

## In Memoriam: Marion Peter Holt

It is with great sadness that we report the passing of one of the most dedicated and appreciated supporters of this journal, Marion Peter Holt. Marion was one of the founding members of the editorial board of *Western European Stages* in 1989 and remained with us when the journal changed to *European Stages* in 2013. He contributed in no small part to our continued strong coverage of the contemporary Spanish and Catalan stage through all these years. Of course these contributions were only a small, if typical example of the life-long service Marion performed in bringing knowledge of the contemporary Spanish and Catalan theatre to the English-speaking world. His death has inspired many tributes on both sides of the Atlantic, including the following, which incorporates the observations of a number of leading figures in the dramatic world of Spain and Catalonia. It was assembled for the digital journal *Núvol* by Jaume Forés Juliana for the issue of 17/08/2021 and is here reproduced with the kind permission of that journal:

We often hear about the excellent international reputation that the Catalan theatre is enjoying, but this reputation would not have been possible without the intervention of good translator ambassadors. One key such figure was the author and translator Marion Peter Holt, who, through his translations, helped to spread knowledge of Catalan and Spanish drama throughout the United States. A Professor Emeritus of Theatre at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York, and a member of the Real Academia Española since 1986, he translated into English such major authors as Josep Maria Benet i Jornet, Àngels Aymar, Sergi Belbel, Marta Buchaca, Guillem Clua and Lluïsa Cunillé. The news of his death this Sunday in New York, has shaken the Catalan theatre, which mourns the loss of one of its most staunch American champions.

### Guillem Clua

Playwright, director and screenwriter. National Prize for Dramatic Literature 2020.

Marion and I had a friendship that went beyond the professional relationship we've had over the last few years. He was one of the first people who became interested in my works when I moved to New York in 2006 and helped me in my first steps in that rather hostile city, promoting my few texts in the academic and publishing fields where he had influence despite them not being his translations. I had already heard about him, because he carried out a tireless task of translating and disseminating contemporary Catalan drama (at that time focused on texts by Josep Maria Benet i Jornet, with whom he had a great friendship, and Sergi Belbel).

He was always very curious to discover new authors and help them in any way possible. Thus, he immediately offered to translate my works *Marburg*, *The Promised Land* and *Smiley*. Thanks to him I had the opportunity to present them in staged readings in theatres in New York such as the Martin E. Segal Theatre, the Repertorio Español or the New York Theatre Workshop, as well as others across the country.

He always devoted his time and energy which gradually failed him, to young authors. Many of us are indebted to him, as his translations could not only be read and seen in the US; they were also the gateway for translators from other countries to our work. I would say that without Marion, Catalan contemporary drama would not be as well known everywhere as it is now. And beyond that, on a more personal note, I

will always remember his generosity, hospitality and wisdom, in a relationship that has lasted for these 15 years.

### **Sergi Belbel**

Director and playwright. Director of the Teatre Nacional de Catalunya from 2006 to 2013.

I met Marion through Josep Maria Benet i Jornet, a teacher and friend I miss (with pain, every day since he left us, first from Alzheimer's and then from the damn pandemic), and therefore, I am grieving both partners. I also associate him (perhaps because I saw him twice in Manhattan and walked with him there) with New York City, where he lived, and this also makes me inevitably think of Mary Ann Newman. She also saw Marion every time he came to Barcelona, ??a city he adored. The last few times, he had stayed to sleep in the huge flat that Papitu (Benet and Jornet) had in Balmes Street. He translated three of my works into English: *Blood*, *Mobile*, and *Offside*, the first and third published.

*Blood* premiered in Melbourne, Australia, and the other two were staged in New York. I immediately noticed that his translations were, in addition to being very respectful of the original, very beautiful and "sonorous" (an important aspect, in a theatrical translation), with a refined and cultured English. Marion was a character, what we used to call a "dandy," a lyricist and a great lover of theatre (I think I also remember the opera). He translated great names of the modern Spanish theatre like Buero Vallejo and López Rubio, then , later, like the other great translator and specialist in Catalan theatre, his friend Shaorn Feldman, he ended up being a passionate and loyal follower and enthusiast of the theatre in the Catalan language.

Marion was an extremely learned, refined man with a great sense of humor. He never raised his voice and always had kind words for everyone. Sometimes he looked like an almost prototypical movie character from Woody Allen, a Manhattan "gentleman," when he told you what he'd been seeing lately at the Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts, or what Broadway musical you should have to go see, or what Public Theater play you couldn't miss, or what Soho exhibition was worth visiting.

From the United States, along with the splendid Mary Ann Newman and Sharon Feldman, Marion followed very closely everything that premiered in contemporary Catalan theatre. The phenomenon of our spoken theatre in the Catalan language after the transition, with Josep Maria Benet i Jornet at the helm, and even the youngest authors who emerged in the 21st century, such as Guillem Clua, fascinated him and had him always on the lookout for new voices that were being added to a now lengthy list. Hopefully future crises do not cause it to languish, as this list is now full of strength and talent.

We must be very grateful to this great professor and intellectual from New York who was so passionate about Catalan theatre. Thanks to him, some of the "little" works of our culture and "small" language (I pay homage to Papitu) have been able to be seen and heard in the most powerful language in the world. Thanks, Marion, we'll always be grateful!

### **Sharon G. Feldman**

Academic, translator, and Professor of Catalan and Spanish Studies at the University of Richmond.

Marion Peter Holt was a man from the South (South Carolina, to be precise) who came to live on New York's Upper West Side, a bit like Tennessee Williams, another Southerner who became a New Yorker. It seems to me that he never lost a certain special quality of Southern kindness, as well as a certain lovely feeling of surprise at living in the big city.

I met Marion at the beginning of my professional career, when my interest in Catalan theatre was just beginning. In an American academic context, in which dedicating oneself to Catalan studies was often considered an unthinkable proposal, Marion, with his decades of experience and professional weight, reached out to me, offering me his unconditional support. I will always be grateful for his generosity and ability to imagine the future. In 1997 we met at an academic symposium on "Spanish theatre" in the heart of Pennsylvania. I still remember the inaugural cocktail I attended with playwrights Carles Batlle and Josep M. Benet i Jornet, whom I had recently met in Barcelona.

And I also remember the feeling of satisfaction I felt when I whispered to Marion, "There's someone I'd like you to meet," and when I grabbed his arm and carried him to "Papitu." The mutual appreciation between (also much missed) "Papitu" and Marion became very authentic and deep. They shared many loves: the theatre, New York, cats, Barcelona, the Catalan language... In fact, in Benet's house, the guest room was renamed "Marion's room," a perhaps ironic or subconscious reference to his play *The Child's Room*.

I had the honor of publishing a volume of four theatrical translations with Marion entitled *Barcelona Plays* (the title, wonderful, was very much his), which includes his beautiful translation of *Salamandra*, by Benet and Jornet. Shortly afterwards, Marion would prepare another volume entitled *Two Plays*, with two more works by Benet. And he continued to translate works by Àngels Aymar, Sergi Belbel, Guillem Clua, Lluïsa Cunillé. but he didn't just translate the texts; he went on to successfully place them in some of the country's leading regional theatres, from the Wilma Theater in Philadelphia to the San Diego Repertory.

Of his great legacy, I suppose one of the least known works in Catalonia would be his *Magical Places: The Story of Spartanburg's Theaters and Their Entertainments: 1900-1950* (2004), a beautiful book about the theatrical and cinematic life of the first half of the twentieth century in one of the places of his childhood: Spartanburg (South Carolina). It is a jewel that remains as a sample - among many - of his great refined sensitivity, his great intellectual vitality and his great love for the performing arts.

### **Dr. Isaias Fanlo**

Academic, cultural manager and Professor of modern and contemporary Iberian literature at the University of Cambridge.

Our perception of a city, of a neighborhood, of a street, is usually marked by the emotional imprint left by our personal experiences. For me, the Upper West Side of Nova York will always remain inevitably marked by the impression of Marion Peter Holt: a professional humanist, lover of Spanish and Catalan culture, and above all, a man of the theatre. His work as a translator of pieces by authors such as Sergi Belbel, Lluïsa Cunillé and Guillem Clua will never be sufficiently recognized.

Marion's apartment, located on 71st Street between Broadway and Columbus Avenue, west of Central

Park, is for me one of the intersections of Catalan culture in Manhattan — the other, no doubt, is the flat of another splendid Catalanist, Mary Ann Newman. I remember the first time I went to Marion's house, almost a decade ago. I arrived after crossing Central Park on a cold March evening, pursued by a family of racoons. I knew Marion's work as a translator, and I introduced myself as a pilgrim, with respect and admiration. Marion, however, was a generous and warm man, who appreciated visits and soon made you feel at home. I remember that night we went to dinner in the neighborhood, not far away because I already had back problems, and the conversation then lasted a few more hours, in the dining room of his house, with a bottle of wine. Marion was a man of profound wisdom, and to hear him talk about Buero Vallejo or Benet i Jornet and to feel the passion with which he did so was a real pleasure. I can say that there are not many intellectuals and academics capable of combining rigor and tenderness as Marion did, without imposture or hypocrisy.

That March night on the Upper West Side, I told Marion about my plan to resume my academic career, after eight years at the Teatre Nacional de Catalunya, and do my PhD in the United States. He was one of the first people to encourage me to make the leap, and he promised me that I would have him by my side, and that we would find ways to collaborate. Over the years, already based in Chicago, I returned to Marion and his translations on several occasions, both to conduct my research and when I coordinated a collaboration between the University of Chicago and the TNC. to make a dramatized reading of the work of Lluïsa Cunillé, *Barcelona, ??Map of Shadows*. The translation of the play, needless to say, was masterful and by Marion, who generously donated it for the occasion.

The translator Marion has bequeathed us an important body of work, which has made it possible to spread Catalan theatre in the Anglo-Saxon sphere —I don't think it's an exaggeration to say that he is one of the agents responsible for the international boom in Catalan drama a decade ago. For those of us who knew him, this legacy is accompanied by his bonhomie, a candid smile under his characteristic Hollywood gallant mustache, and a generous, restless look, always sparkling with curiosity. What a fortune to have met you, Marion. Thank you for these years, for your wisdom and support. It's impossible not to remember you every time we step into the Upper West Side.

### **Josep Maria Miró**

Playwright and stage director. Born Theater Award 2020.

Sometimes we start to love people for how they love our friends. Also for how they love what we love, such as our culture and language. The first time I heard Marion Peter Holt's name was through "Papitu" [Josep Maria Benet i Jornet], from whom he had translated several works into English. We corresponded and he was interested in my theatre, but it wasn't until 2017, on my first trip to New York, that I met him personally.

His house was the interior of a typical New York historic flat, full of objects—posters, plates, books—that showed his love for Catalonia and our culture. Spending the afternoon talking about theatre, translation and politics with someone who has almost a century of experience and the knowledge and friendship of names like Buero Vallejo or Benet i Jornet was a gift. I say almost a century and that is a guess because I've never known the age of Marion, a braggart, who hid his age, and maintained a certain aura of youthful flirtation. Papitu's news of Alzheimer's was a great shock to him. I understood and was deeply moved that, despite his advanced age, he always spoke of an imminent possibility of taking a plane and

traveling to Barcelona to reunite with his friend and our city. It is the same sort of tenderness that causes Alvin Straight take the only means of transportation he has, an old, battered John Deere mower, to cross 500 miles from Iowa to Wisconsin to visit his brother Lyle, who is ill and whom he has not seen for ten years, in David Lynch's *The Straight Story*.

I also have an admiration for translators, a work that is often discreet and silent but crucial to the visibility and internationalization of our theatre. Marion was so generous that, despite expressing a desire to translate for you, he recognized the happiness it caused him to know that your theatre was in good hands, even if they were those of another translator for whom he spared no praise. This past year we've written quite a bit. He was grateful for "the letters," as he called the e-mails, and I was happy to send him new texts. His "letters" were genuine and sent texts were soon returned; problems with the elevator; his panic at the dentist and tooth implant; or his deep contempt for politics and recent attempts of Donald Trump to stay in power. I am saddened by the pain and loneliness of the pandemic. We are too unaware of how the elderly living alone have suffered.

Marion, I will miss you. Have a rest. Hopefully this last trip will take you wherever you want with your lawnmower.

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