



# INTERVIEW

## JOSEP-MARIA TERRICABRAS: LANGUAGE AS THINKING

RAMON ALCOBERRO

Josep-Maria Terricabras (Calella, 1946), has forged a long career as a writer and is one of Catalonia's best-selling philosophers. He is Professor of Philosophy at the University of Girona, one of the country's most prestigious research centres in the Humanities. As a theorist in the Wittgensteinian tradition, he is able to tell us about the sense of being a philosopher in Catalonia today.

**You wrote your doctoral thesis on Wittgenstein in German; you published the papers of Wittgenstein at a congress held in Girona in English; and then you published in Catalan. This runs you the risk of not being very well-known outside the country. It would be much easier, when it comes to making your work known, to write in Spanish and yet you haven't done so. Why not?**

In fact, I have work published in Catalan, German, Spanish, English, French, Italian and Basque. Generally, however, I write in Catalan, my native language. It shapes my thinking because both education and human experiences are primarily linguistic. I don't mean that they are 'only linguistic', but if a thought is good and interesting, there is always the possibility of translating it. First, I look for rigour and coherence. Then comes making the work known.

**You're a *maitre à penser* in Catalonia and a political reference that transcends party affiliations. Yet, as a philosopher, you come from the analytical tradition and you practise a philosophy that seeks to 'dissolve' problems rather than resolve them. Am I mistaken?**

You're right. My most basic philosophical training is influenced by Wittgenstein's work, which gives me the urge – and, I hope, the ability – to describe concepts clearly and rigorously. Social commitment doesn't come to me directly from philosophy but from an awareness of civic responsibility, which is acquired and cultivated in other milieus. But no theoretical reflection can give reality more consistency than it already has.

**Fidelity to one's own cultural tradition is a major issue in all cultures of limited reach. When one chooses to think in a minority language is the choice made out of fidelity?**

Theory is not produced to shore up reality, but to understand how it is shored up. Nobody thinks entirely alone, and neither is the individual made in isolation; or, if so, the job is badly done. I tried to explain this in my book *Aprendre a pensar (Learning to Think, 1998)*. Each person is a child of the times of his or her country and culture. When one accepts and knows one's own cultural tradition it is not to submit oneself to it but to manage it and, to the extent that it's possible, contribute to it and improve it.

*Catalan Writing*, nº 3; march 2008.