

*NB: This piece originally appeared in the Winter 2014/2015 issue of Ezra, but since you have to scroll down to see it, I cut and pasted it. The original can be seen [here](#). The article states that the book is translated from Catalan; in fact it was originally written in Spanish.*

ALMA VENUS, Pere Gimferrer. Translated by Adrian West. Antilever Press 2014. 122 pp.

Antilever Press and its 2014 English-language publication of Pere Gimferrer's *Alma Venus* reveals how the artist is intimately connected to his community, his generation, and all that surrounds him: its music, fashion, film, and its icons.

Adrian West's masterful translation of Gimferrer's work from the original Catalan captures the poet's essence: always questioning, ever mindful of the past and its role in the present, as well as poetry's role as a part of the same history it discusses. As stated in the Translator's Note, "Gimferrer's writings are demanding," not so much because of their complexity, but because the strength of his language and the precision of his craft create a plethora of images that are as captivating to the senses as they are refreshing to the ear. They force us to embark on a visual and lyrical journey, which reveals to us fragments of an *ars poetica*.

Although comprised of two sections, First Book: *Alma Venus* and the Second Book: *The Senses at Peace with the Memory*, the unifying themes and the beauty of Gimferrer's texts present themselves on occasions as a critique or analysis of society and/or art itself, while at others, as an intimate gaze from an understanding and accepting lover: viewing either his city, his people, or their creations—enamored by what he sees. The form or elements of an *ars poetica* poem, "are not as important as the depth and insight it provides into the art and nature of poetry" ([world-class-poetry.com](http://world-class-poetry.com)); for Gimferrer, life and art are so inextricably bound to each other that at times it is the poem that best describes the object, moment, or feeling which first inspired it. With lines like, "Moguer will live in no place/ Except in those clouds of invention,/ More words than clouds, more Moguer/In the poem than in reality," Gimferrer's fourth poem in the book alludes to the Spanish poet Juan Ramon Jimenez and his work "Moguer," which expresses how poetry can exist as both representative of both a time and a place, yet recognizes the power of the words to create and make a thing more what it is, by simply describing it. This belief appears throughout many texts and sections in the collection, forcing our attention to focus on what we believe art or poetry or life or living should actually be. "Life is not a poem about landscapes,/ it is the cobra of fire of death," the darkness's certified post", states Gimferrer in the first poem, yet this line lives in direct opposition to what the author demonstrates: a poetry of landscapes, of scenery, of settings and surroundings, of cultivation and exhibition.

Gimferrer, "explores, on the basis of a poetics of the instant, the tenuous frontiers between real reality and artistic reality," states LLeترا Catalan Literature Online; that much is visible in these lines:

I came from the poplars of the night,

Real, above all, in the poem;

In the magnetic pole of verse,

Each word is fructification.

I came from living in the poem

So that thus, the poem would live in me.

Also:

In fantasy I discovered love,

But love is a figure of realism;

In fantasy I discovered the poem;

But poetry fashions the real;

The line between the different realities permeates Gimferrer's thinking, as does the blending of artistic or real life allusions to Pedro Calderon de la Barca and Rubén Darío, to film directors like Roberto Rossellini and actor Charlie Chaplin, even to architecture and many buildings or structures whose appearance sets us insistently in that environment. West himself asserts that Gimferrer's writings, "depend on a system of multiple meanings and textual echoes that span not only the whole of Spanish language literature, but also references to contemporary history, art, music, film, and design." And it is those references and allusions to the past and its relevance to our present that remain very prevalent in *Alma Venus*. Even his "precision and attentiveness to the description of the play of light and shadow" as mentioned in the Translator's Note is a way of linking the past with the present, of sifting through the layers of the ugly or the grotesque, and seeing life and art for what it should and has the potential to be. So, as the seen and not seen reflect the visual technique of chiaroscuro, Gimferrer's multilingual approach to communication embody the same principle of known and unknown, visible and invisible, light and dark.

The use of other languages from Italian to Spanish and French, even English (in the original), as well as the names of places in these countries, helps the reader then find himself in a foreign setting, hearing a foreign tongue, understanding that each moment that passes is a fading memory, a trace of what we just experienced, which is also a clearer reflection of that blurry image or instant.

To Gimferrer, life includes an endless pursuit of who we were and a strong desire to recreate ourselves. "We have lived by clinging to shadows," he states, and unlike Plato's myth of the cave, these shadows become reality and at times are much less fleeting and more tangible than what gets projected to us by the world around us. West's translation of *Alma Venus*, provides readers with a wonderful introduction to a truly remarkable literary talent, one whose legacy already casts a long shadow.