

THEMES AND SYMBOLS IN THE POETRY OF MÀRIUS TORRES



MÀRIUS TORRES AND HIS SISTER, NÙRIA. OCTOBER 1942

IN THE POETRY OF MÀRIUS TORRES, THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN HIS FOUR MAJOR THEMES –THE BEAUTY OF THE WORLD, NIGHT, DEATH AND GOD– IS A VERY PROFOUND ONE THAT GIVES COHERENCE AND UNITY TO HIS WORK AS A WHOLE.

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AIXÒ ÉS LA JOIA

AIXÒ és la joia –ser un ocell, creuar
un cel on la tempesta deixà una pau intensa.

I això és la mort –tancar els ulls, escoltar
el silenci de quan la música comença.

30 març 1940 - gener 1941

THIS IS JOY

THIS is joy –to be a bird, to cross
a sky in which the storm has left a deep peace.

And this is death –to close one's eyes, to listen
to the silence of when the music starts.

30 March – January 1941

Translation by Andrew Langdon-Davies

In the prologue to the *Poesies de Màrius Torres*, in the fifth edition in the collection *Clàssics Catalans* Ariel, Pere Gimferrer lucidly analyses some characteristics of this poetry and says, “A living network of images in constant intercommunication, of symbols that suddenly embody the idea, of words that set light to a secret glow, that shine, at once hidden and visible, the work of Màrius Torres reveals the search for the meaning of human existence, in a poetic *oeuvre* which sets out to discover its transcendent dimension...”.

In this article, I shall try to demonstrate the wealth of symbolism in the poetry of Màrius Torres, through a study of some significant themes whose recurrence reveals the poet's wish to make them symbols, with all their polyvalence, since they are themes whose scope is universal, treated in a range of different ways. There is no doubt as to the influence of Baudelaire and of the symbolist poets in general. In the use of certain images, the Lleida poet implicitly recognizes the teachings of Carles Riba, with whom he kept up an interesting correspondence. At the same time, we shall see how Màrius Torres searched for “the meaning of human existence”, in the words of Gimferrer, and at the same time, glimpsed in it a transcendent reality. Many poems approach the mystery of God and reflect profound concern. One of the favourite themes of symbolist poetry is music. Màrius Torres was a great music-lover. He speaks of the wonderful effects it has and of how it becomes an intimate part of life. Let us think, also, of the many times he mentions great musicians: Handel, Corelli, Mozart, Schumann... The whole of his work is shot through with references to music, and the euphony in his poetry is admirable.

He knows that life –“this slow fever” “dragging silences behind it”– will one day carry off “voices and songs of a music you no longer perceive / to an end made of itself, as perfect as a chord”.

Painting also attracts his attention, especially in the earliest poems. Remember the poem “Taula preraphaelita” or “El dia clar”, which makes a comparison “with a painting / by Breughel the Elder”.

In the poetry of Màrius Torres there is a search for balance between memories and hope. However, he knows that life will be short... Memories of Lleida, the city in which he spent his childhood and youth, are glimpsed in his imagination a few months before he dies, “happy as a landscape crossed by a great river”. Hope, felt as music that comes and goes, is also present in the poet's work. Over a period of five years (1937-1942), he uses similar language in speaking of it: in nature, the branches of the almond-tree feel it pulsate beneath the bark with a slow movement (poem 13) and he, in “Lorelei” (poem 15), also feels hope take root “in the flesh and in our dreams” and flow through his life like the sap of the future (poem 88).

The passage of time is like background music in the work of Màrius Torres, but in the poems “La pedra antiga” and “Rellotge de sol”, which irradiate a severe, profound beauty, this becomes a central theme. The words of the second of the poems mentioned bring to mind the cosmic wheel, the cycle of the seasons. They speak of a delicate awareness of the passage of time... Màrius Torres was sensitive to the effects of light and shade, faithful to the natural order, in love with the clouds and with clear water –the mirror of the sky. But he also knew the night and the storm, “the moment of despair which in our heart of hearts / is longer than life

itself”. He knew that death was drawing inexorably closer.

Solitude has its counterpoise in love... We see this clearly in “Cançó a Mahalta” (poem 64) where the poet mourns her departure and sees her, somehow transfigured, on the border between reality and memory. Apart from the six poems of the same title, there are others that speak of love in the abstract, sometimes in a brief reference limited to three or four verses. However, in the poetry of Màrius Torres it is not easy to separate friendship and love.

In poem 47, we find for the first time the theme of the insufficiency of human language, an excessively rational instrument. Sometimes, human language contrasts with the silence of God, who exists beyond language or who silently orders language inside the poet's head (poems 55 and 59). It is when he opens up to a transcendent reality that we arrive at the four great themes of the poetry of Màrius Torres: the beauty of the world, death, the night and God. I would like to stress the relationship between the four. The beauty of the immaterial world, which is a sign of the invisible God, is hidden during the night and disappears completely with death, by which one arrives at God. Furthermore, the night has always been seen as symbolizing negation and end.

In the poetry of Màrius Torres, the relationship between these four themes is a very profound one which gives coherence and unity to his work as a whole. As the book advances, the dispersity of subject matter diminishes and the poems begin to interrelate. This results in a concentrated, close-knit work of poetry. The beauty of the world, night, death and God are the cornerstones of a production with a powerful imaginative charge, which reveals an eminent poet whose work is well worth reading today, fifty years after his death. ■