

cultado, por la ausencia de un índice onomástico que concierte la gran cantidad de información que encierran estas páginas.

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## CREACIÓN

Carmen Riera. *Cuestión de amor propio*, Barcelona, Tusquets, 1988, 77 pp.

First published in Catalan in 1987, this short novel now appears in a translation to Castilian by the author herself. Riera, one of the «Mallorcan School» of young women narrators in Catalan, has previously published four books of fiction and a good number of essays in Castilian, many dealing with Spanish literature, which she teaches at the Universidad Autónoma de Barcelona. While still relatively young, Riera is in no sense a novice.

With its seventy-seven pages of rather large type, *Cuestión de amor propio* might be considered a long short story, and other significant aspects likewise suggest the appropriateness of classing it within this genre: limitation of characters (only two of real importance), considerable concentration of action and still more of emotion, and temporal limitation (a month and a half duration for the central story). However, certain elements argue in favor of terming *Cuestión de amor propio* a novel or novelette. The epistolary form — the entire work comprises a single letter written by a middle-aged novelist to her friend in Scandinavia — «opens» the narrative temporally, introducing an implicit and occasionally explicit past when the two were together. Similarly, the epistolary structure introduces implicit characters, physically distant but mentally present: the friend addressed, other associates of the two. Such references expand the text beyond the normal scope of the short story. Past time and absent characters are peripheral; they function as a frame for the central narrative.

Angela Caminals, the letter-writing narrator-protagonist, is a Catalan writer and intellectual connected with an academic environment in which attending literary conferences and reading professional papers are part of the routine. Professor, writer, critic

with a similar age and ethnic background, she is sufficiently like Riera to be a mask of the novelist, which is not to imply that the text is a memoir. It is textually impossible to establish the line separating autobiography of personal experience from what is fiction. Clearly, Riera knows the ambient described quite well, and one or more characters may have real life models. There are mentions of living writers and critics (e.g. — p. 68 — Robert Saladrigas of *La Vanguardia*), as well as intertextual references to many extant texts and characters, both contemporary and historical. The necessary ingredients for a *roman a cle* are present — which does not indicate that *Cuestión de amor propio* actually refers to identifiable persons.

Angela ostensibly responds to a letter from Ingrid, her absent interlocutor, berating her for an extended break in the correspondence between the two. She explains her silence as the result of a deep depression caused by an unhappy, humiliating love affair. At a writers' and critics' conference in Valencia, the star attraction was Miguel, an egotistical, superficial counterpart of the current best-seller. Angela challenged his interpretations publicly during the discussion period, mainly as a means of ensuring that he notice her. Sexually and emotionally inactive since a separation or divorce seven years earlier, she was overwhelmed by Miguel. Evidently a Don Juan, he nonetheless devoted himself during the remainder of the conference to her, seeming to coincide with her tastes in everything and acceding to her request to postpone sexual contact for a future meeting. The intervening month is filled with phone calls, flowers and letters, and although Miguel is married with children, he suggests a possible divorce. Completely infatuated, Angela prepares for their tryst, perfecting each detail — «their» wine, «their» music [Mozart], «their» flowers [orchids]. Painfully aware of her faded charms, she longs to sell her soul to Mephistopheles in exchange for the youthful beauty of Margarita. After the climactic night, Miguel fabricates an unavoidable meeting, breaking all contact. Angela's progressively more frantic attempts to re-establish communication are coolly, firmly rejected. A series of humiliations fails to prepare her, however, for the shock, shame and indignation when Miguel's next novel proves to be the thinly veiled story of their love affair — only the names have been changed. Analyzing the relationship as she writes the letter, Angela realizes

the essential narcissism: what Miguel «loved» in her was her adoration of himself. But while attracted physically by Miguel, she began to «love» him only when she believed him to be a reflection of her own tastes and opinions. Considerable cynicism imbues Riera's bitter implication that all love is reducible ultimately to a *Cuestión de amor propio*.

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JANET PÉREZ

Maria Antònia Oliver. *Antípodes*, Edicions de la Magrana, 1988, 235 pp.

Sailing on stormy seas (both literal and figurative) in her second adventure, Lònia Guiu, the Mallorcan detective invented by Maria Antònia Oliver, once again manages to turn the *roman noir* on its often sexist ear. Guiu, who first appeared in 1987 in *Estudi en lila* (translated into English by Kathleen McNerny, Seal Press, 1987), is a strong, intelligent woman who immigrated from the island to Barcelona as the Franco dictatorship was creaking to an end, and moved from department store detecting through clandestine political activities to her own small private investigation firm, aided by her male assistant and secretary, Quim. While *Estudi en lila* took a cold look at rape in the Catalan society and the exploitation of Filipino maids, *Antípodes* deals with prostitution and, ironically, the way shallow values in the Mallorcan upper crust sometimes lead the island's own daughters to sell their bodies.

In clear, flexible Catalan with Mallorcan-flavored dialogue Oliver constructs her plot with a logical sequence of events and a deftly surprising ending.

The book's sexual politics are also conveyed clearly and without pamphleteering, and Oliver passes with ease from the sensitive description of Quim's coming out, to the unembarrassed presentation of Lonia's sexual and affective needs. Particularly adept is Oliver's variation played on the theme of the detective who sets out to rescue a pretty young girl caught up in the web of prostitution, a situation in which the male detective is often propelled by sexual desire masked as paternal or chivalrous concern. Oliver's inversion of this scheme is brilliant, and constitutes