

MÀRIUS TORRES



MÀRIUS TORRES IN 1935

THE POETRY OF MÀRIUS TORRES (LLEIDA, 1910 – PUIG D'OLENA, 1942) IS NOT GLOOMY OR PESSIMISTIC; IT IS LIGHT AND CLEAR AND FULL OF HOPE. 1992 IS THE FIFTIETH ANNIVERSARY OF THE DEATH OF THIS GREAT POET WHO DIED AT THE AGE OF THIRTY-TWO.

MARGARIDA PRATS TEACHER OF CATALAN LITERATURE

Màrius Torres was born on 30 August 1910, at No. 36 of the Carrer Major in Lleida, which at that time was a city with a large number of peasants, not many gentry, some clergy and quite a few craftsmen. He died at the age of thirty-two in the Puig d'Olena tuberculosis sanatorium, in the company of a faithful group of friends, with no way of bidding a last farewell to any of his family, who had been driven out of Catalonia in January 1939.

Until the age of sixteen, he was educated, both at home and at school, in trust, good taste, order, courtesy, and self-control, to be a citizen of a civic, tolerant and pluralist Catalonia. He was brought up in a loving atmosphere where he found musical and literary stimuli on the part of his mother, and influences from the field of metaphysics on the part of his father. The next seven years he spent in Barcelona, where he trained in medicine, made good friends

and experienced the pangs of first love. His student years started with the premature death of his mother and ended with a stay in Madrid where he took his doctorate. Before that he had already travelled in France and Italy with his fellow students and been seduced by one city: Florence.

At the age of twenty-three he returned to Lleida to practise medicine at his father's side, the third generation of doctors in the family. He enjoyed mu-

LA CIUTAT LLUNYANA

ARA que el braç potent de les fúries aterra
la ciutat d'ideals que volíem bastir,
entre runes de somnis colgats, més prop de terra,
Pàtria, guarda'ns: –la terra no sabrà mai mentir.

Entre tants crits estranys, que la teva veu pura
ens parli. Ja no ens queda quasi cap més consol
que creure i esperar la nova arquitectura
amb què braços més lliures puguin ratllar el teu sòl.

Qui pogués oblidar la ciutat que s'enfonsa!
Més llunyana, més lliure, una altra n'hi ha potser,
que ens envia, per sobre d'aquest temps presoner,

batecs d'aire i de fe. La d'una veu de bronze
que de torres altíssimes s'allarga pels camins,
i eleva el cor, i escalfa els peus dels pelegrins.

1939

THE DISTANT CITY

NOW that the furies' mighty fist has razed
the city of ideals we hoped to build:
amid the ruins of buried dreams, close to the earth,
preserve us, Motherland –the earth will never lie.

Over this alien clamour, let us hear your clear voice
speak out. For what is left us now,
but to believe and to await the new design
that freer hands may trace upon your soil?

Oh to forget that sinking city!
Farther off, and freer, another there may be,
sending us, across this imprisoned time,

a breath of air and faith. That of a voice of bronze
that from tall towers reaches out,
exalts the heart and warms the tread of pilgrims.

1939

Translation by Andrew Langdon-Davies

sic, and went to concerts by the Lleida philharmonic orchestra, writing reviews for the weekly *La Jornada*. He also liked literature, especially poetry, which he read in Catalan, French and Castilian. He wrote poems from the age of seventeen. In 1933 he started translating French poetry and writing stories. In 1935 he wrote the farce *Una fantasia com n'hi ha poques*, which has never been published.

Just as he was starting his professional life, shaping projects and expectations, a cruel twist of fate mocked his condition as a doctor, with an illness, tuberculosis, which forced him to enter a sanatorium. This personal circumstance marked the start of a seven-year period filled with difficulties, which can be divided into two stages separated by the Spanish Civil War. He lived the military conflict as a passive and tormented spectator, and when it began, suffered a severe moral crisis at the sight of so many young people, so full of life, going to their deaths, and the thought of the fate awaiting his family and many Catalans if the war was lost, fears which were realised one by one as the conflict progressed: his home was looted and his family and most of his friends had to go into exile. Catalan society was deprived of its voice.

When the war finished, Màrius Torres was, apart from a sick doctor, a beaten Catalan, an exile imprisoned in a sanatorium. During this period, though, Màrius had made good friends in the sanatorium, amongst them a young girl –the

Mahalta of his poems– who shared the love he declared for her. The warmth of this relationship and the deep affection and generosity of the friends he had made at Puig d'Olena helped him through the second stage of the last period of his life, during which, in fact, his poetic work became consolidated, as it was during these four years that he abandoned the medical profession and his poetic vocation strengthened.

Before dying, though, he was to experience further disruption, the beginning of World War II and the spectacular advance of Nazism in Europe. This affected him profoundly, he feared for the fate of his family and friends, exiled in the south of France. On an ideological level, he was appalled by a good deal of the view of the world in which he had been brought up, that optimistic view that believed that science would contribute to the social and moral improvement of humankind.

The life of Màrius Torres shows that we would be wrong to speak of the death of a young man, because a series of extreme situations forced adulthood on him and brought him to maturity in spite of his age. A maturity that came from disruption and self-denial and forced him to make a profound introspection at one of the most difficult moments in the history of Catalonia and Europe. Like a rose out of season, as his poetry says so beautifully, Màrius Torres would not be able to experience July afternoons or August evenings; he would only have access to autumnal

calm, on the way to the sightless season that condemns the flowers. And it is his experience of this life cycle, freed of specific personal details, that resounds throughout his poems. Of those poems he wanted to leave for posterity.

In the case of this poet, poetry started as an adolescent game, continued as a safety valve and eventually became the means of expression of a person subjected to a concentric circle of torments. Nevertheless, the end result of this experience is never gloomy or pessimistic; it is light and clear and full of hope. It is born from pain, from abnegation, but it is never self-pitying. It is the shining light of a tormented spring: it has the gentle earnestness of someone who has known many disappointments; the sadness of one who sees many of life's experiences escape him before he has had a chance to savour them; it is even the elegiac cry of fear that the future might be an empty waste, sown with salt...

Alongside all this, though, there is also delight at the passage of time; the enjoyment and the rhythm of music; the reflections on life and death... And all expressed in agile verses, in language that is lively and suggestive, full of sensuous elements, especially of the annual cycle and the plant world through which he communicates his inner self.

Màrius Torres died on 29 December 1942. The posthumous edition of his *Poesies* appeared in Mexico in 1947 in the collection "Quaderns de l'Exili", edited by his friend the writer and publisher Joan Sales. ■