temporal limits of the books on my list: *Robinson Crusoe*, one of the first books considered as modern, and *Peter Pan*, a book which anticipates post-modernity when creating a myth from other literary myths (pirates, fairies, sirens), and which I consider to be the swan song of childrens' literature.

—How did you choose the 28 books included in this canon (even Dracula is on the list!)

It has been an experiment: I tried to re-read the books I liked when I was a teenager, but through the eyes of a teenager of our times. I found inspiration in students, family, memories. Some works, such as books by Salgari and Karl May, disappeared during the process. I was guided by feelings, but especially by readability.

—Why are most books from the canon by Anglo-Saxon writers?

The genre of children's literature was initially Anglo-Saxon, just like the troubadours' art is from Provence and picaresque literature is Castilian. Then other languages came along, and made it theirs, like rock, that could be sung in Finnish or Swahili.

—Who is the book aimed at?

People who think teenagers should read books that are enjoyable and have literary quality at the same time. I guess I am referring to parents, teachers, friends, neighbours and family. It can also be useful for teenagers, not just when choosing a book, but also when they need to do one of these tedious projects that some teachers still set as homework.

—You said this is a sentimental book. Why?



Vicenç Pagès tries his hand at saving the classics of the 19th century Anglo-Saxon literature from oblivion / L. CRUSET

Re-reading all of these works has been an exercise in nostalgia. When we are young, we read with all our body, without the distance we build later on. Reading *The Three Musketeers* at 16 is an experience that nobody should allow themselves to lose.

—Which is your favourite?

It depends on the day. I am still surprised by the capacity of compassion and analysis of Jane Austen in *Northanger Abbey*, a book that shows that most teenager actions and reactions we see in many sentimental comedies of today are at least 200 years old.

—Why have today's teenagers lost their taste for the classics?

The proof that they haven't totally lost it is the success of the *Harry Potter* books that preceded the success of the films. Actually, *Harry Potter* reproduces the narrative structure of children's classics of the 19th century, such as *The Prisoner of*

Zenda, *Peter Pan* or *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*.

—Is there any chance of recovering the taste for quality literature (the kind that deserves to be re-read, which is, accord-

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ing to you, real literature)?

Not all, but a part, yes. I want to highlight the kind of literature that has been marginalised, that only gets to young readers through more recent works such as *The Lord of the Rings* or *The Chronicles of Narnia*.

—You say that after reading it

is better not to force students to write papers. Which are the best strategies to encourage the taste for quality books?

Reading is a solitary activity. What I find stimulating, after finishing a book, is talking about it with other readers, commenting on the characters, their expectations, the ending... A written paper, in contrast, is a major effort that does not offer any pleasure, and that the teacher often reads superficially.

—Bad readers make bad writers?

There is no doubt about it. Imagination can be learnt through really imaginative works, not through products that try to be so up-to-date, that end up becoming antiquated after 20 years. The worst is not reading shallow books, but making teenagers believe that they are literature. Bad readers make incomplete citizens.