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Aiding but not abetting British authors

A publisher enamoured by obscure literature translates books for the Argentine public

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A taste for eccentric UK writers and a fanaticism towards the work of Scottish novelist Muriel Spark are the things that most accurately describe La bestia equilátera publishing house. Founded by Natalia Meta and Diego D'Onofrio in 2006, this independent local publisher has already released more than 10 books. The list of British titles features *El Camello* (The Camel) by Lord Berners, *Los encubridores* (Aiding and Abetting) by Muriel Spark and *Tostadas de jabón*, a collection of short stories by Julian Maclaren-Ross. Besides, the house also published Argentine writers Luis Chitarroni and María Martoccia, as well as French philosophers Barbara Cassin and Alain Badiou.

Natalia Meta says they founded La bestia equilátera in order to translate and publish Spark's work in Argentina. "I was a big fan of Spark," Meta says. "Diego and I started the publishing house with a very romantic idea in mind — we were not aware of all the work it would take."

When did you decide to found La Bestia Equilátera?

Natalia Meta: Twenty years ago, Diego and I were both attending a creative writing workshop by Luis Chitarroni and Daniel Guebel. I was 16 then, and now I'm 35. I attended that workshop for five years. Diego went there for 12 years and started writing a novel called *La bestia equilátera*, which he still hasn't finished. Three years ago, I got together with Luis Chitarroni and he suggested I should read *Aiding and Abetting* by Muriel Spark. I did, and I loved the book, so I decided to translate it. We opened a publishing house so that we could publish Spark's work and Diego's novel. We were very excited with the idea. I asked for the rights to translate *Aiding and Abetting*, and got them. Luis Chitarroni was also about to publish a book by that time — *La muerte de los filósofos* — and he said that he would do so through our publisher, so we just started the whole thing.

Why is the novel called *La bestia equilátera*?
Diego D'Onofrio: The name has



Natalia Meta and Diego D'Onofrio.

no reason for being. It is about a psychoanalyst who has a painter as a patient. Actually, painter Eugenio

Cuttica asked me to create a character inspired by him, so the original idea was to write a biography of

this painter focusing on the psychoanalytic sessions. I never finished the novel, thought I want to.

What's your literary background?

NM: I studied philosophy at college. I used to work for TV and I also engaged in finances. Actually, La bestia publishes a lot of philosophy books — we are about to publish Alan Badiou and we have recently decided to publish memoirs by Bárbara Cassin.

DD: I'm a Lacanian psychoanalyst. I wrote a book called *Cómo se escribe la carta de amor* which was published by Editorial El Ateneo.

Why did you go for authors such as Lord Berners or Maclaren-Ross?

NM: We are anglophiles. We publish UK authors who we think deserve to get known in Argentina. Muriel Spark is a very famous author in the UK. Maclaren-Ross is an excellent writer with a very turbulent life — he was kind of a Lord Lucan who didn't kill anyone and who had no money. He was careless and always in trouble, and at times he didn't have a place to live. I've been reading the letters to his editor and he was always asking for money to survive. He never gained recognition during his lifetime. He wrote in a clear, chatty prose but, as always in good writing, there is gravity and a certain mood in his stories. Thing is, he never wrote a best-seller. He was very messy.

DD: I think Maclaren-Ross was the most talented writer of his group — Anthony Powell and Graham Greene admired him. He wrote scripts for the BBC with Dylan Thomas. His life was very interesting; he had what it takes to become a legendary writer.

How did you come across Maclaren-Ross?

DD: We first read *Of Love and Hunger* and we loved it. Matias Serra Bradford chose it as part of a collection for Sudamericana. It was one of Chitarroni's favourite authors. It was easy to get the rights because he is a forgotten author by major publishing houses. We are about to publish a novel by Maclaren-Ross, *Bitten by the Tarantula*.

Why do you like British literature so much?

NM: I went to a British School — Northlands — and the English liter-

LA BESTIA EQUILÁTERA'S LITERARY DREAM TEAM

—Muriel Spark. Dame Spark (1918-2006) was an award-winning Scottish novelist. She was educated at James Gillespie's High School for Girls and later took a course in Commercial correspondence and précis writing at Heriot-Watt College. In 1937, she married Sidney David Spark, and soon followed him to Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe). Their son Robin was born in July 1938. Within months she discovered that her husband was a manic depressive prone to violent outbursts. In 1940 Muriel had left Sidney and Robin. She returned to the UK in 1944 and worked in intelligence during World War II. Spark began



writing seriously after the war, under her married name, beginning with poetry and literary criticism. Her first novel, *The Comforters*, was published in 1957. She lived in New York City for some years and then moved to Rome, where she met the artist and sculptor Penelope Jardine in 1968. In the early 1970s they settled in the Italian region of Tuscany and lived in the village of Civitella della Chiana, of which Spark was made an honorary citizen in 2005. La bestia equilátera has published *Aiding and Abetting* (2000), a novel based on Lord Lucan's disappearance, and *Memento Mori* (1959), which translates to "Remember you must die." Memento Mori revolves around a message delivered by a series of insidious phone-calls made to the elderly Dame Lettie Colston and her acquaintances.

—Lord Berners.



Berners (1883-1950) was a UK composer of classical music, novelist, painter and aesthete who enjoyed having animals around. As a child, upon hearing that a dog could be taught to swim by throwing it into water, he decided that by throwing his mother's dog out the window he could teach it to fly. The dog was unharmed, though the act earned Berners a beating. Berners was notorious for his eccentricity, dyeing pigeons at his house in vibrant colours and at one point having a giraffe as a pet and tea companion. In 1936 he published *The Camel*, a tale of an ecclesiastical couple whose life is undone by a dromedary's mysterious appearance on their doorstep.

—Julian Maclaren-Ross.



A media star of his day as a Soho literary dandy, known for his outrageous dress-sense and dissolute ways. Born in London, 1912, he never achieved huge success in life, though his friends Anthony Powell, Cyril Connolly and Evelyn Waugh saw him as the most promising young writer of his day. Maclaren-Ross ended up as a radio hack to pay his debts. Alcoholism and a love of debauched living featured heavily in his life. He died in 1964. La bestia equilátera has published a collection of short stories by him (*Tostadas de jabón*) and is to release his novel *Veneno de tarántula* (Bitten by the Tarantula). The latter was written in 1945, and is an unashamedly nostalgic look back at pre-war society.