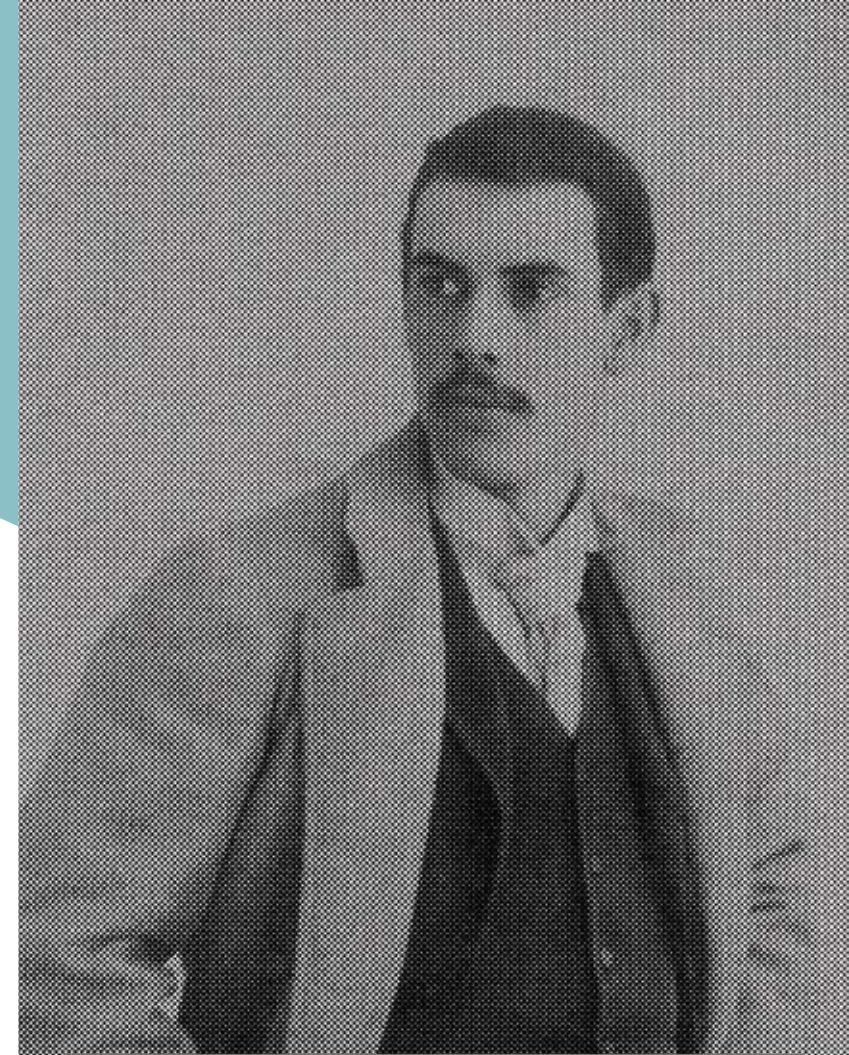


INTRODUCTION

Prudenci and Aurora Bertrana were very different in character. However, they shared a literary vocation that led to their joint publication of the novel *L'illa perduda* (The lost island) in 1935. Before and after that point, their life paths witnessed quite dissimilar experiences and events, although they did coincide on some essential points, such as their links to Girona, their passion for artistic expression in multiple forms, the cultural weight of Barcelona, their "unease" at having a certain public image and the importance of intellectual relations. This exhibition takes the point of creative union represented by the aforementioned mid-nineteen thirties novel to explain the worlds of the father and daughter with regard to both their differences and what they had in common. Our aim here is to reach a better understanding of both figures, as this will allow us to explain much of Catalan and European political and cultural history from the last quarter of the nineteenth century right up to the nineteen seventies.

PRUDENCI BERTRANA

"Vaig entrar de ple en el fons tenebrós de mi mateix"



THE TERRIBLE TOY

Prudenci Bertrana's literary vocation arrived relatively late, in his thirties, and had to overcome a previous vocation, that of art. His first literary texts date back to 1898, while his first pictorial sketches are dated ten years earlier and framed within a period of training to be a painter, which he had begun at the Llotja School in 1885. In 1892, the same year his oldest daughter Aurora was born, he participated in his first prestigious exhibition, which assembled painters from all over Catalonia: the Sant Feliu de Guíxols Exhibition of Fine Arts. That same year, he founded the academy Gran Acadèmia Moderna Brull Bertrana with the renowned painter Joan Brull i Vinyoles at no. 6, Correu Vell Square in Girona. After more than 20 years of dedicating his life to drawing and painting, the publication of *Josafat* (1906) saw him established in the literary world. Bertrana the writer was born out of Bertrana the painter.

Advert for the academy Gran Acadèmia Moderna in Girona, run by Joan Brull and Prudenci Bertrana, 1892. Girona City Council. Municipal Archive (AMGI).



THE FOREST OF HEROES

In the lecture "De les belleses de la Natura i el meu goig" (On the beauties of Nature and my joy) (1908), Prudenci Bertrana depicted himself as a "poor artist from the forest who loves silence and the august quiet of the mountains". Unlike other writers of his time, the main space that occupied his literature was not the city, garden or field, but the forest. A kind of melancholic happiness, of Rousseauian influence, flowers forth in Bertrana's books due to the freedom released by his contact with nature (a free life on the mountain as opposed to that of the city, progress and industrialization) and the men that lived there, a long list of peasants, day labourers, farmers, hunters, foresters, miners, cork-tree peelers or stubbers, with their gundogs, hares, rabbits, doves and partridges, and the often tragic struggles, suffering and illnesses that awaited these animals.

Detail of cork oaks in El Congost house, Arbúcies. AHMA-Post Card Collection.



JOSAFAT

At the turn of the century, Girona was undergoing effervescent cultural change. A group of intellectuals (Rafael Masó, Carles Rahola, Miquel de Palol and Xavier Montsalvatge) were committed to renewing the artistic panorama of the city by launching initiatives such as the Floral Games and the magazines *Vida* and *L'Enderroch*. It was within this context that Prudenci Bertrana, still painting, began to write. His first story was written in 1898, his first novel, *Violeta*, in 1899 and he assiduously published narratives in the Girona and Catalan press. In 1906 he published *Josafat*, one of the great works of contemporary Catalan literature. As a narrative it establishes Girona cathedral as the setting for a relationship between the bell ringer and a prostitute, consumed in the holy spaces of the building. The infinity of nuances that embody the inner torture suffered by the bell ringer, the re-interpretation of the myth of Beauty and the Beast, with reappropriations of the Romantic and Gothic imaginary, reflections on the nature of evil, the subversion of sexuality and the destabilizing role of the *femme fatale*, engross readers today as they did more than a hundred years ago.

Group portrait in La Mercè gardens in the city walls, 1907. Girona City Council. Centre for Image Research and Difusion (CRDI) (Author unknown).



THE SAD HUMOURIST

With few professional expectations and part of the city of Girona against him, Prudenci Bertrana agreed to become editor of the satirical Barcelona-based weekly publications *L'Esquella de la Torratxa* and *La Campana de Gràcia*. Despite settling there with his family, the profession of journalist did not bring him either economic stability or peace of mind: between 1913 and 1915, he lost two of his children, Heribert and Helena, while he had to find the strength to write poorly-paid humorous articles. He could not adjust to life in Barcelona and came to reaffirm his belief that the city is a hostile, cruel and hypocritical place. Protected by his character as the "barbarian", unadapted to city life, he worked with the main Barcelona periodicals of the time, *El Poble Català*, *La Publicitat* and *La Veu de Catalunya*. The quest for a frugal but constant income led him to try his luck as a playwright, but his successes were few and far between and he ended up teaching drawing and painting at the Escola del Bosc in Barcelona.

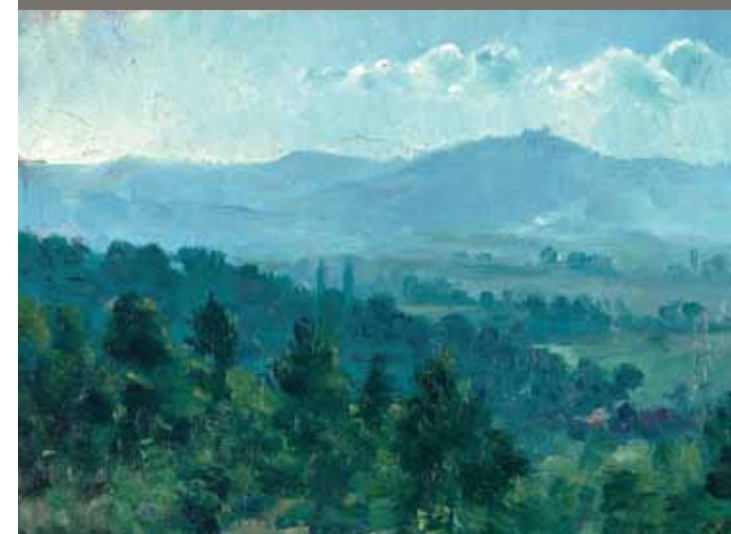
Lluís Claramunt. Map of 1914 typhus epidemic in Barcelona. 1933. Cartographic and Geological Institute of Catalonia (ICGC).



BETWEEN THE EARTH AND THE CLOUDS

In the last years of his life, Prudenci Bertrana looked back. He dedicated his time to remembering, taking stock of his career and leaving a written testimony of the literary image he wished to survive him. It was with this intention that he wrote the trilogy *Entre la terra i els núvols* (Between the Earth and the Clouds), comprising the novels *L'hereu* (The heir, 1931), *El vagabund* (The vagrant, 1933) and *L'impenitent* (The unrepentant, posthumous, 1948), with which he culminated the process of building his literary personality, that of a luckless writer who has struggled to live from literature and has written from the authenticity of experience. Following publication of *L'impenitent*, Bertrana's work fell into oblivion due to Francoist censorship and the difficulty of finding his books. It was not until 1967 that the importance of his work began to be acknowledged, on the occasion of the centenary of his birth. In 1968, Girona honoured him by lending his name to the Bertrana Prize for Novel writing. Since then and still today the memory of this figure and the study of his work place him among the great writers of Catalan literature.

Prudenci Bertrana, *Landscape*, undated. Girona Museum of Art, reg. no. 251.511. Girona Provincial Council Art Archive.



L'ILLA PERDUDA

In 1935, Prudenci and Aurora Bertrana published a joint work that showcased both of their talents: *L'illa perduda* (The lost Island), a novel of ocean-based adventure. The daughter prepared the script and she and her father then shared out the writing work between themselves. Aurora's first novel and one of Prudenci's last, it is the only text signed by both of them. The two's vocations thus met in literature, which constitutes the most significant field they shared in their professional lives.



AURORA BERTRANA

“No em condemneu sense llegir-me”

IMPRESSIONS OF A STUDENT

Aurora Bertrana's artistic vocation was awakened very early in her life thanks to her family, although her father's reluctant attitude meant her passion for literature was diverted towards music. She studied cello and perfected her musical knowledge at Barcelona's Municipal School of Music under the guidance of feminist writer and campaigner Carme Karr. From 1922, she continued her training at the prestigious Jaques-Dalcroze Institute in Geneva, although that stage of her life is marked by difficulties paying for her education, economic hardships, the cold and the atmosphere at the student residence where she lived. A born fighter with boundless enthusiasm, she founded a trio of jazzwomen that performed in hotels and restaurants, while at the same time appearing as a flamenco singer on a Swiss radio station. Friends encouraged her to write. In 1925, she married Swiss engineer Denys Choffat, “Monsieur Choffat”, as she called him, and lived a modern and cosmopolitan intellectual life.

Jazz trio created by Aurora Bertrana, with her on cello, Yvonne Bovard on violin and Mina Blasser on piano, undated. *Memòries fins a 1935 (Memories until 1935)*.



THE TRAVELLER

Fascinated by nature and eager to transcend the confined spaces of her family life, Aurora Bertrana travelled in an unprecedented manner for Catalan women of the time. She spent three very happy years with her husband in Polynesia (1926-1929), from where she sent articles to the magazine *D'Ací i d'Allà* and the weekly publication *Mirador*. The resulting travel book, *Paradisos oceànics* (Oceanic paradises) (1930), gained her literary recognition. Aurora Bertrana projected a unique image of modernity for the new twenty-first century woman of letters; she was a free, critical, astute and independent writer. After bringing the exotic theme to the short narrative and the adventure novel with *Peikea, princesa caníbal i altres contes oceànics* (Peikea, the cannibal princess and other Oceanic stories, 1934) and *L'illa perduda* (The lost island, 1935, written with her father), she embarked on a solo trip through Morocco for several months, which was first translated in the articles “Impressions d'una dona a través de l'Àfrica musulmana” (Impressions of a woman through Muslim Africa) in the newspaper *La Publicitat* (1935) and then in a new literary success: *El Marroc sensual i fanàtic* (Sensual and fanatical Morocco) (1936).

Gautier. Hamené Bay (Raiatea) *Paradisos Oceànics (Oceanic paradises)*, 1930.



THE REPUBLICAN WRITER

Aurora Bertrana was involved in intense political and social activity during the times of the Second Spanish Republic. Liberal by nature, with an enriched outlook due to her stays overseas and representative of the “well understood” feminism of the time (which defended equality for women without breaking with traditional principles), she presided over the Lyceum Club of Barcelona, joined various organizations (La Lliga Femenina Catalana per la Pau i la Llibertat, El Front Únic Femení Esquerrista de Catalunya and La Unió Femenina Franco-Catalana - the Franco-Catalan Women's Union), and was the first woman to be on the list of candidates for the ERC in Barcelona in the country's first elections with female suffrage. These actions, along with her literary achievements and regular talks and collaborations in the press on controversial topics such as prostitution, consolidated her intellectual prestige. With the outbreak of war, the author's cultural, feminist and anti-fascist career and commitment brought her a place in the Catalan Writers' Association, on the editorial committee of the magazines *Moments* and *Companya* and the editorial board of the collection *La Novel·la Femenina* by the publisher Mediterrània, and saw her named president of the jury for the 1936 Crexells Novel Prize.

Gabriel Casas. Aurora Bertrana at a political rally held in La Monumental (12 November, 1933). National Archive of Catalonia



BETWEEN TWO SILENCES

The Civil War forced Aurora Bertrana to leave Catalonia in 1938. She spent much of her exile in Geneva, the city of her husband, from whom she had by then separated. These were years of economic instability and unstable employment, even if she was very active: she helped Republican refugees in the concentration camp at Saint-Cyprien, studied literature at the University of Geneva, went to live in a Swiss psychiatric hospital as the companion of the director and travelled to France on a humanitarian mission after World War II. In 1946, she settled in Prades in order to be near Andorra, where she could meet her mother; here she came into contact with Catalan exiles and made friends with Pau Casals and Pompeu Fabra. Returning to Barcelona in 1949, she survived by giving French classes. Little by little she resumed her literary career, which had been truncated by the Franco regime. She wrote first in Spanish (*Vértigo de horizontes* - Vertigo of horizons, 1952) and finally in Catalan (*Camins de somni* - Dream roads, 1955), slowly emerging from her silence and recovering a measure of social and literary visibility.

Post card from Les Escaldes, Andorra, ca. 1940. Miquel Sánchez Baños Collection.



MEMORY AS A REFUGE

When Aurora Bertrana began her memoirs in 1966, she was already the author of an established body of work. Her life as an adventurer, her independent personality and the pre-war publication of her travel books had made her a renowned literary figure. But despite that, her return to Catalonia went almost unnoticed. She had to face the indifference of literary circles, which belittled her by presenting her as the daughter of Prudenci Bertrana. Her historical novels *Tres presoners* (Three prisoners) (1957) and *Entre dos silencis* (Between two silences) (1958) were not deemed worthy of the attention they in fact deserved. Only *Vent de grop* (Storm wind) (1967), adapted to the cinema under the title *La llarga agonia dels peixos fora de l'aigua* (The long agony of fish out of water), starring Joan Manuel Serrat, lent her some degree of popularity. It took her six years to write her memoirs, which she undertook in a peaceful and happy setting, having retreated to Les Eres de Guardiola, satisfied at being able to give literary shape to her life. The first volume, *Memòries fins a 1935* (Memoirs until 1935), was published in 1973 and won the Serra d'Or Critics award. The second, *Memòries des del 1935 fins al retorn a Catalunya* (Memoirs from 1935 until the return to Catalonia), appeared posthumously two years later.

Aurora Bertrana at the awarding of the Prudenci Bertrana Prize for novel-writing, La Devesa Sports Pavilion, Girona. 1970. Girona City Council. Centre for Image Research and Diffusion (CRDI) (Narcís Prats Gutiérrez)



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TEMPORARY EXHIBITION
Museu d'Història de Girona - Sala d'Exposicions

From 28th October 2017 to 22th April 2018