

Xavier Queipo
Interview in "Agenda Brussels", January, 2008

The citizenship of the world

To mark the Poetry Day (*Gedichtendag*), Passa Porta has organised two events with a difference. On the evening before *the* Poetry Day – there are several, but this is the one on which poetry-lovers come out in force – you will be told just what poetry is about. More than you thought, as will become clear the following day.

On 30 January Geert Buelens will present his oven-fresh collection of essays about the improper use and real significance of poetry (*Oneigenlijk gebruik*, published by Vantilt) in Passa Porta. As he sets about this task of demarcation and opening up new horizons he will be joined by Mauro Pawlowski, Rozalie Hirs, and Sven Speybrouck. During the great celebration of poetry the next day you can witness the knowledge accumulated being put to use in a most unlikely location, as the European Parliament opens its doors to the Brussels Poetry Collective. Xavier Queipo, Manza, Laurence Vielle, and Geert van Istendael will present a mission statement intended to lead to a European Constitution in verse in 2009. *Agenda* spoke to one of these pioneering poets: Xavier Queipo.

The Galician poet, born in Santiago de Compostela, came to Brussels in 1989 to work as a civil servant in an international institution in the heart of Europe. Xavier Queipo says, "I work as a civil servant because I cannot live off my writing, as I publish in a minority language. "To my readers I have some 'exotic' aspects. Because I live abroad, I'm not really participating in the cultural life there. But every week I contribute to the Galician public radio. They give me three minutes; I use five, to talk about movies, books, or shows in Brussels. You can say that I am the Galician *Agenda*, but about the things that I like. And every two weeks I publish an essay on the webpage of the Council of Galician Culture about literature. That's my regular link with my country." His work is widely translated, into Portuguese and Spanish, and will soon be available, for the first time, in French.

The science of art

"In art you need to have the same philosophy you have in science, which consists of innovation, development, and investigation. It's my obligation as a writer to investigate, to use literary tradition as a background. To be able to investigate, it is very important for a writer to translate. [Among other works, Queipo has translated Joseph Conrad's *Typhoon* and is currently working, with two other translators, on James Joyce's *Ulysses*. – KS] By translating you are merging the ideas of other people, other cultures with your own ideas." He experiences this confrontation as one of the most positive effects of his membership of the Poetry Collective: "It's a positive thing, a good exercise. Writers usually work in isolation. This membership gave me the possibility to share my ideas with others from time to time. You contrast your work with the work of others, you receive comments and opinions from people whom you would probably never have had contact with."

With the *European Constitution in Verse*, the Poetry Collective has clear goals and grandiose plans in mind. "The basic principles of the European Union are the free circulation of people, goods, and capital. What we would like to obtain is the freedom of circulation of ideas. We will start with the preamble, an amazing text by Geert van Istendael, and a few – well, the more sexy – articles. Afterwards we will expand the project to writers from different European countries, possibly even to writers who live outside Europe, that have been part of Europe in the past, like the people from Argentina, from Brazil, Nigeria, Kenya, India... They have some traces of European culture. It would be interesting to see what they would like Europe to be. It could be the first step towards a text about the citizenship of the world."