
MARTÍ DE RIQUER



COURTESY OF THE DE RIQUER FAMILY

3 MAY 1914 · 17 SEPTEMBER 2013

Martí de Riquer died on September 17, 2013, at the age of 99. For days afterward, the Barcelona press was full of the grief and affection of acolytes and admirers alike. The well-attended funeral on September 19, accompanied by a Latin Mass at the wishes of the deceased, was widely covered in the media. The king of Spain sent a wreath. Riquer was not just any old university professor.

Apart from the Civil War years (1937–39), when he fought on the Francoist side, Riquer's life was always dedicated to research and teaching. The loss of his right arm during the war did not prevent him from producing a prodigious quantity of writings: it was his way of overcoming that handicap. Prior to 1937, the young Riquer's formative years were spent in Barcelona, where he was a regular at the Biblioteca de Catalunya and the library of the Barcelona Athenaeum; he contributed to literary journals, tried his hand at playwriting, and attended the Latin and Greek classes given by Carles Riba and Joan Petit at the Universitat Autònoma (as the Universitat de Barcelona was known during the Second Republic). Riquer's introduction to medieval Catalan literature came about courtesy of the "Els Nostres Clàssics" series, which Josep Maria de Casacuberta had established in 1924 at the publishing house Barcino. The authors who made the greatest impression on him were Bernat Metge and Joanot Martorell. Soon Riquer realized the debt that Metge owed to Petrarch's *Secretum* (1933), and it was not long before he edited a volume for "Els Nostres Clàssics" himself. Indeed, he maintained a good relationship with Casacuberta both before and after the Civil War. In total, Riquer edited six volumes for the series: the translation of Seneca and Petrarch by the Franciscan Antoni Canals; the Occitan-Catalan poetry of Andreu Febrer and Gilabert de Pròixita, respectively; and three volumes of fifteenth-century battle letters and chivalric challenge letters.

Riquer graduated from the Universitat de Barcelona in 1941 with a degree in philosophy and literature and in 1942 began to give classes in Spanish literature at the same institution, including Catalan authors within his teaching program. Soon afterward, he was appointed as a lecturer in Medieval Romance Language Literature and he dedicated himself heart and soul to the task; he was promoted to professor in 1950. From then until his retirement in 1984, Riquer worked for his alma mater, with the exception of the years 1970–76, during which he took up a temporary post at the newly founded Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona. During the years of student political upheaval around 1966–68, Riquer acted as mediator between the intransigence of the authorities and the angry demands of students and colleagues. It was a

thankless task, one which took him away from his beloved work and had limited prospects of success.

The truth is that Riquer was happiest when he was working tirelessly at research, writing, and teaching. He was also content in his private life. He enjoyed a long and happy marriage to Isabel Permanyer, who predeceased him. He was proud of their six children—three of whom have followed him into academia—as well as his numerous grandchildren and great-grandchildren. Although brusque and taciturn, Riquer had a peculiarly personal way of eliciting affection in those around him. He had no time for affectation or pedantry and had a sense of humor that delighted in the paradoxical. When he found someone disagreeable, he would say that it was because they were, in his view, boring. He was a strict and demanding teacher. The respect he inspired in new students was tinged with fear, but over time, Riquer became a charming character who conveyed energy, boldness, and enthusiasm. He smoked a pipe from his youth onward and boasted of never having practiced any sport, which he claimed was the secret of his longevity.

Riquer was a prolific author, always guided by a desire to reach a wide, educated readership. One of his particular skills was his ability to provide broad overviews. The most remarkable example of this is the early part of the *Història de la Literatura Catalana* (*History of Catalan Literature*), published by Ariel (1964), which covers the period from 1200 to 1700. Riquer also wrote the section on the Classical, medieval, and Renaissance periods for the *Història de la Literatura Universal* (*History of World Literature*), published by Planeta (1968).

His monograph on the French *chansons de geste*—which in the 1950s was the first of its type in Spanish or French—started out as a student coursebook; a revised edition was published in 2009. His anthology *Los trovadores* (*The Troubadours*) (1975) is still today the most complete, useful, and accessible collection of twelfth- and thirteenth-century Occitan poetry: it includes a comprehensive yet measured introduction; a generous selection of texts, complete with translations and essential annotation; and literary introductions to each of the troubadour authors. Following his retirement, Riquer focused on some of the works dearest to him and produced editions that made troubadours like Guillem de Berguedà and Arnaut Daniel accessible, as well as classics of French medieval literature, such as the *Chanson de Roland* and *Li Contes del Graal* (*Perceval, the Story of the Grail*) by Chrétien de Troyes. The illustrated volume *Vidas y retratos de trovadores* (*Lives and Portraits of Troubadours*) (1995), reworked as *Vidas y amores de los trovadores y sus damas* (*Lives and Loves of the*

Troubadours and Their Women) in 2004, combined medieval texts with iconography.

Riquer's successive editions of *Don Quixote* and the numerous reprints of his *Aproximación al Quijote* (*Introduction to "Don Quixote"*), together with several other erudite contributions to the subject throughout his life, make him one of the main specialists in the work of that most universal of Spanish authors, Cervantes. His editions of Joanot Martorell's *Tirant lo Blanc* stretch from 1947 to 1990, the year of the fifth centenary of the first edition of Martorell's work, which signaled a general renewal of academic interest in this novel. Riquer provides a synthesis of this scholarship in his *Aproximació al Tirant* (*Introduction to "Tirant lo Blanc"*) (1990) and in his essay *Tirant lo Blanch, novela de historia y de ficción* ("*Tirant lo Blanc*," *Historical Novel and Work of Fiction*) (1992). Riquer also edited the complete works of Bernat Metge, accompanied by studies and Spanish translations (1959).

Among Riquer's bibliography, there are some works that did not stem from his university teaching, such as the treatise on medieval arms (*Arnès del cavaller* [1968]), manuals on Catalan and Castilian heraldry, and the two versions of the book that covers the Riquer family history from the fourteenth to the nineteenth century (*Quinze generacions d'una família catalana* [*Fifteen Generations of a Catalan Family*]). The volume *Reportajes de la historia* (*Reports from History*) (2010), written in collaboration with his son, the historian Borja de Riquer, is an anthology of 153 eyewitness accounts of key events in history.

Riquer was a member of the Real Academia Española de la Lengua (Spanish Royal Academy of the Language) from 1965, and he received the Menéndez Pelayo International Prize (1990), the Premio Nacional de Ensayo (National Essay Prize) (1991), the Prince of Asturias Prize (1997), and the Premio de las Letras Españolas (National Prize for Spanish Literature) (2000). To mark his retirement, a five-volume Festschrift was published with contributions by scholars of Romance-language literature from around the world—and with the support of the royal household. King Juan Carlos I had, in fact, studied under Riquer in 1960 as part of a university studies program specially designed for him. Riquer was appointed a senator in 1977, and in 2005, he was granted a hereditary peerage as the Eighth Count of the House of Ávalos, along with grandeeship (*Grandeza de España*).

Riquer was president of the Reial Acadèmia de Bones Lletres de Barcelona (Royal Academy of Belles Lettres of Barcelona) from 1963 to 1996. His tenure saw huge structural improvements to the main Palau de Requesens building and close links forged between the

Academy and university research. The Universitat de Barcelona and the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, as well as municipal and Catalan government institutions, have all honored Riquer in recognition and appreciation of his contribution to literary and cultural history.

Elected 1975

LOLA BADIA
Facultat de Filologia
Universitat de Barcelona

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Badia, L., et al. *Martí de Riquer i els valors clàssics de les lletres: vocació literària i filologia, en el centenari del seu naixement*. Barcelona: Barcino-Institució de les Lletres Catalanes, 2014.
- Fontdevila, J. F. *Martí de Riquer: la gran obra d'un humanista expert en literatura provençal, catalana medieval i cervantina*. Barcelona: Fundació Catalana per a la Recerca, 2003.
- Gatell, C., and G. Soler. *Martí de Riquer. Viure la literatura*. Barcelona: La Magrana, 2008. Spanish version: *Martín de Riquer. Vivir la literatura*. Barcelona: RBA, 2008.
- "Martín de Riquer. Investigación filológica e historia de la cultura." *Anthoropos. Revista de documentación científica de la cultura* 92 (1989).
- Vela, L. "Bibliografía de Martín de Riquer," in *Studia in honorem prof. M. de Riquer*, IV. Barcelona: Quaderns Crema, 1991, 733–64.