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Literary news about Anna Murià in LletrA, Catalan literature online (Open University of Catalonia).

< <http://lletra.uoc.edu/en/author/anna-muria> >

## Anna Murià



### Literature as a moral vice

Mercè Ibarz

*- Shall we talk about journalism? Do you believe you're a good journalist and an excellent literary critic?*

- Oh dear, I think that in order to be a good critic I need to do a lot more reading and be much more cultured.

- Modesty apart, the fact is that you have been a journalist, especially in Mexico, writing in Spanish, in the publications of your son Roger Bartra. I recall a long article that Josep Ramoneda had reprinted here in La Vanguardia. It was about the Fifth Centenary, starting out from a discussion of a book by Carlos Fuentes.

- In recent years, in the summer, I must have reviewed between twenty and thirty books, for *Jornada Semanal*, the review of which Roger is editor. My favourite authors are all the good ones I can read. I spent years being a Thomas Mann fanatic. Now I'm keen to devour all the new rising stars being discovered around the world and in Catalonia.

Literary or artistic criticism is journalism too. There's good, dense journalism with a light style but deep when it comes to thought, and superficial, pedestrian journalism, like the greater part of [Pla's](#) work.

- You were already a journalist before you went into [exile](#)...

- Here, during the war, I was also doing short, fast literary criticism. I remember only two of those pieces, even though I've never set eyes them again. In one I was writing about or eulogising the translations, or one translation, of Andreu Nin, just after he died. No one dared to speak about it publicly because that system sowed even more terror than FAI, which had just been crushed, ever did. I took the risk of talking about it, indirectly through literary criticism, without making any explicit reference to Nin's disappearance. I also wrote about [Agustí Bartra's Cant Corporal](#) (Corporal Canto), and this was before I met him.

- You did more than write about books: you were doing interviews, publishing brief political articles and you were even editor of a newspaper...

- Yes, of course I got to be editor of a newspaper, as you say, and that was because all the men on the editorial staff were at the front!

- What would you save of your journalism in exile?

- The literary criticism I did in 1956, in *Gasetta de Lletres*. We were tired of seeing unworthy stuff being published just because the perpetrators were the ones who could pay for publication and, to cap it all, we were fed up with reading praise of it. I said I'd had enough of people saying that everything written

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in Catalan was good, that we had to tell the truth, do real criticism and that I would do it myself. And I did. And I stirred up furious ill-feeling.

- *You've seen a lot of things happen since 1904 [...]. Socially speaking, what events have marked you most positively?*

- When I was ten or eleven, I was interested in what was happening in the First World War and read the articles Gaziel was writing from Paris. We talked about it at school. The boys and girls wanted to be like the grown-ups and to be able to declare ourselves Francophiles or Germanophiles. But it didn't upset me; at that age you can't understand the horror of war. I didn't understand the Russian Revolution either. It didn't start to mark me until years later. I described, in an article I published in Mexico in March 1990, titled "Quien pierde el mundo" (Those Who Lose the World), how it left its mark on my entire life and wrote about how the members of my generation have spent their whole existence coexisting with communism –in favour, against, or neutral, but experiencing it together– and the sensation, when faced with present-day events, that what was our world, which was often cruel and sanguinary, but still ours, is sinking.

In my adolescence I was also marked by the Catalanist struggles, the agitation in the streets, news of the "sabre blows" on the Rambla, where the police on horseback hit people with the flat blade, which didn't draw blood or cause visible wounds though it could break a bone or two, and the social events which, for me, were more distant: the workers' movement, the gunmen...

In my adult life, the great, luminous, radiant impact came with the declaration of the Republic. That Barcelona vibrating with happiness and enthusiasm, rivers of people flowing through the streets, the triumphant voices... and there was no violence. How gorgeous that was! The resolute cry that echoed for hours and hours all over the city –"Long live Macià! Death to Cambó!"– had no homicidal intent, because what we wanted was not physical death but political death... and that's what he got.

In order to understand this, you need to know how Cambó had duped us: for years he worked up the Catalans, the young people, preaching autonomy, calling for it, promising it. His fiery speeches had the young people out demonstrating on the Rambla, getting these sabre blows. And one fine day, Cambó was named minister and that was the end of his talk of autonomy. People turned against this man who "sold out on autonomy for a minister's portfolio". [...] We never forgave him. Imagine how thrilled we are, those of us who still conserve the memory of that time, to see them naming a Barcelona street after Cambó. A few years after that, our tribulations began, and the most terrible of them all: war.

Fragment of an interview published in *El Temps* (20 April, 1992).

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But you know, Anna, that we are here, with you, joined in an embrace that began many years ago and that can only be undone –and he'll have his work cut out!– by the grim reaper, the old man of unlovely endings. I think he'll have to resign himself to keeping us as we are, without loosening the bonds that unite you, me and Rosa in our close embrace.

**Pere Calders**, "Set versions personals. Amics i escriptors parlen de la seva relació amb l'autora" (Seven Personal Versions. Friends and Writers Speak of the Relationships with the Author), *L'actualitat/El 9 nou*, Terrassa (22 April, 1994)

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The Literary Vision

**D. Sam Abrams**

In approximating the work of Anna Murià, one might say in general terms that this is a prolonged analysis of the modern world, a lengthy, nuanced meditation on our century and the human condition.

Throughout her extensive literary career, Anna Murià has worked with a great variety of genres: short story, novel, children's and young people's literature, memoirs, essay, literary criticism and journalism. At first sight, this great diversity could mislead us into thinking that hers is a fragmented or fragmentary opus. This is by no means the case. The fragmentation is only apparent, simply a formal question. At bottom, beyond mere appearances or forms, Anna's gamut of books forms an organic whole. Her work is a kaleidoscope wherein the different books, the fragments of coloured glass, are arranged in such a way as to bring out a figure of radial symmetry, and this figure of radial symmetry that appears at the end is the analysis or vision of the modern world I have just mentioned. To put it in a more matter-of-fact and explicit fashion, books that are apparently so dissimilar or unlike as *El meravellós viatge de Nico Huehuetl a través de Mèxic* (Nico Huehuetl's Wonderful Journey through Mexico), *L'obra de Bartra* (The Writings of Bartra) or *Res no és veritat, Alícia* (Nothing is True, Alícia) are, when all is said and done, integral parts of a single unitary vision, fragments or details of one sole mural painting. Let me stress this: careful reading of the adventures of the Mexican child Nico Huehuetl reveals, in its way, as much of Anna Murià's philosophy of life as might any other of her writings. In her critical work, which is apparently dealing with the ideas and works of others, her own vision of the world filters through. In this regard, her magnificent critical study of Bartra's work might somehow be seen as one long dialogue between Anna Murià and the poet Bartra.

Why so much diversification? The answer is to be found in the events that shape Anna's personality. Anna, as a writer, has little imaginative capacity and, in principle, is more comfortable talking about things she's seen in person, speaking of experiences she's had on the personal level.

Yet this phenomenon gives rise to a serious problem, which is the fact that Anna has a pronounced sense of modesty, a heightened sense of the ridiculous that does not let her, like a Rilke or a Valéry, introduce herself as the only theme of her work. Thanks to this acute sense of diffidence and humility, Anna flees the literary varieties of egocentrism, narcissism or exhibitionism. Instead of constructing a centripetal work, always tending to the centre which would be her own ego, Anna has elaborated a centrifugal body of work that tends to move away from the centre, her own self. One notably eloquent example: instead of writing her own autobiography, Anna has given us *Aquest serà el principi* (This Will Be the Beginning), an autobiographical novel, a true *roman à clef* where we can find all the major events of her life, the essence of her life, but without any need for her to occupy the spotlight, like a Sarah Bernhardt, without her needing to be the centre of the spectators' attention. Hence the reader who wishes to have thorough knowledge of Anna Murià's literary personality, the reader who wishes to capture her vision of the world, will need to keep fitting together the little bits of coloured glass in her kaleidoscope.

Again, throughout Anna Murià's literary work there have always been two writers of opposing tendencies, of contrary nature. On the one hand, is the writer-chronicler who has wanted to portray or catalogue a number of specific historic realities and, on the other, is the writer-thinker who has wanted to depict, beyond real historic events, the universal, eternal truths of the human condition. In other words, fused together in Anna's work we have the memoir writer who offers us a document of her times and a moralist who speaks of human passions that are not fruit of a specific historic

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moment but that have existed ever since the world began. As a chronicler, to cite a couple of examples, Anna has bequeathed us a perfect portrait of the world of exiles in *Crònica de la vida d'Agustí Bartra* (Chronicle of the Life of Agustí Bartra) and *Aquest sere el principi*. As a moralist, Anna evokes the great tradition of the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century French moralists (La Rochefoucauld, Vauvenargues, Chamfort) because we find encrusted in the pages of her books a prolonged series of thoughts, aphorisms and moral judgements. To offer an example of this we might listen to a fragment from her last novel: "One friend should not wish to have power over the other for friendship is mutual influence between equals. The man-woman relationship cannot ever be one between equals, at least not in our times: it is at once struggle and fusion. Fusion is what cannot be in friendship."

Anna Murià's literary *oeuvre* can be divided into two blocks or two periods, with an interlude of withdrawal or crisis between them. The first period, which we might call that of "romantic dogmatism", goes from her literary beginnings in 1926 until the end of the Civil War in 1939. The interlude of inner crisis occurs, more or less, between 1939 and 1944. The second period, which we might label a time of "existential and metaphysical doubt" can be situated from 1944 to the present.

The author herself rejects the entirety of her pre-war production but, as a critic, I am of the view that without these "sins of youth", these literary gaffes of her early years, the great writer we know today might not have appeared. Whatever the case, the pre-war work helps us to understand this author.

Before the war, Anna was a very feisty girl, very vehement, very sure of herself, very categorical. Moreover, she had a very simple, very clear view of the world, which we might sum up as follows: our world, such as we know it, is a place where brutality, injustice and dishonesty prevail, but the world could come to be a place that is virtually perfect; it only takes a political, social and moral revolution that would eradicate the underlying problem: bourgeois society and its repressive, asphyxiating values. The youthful writer, like many of her contemporaries, believed that the world could be changed overnight. She poured all her talent as a writer into the service of these romantic ideals. Through her stories, her novels, her essays and her journalism, she denounced the old world and dogmatically and tenaciously blazoned the new world that had to be constructed. Her juvenilia failed on the literary level, because Anna Murià, without being aware of it, was producing a kind of literature that was poles apart from where her natural talent lay. Instead of using everyday reality as a prop, as a departure point from whence to move into the sphere of ideas, into the world of abstractions (which is her usual way of going about things), she'd start out from an idea or concept and then select situations from real life to illustrate or embody the idea or concept. In sticking to this way of working, going from abstraction to particularities, Anna Murià subverted her own talent, and the works she wrote at this time are overly programmatic and not very natural.

Everyone knows the story. There's no need to repeat it. The war tore down this youthful world of illusions and romantic, dogmatic notions. Our Anna went into exile and once in exile she went through a serious spiritual crisis. She felt distress, uncertainty, frustration and remorse. She wondered about her uncertain, precarious future and, above all, questioned her devastated past. She had tremendous feelings of guilt: how might she have contributed to that war? Was there some ideal that was worth so many sacrifices, so many dead and so much destruction? In view of the outcome, was it worth fighting that war? One of her characters in *Aquest sera el principi* describes Anna's feelings in a tragic, lyrical passage: "I don't like magnolias any more because their perfume is that of remorse. The scent of the magnolias in Guinardó melded into one single pleasure with the visual delight of contemplating the lights and fires of our city's torment. The smell of magnolias is death and destruction; I accuse myself of this aesthetic pleasure, which Bartra and I enjoyed."

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From this "dark night of the soul" and the subsequent union between the author and the poet Bartra emerged the Anna Murià of the second stage, that of "existential and metaphysical doubt". As I've already noted, this stage runs approximately from 1944 to 1992 and this is the period of Anna Murià's major literary creations.

Anna came out of the war as a much more mature, profound and realistic person. There is a passage from the first part of *El llibre d'Eli* (The Book of Eli) in which Anna addresses her daughter, giving her a brief and extraordinary summary of her philosophy of life. I think it is one of the most beautiful texts in Catalan literature and a key piece for understanding her post-war literary production.

"I don't want to teach you to believe. I want to leave you with all the doubts of humankind. Fecund, purifying and touching doubt. The person who believes he or she is right, who presumes to be right, is harsh and cruel. Luckily, people who believe sometimes doubt and are moved! When I believe, when I think right is on my side, I am harsh, cruel and inhuman; I try to resist the temptation of doubt, which makes me horrified at myself, and moved by others. Hatred is born in the person who is right; love in the one who doubts. Doubt is the great good in mankind! If we *knew*, we'd be sterile. If there was no doubt, there'd be no faith or any other abstract thing of the kind we call virtues. There'd be no works. If we *knew*, how unbearable life would be! Doubting makes us experience even the rightness of our doubt; otherwise it would be sufficient, perhaps it would be even too much, for us to exist biologically. This is why I don't want to teach you to believe but want to leave you with doubts: so as not to harden you or ankylose your spirit in biological existence."

In this brief and very beautiful passage, we can see that Anna Murià has captured the spirit of the modern world. The modern world is characterised by crisis, it is crisis, permanent crisis. Everything is doubt; everything is uncertainty. There's nothing solid, nothing fixed. However, the great wisdom of Anna Murià derives from the fact that, faced with an unstable, insecure world, she doesn't despair, doesn't falter, doesn't adopt any kind of facile pessimism, but has the courage to keep loving and creating, in spite of everything.

Fragment of a speech on the occasion of the presentation of the City of Terrassa Medal to Anna Murià in March 1992. Published in *L'actualitat/El 9 nou*, Terrassa (22 April, 1994)

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Reflections on Old Age

### **Anna Murià**

I've made the connection between what I was reading in Husserl with what there is in the last book I wrote –one of the basic ideas therein. (It's the last because I doubt if I'll write any more, and I shan't write any more creative works or books based on imagination.) The idea of the "philosopher's apprentice", which is my main character, the idea of her scepticism, I made my own by putting it in the title and then applied it in generalised form: "Nothing is true..." It's in me, this idea; I no longer dare to affirm or deny anything categorically. I even doubt scepticism. I doubt what I read in Kolakowski's work on Husserl: "It is true that nothing is true", this generalised negation that turns back on itself, which, in order to negate absolutely, negates itself and asks, doubting even more, "Is it perhaps not true that it's true that nothing is true?" What Husserl says is that the very concept of truth makes it impossible to say "there is no truth", since it would mean "it's true that nothing is true". When I wrote *Res no és veritat, Alcía*, I thought (I made the character think) I'd discovered something. But now, reading the comments on Husserl, I realise that many people have discovered it. My ignorance is

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immense and I've run out of time for diminishing it. I used to think that one goes on learning until the very last moment of life. Perhaps that's so... Reading an article on Milan Kundera today, it dawned on me that I was finding out about a lot of things I didn't know about writers and ideas.

And I've wondered if there's any point in going on learning until one's dying breath. Who or what benefits from that? The universal spirit? This I shan't enrich because what I learn is already in it and comes to me from it. Such a lot of doubts! Husserl says that, once we go over to scepticism, we deny ourselves the right to understand the world. How I'm carrying on! Now I read that the experience of certainty in Husserl's sense is as incommunicable as a mystical experience. And I say yes to that. My experience of my love for Him, my certainty in His presence –which is not spiritualist– is mystical. Eternal presence? Husserl says, moreover, that "eternal" doesn't mean "everlasting" but "timeless".

This is my mystical sense of Him: that He is timeless... Yet He announced that time would make a tinkling of stars sound in His ears of grass because He is forever integrated into the earth, into the universe, into time... Eternally? Yes, in time without measurable time, beyond the universe, in total time.

She has the reputation of being a writer. Mine is as a woman. My fame will be of a kindlier nature. Fame? But fame doesn't exist! There is only, forever, the treasure of the universal spirit. And even that is doubtful. All our achievements – will they have any value in ten million years' time? An anonymous value, of course... Why, despite myself, do I give any importance to fame? Why do I envy it? Why am I pleased with my little bit, very little bit of fame? It was a superstition of my early youth and it still is now.

Superstition, yes, useless, fatuous superstition. "There's no point in being alive if one goes anonymously through the world", I used to say. Idiot! Even really famous people are anonymous for the majority. But I don't think it's silly to be recognised as having value as a woman. It's important, being a woman. I often protest, "Don't call me '*senyora*'; I'm not a *senyora* but a woman and it's more honourable to be a woman than a *senyora*."

And being a writer? Failed ambition. But I'll settle for being a woman with the vice of writing. Being admired because I've known how to love doesn't make me feel proud but it moves me. It's about knowing how to love with all the selfishness of one who loves, with the selfishness of the benevolent, and being paid back in gratitude and love!

Published in Anna Murià et al., *Anna Murià* (Ajuntament de Terrassa, 1989)

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**WEB: L'obra de Bartra: assaig d'aproximació**

La "Biblioteca del exilio" de la Biblioteca Virtual Miguel de Cervantes conté l'edició digital d'aquest llibre.

<http://cervantesvirtual.com/FichaAutor.html?Ref=4910&portal=21>



**PDF: Tres cuentos**

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Amb motiu de la mort de l'escriptora, la revista *Tiempo 60 memoria* reproduïx tres dels seus contes per retre-li homenatge, (novembre 2002). En castellà.

<http://www.difusioncultural.uam.mx/revista/nov2002/muria.pdf>



**TXT: Dos poemes dedicats a Anna Murià**

Dos poemes d'Agustí Bartra i Feliu Formosa dedicats a Anna Murià

[http://lletra.uoc.edu/anterior/noms/amuria/html\\_especials/amuriaaltres1.html](http://lletra.uoc.edu/anterior/noms/amuria/html_especials/amuriaaltres1.html)

## Bio-bibliography

### Biography



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**WEB: Fitxa al "Qui és qui a les lletres catalanes"**

<http://cultura.gencat.net/ilc/qqq/FitxaAutors.asp?nom1=mur&nom2=&cerca=Cerca&quinform=form1&NRegistre=3&idregistre=2424>



**WEB: A la Viquipèdia**

Nota biogràfica i obra de l'autora al web de l'enciclopèdia lliure.

[http://ca.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anna\\_Murià\\_i\\_Romaní](http://ca.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anna_Murià_i_Romaní)



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<http://www.grec.cat/cgibin/hecangcl2.pgm?&USUARI=&SESSIO=&NDCHEC=0045000&PGMORI=E>



**WEB: The author in the Who's Who of Catalan Literature**

<http://cultura.gencat.net/ilc/qqq/fitxaAutorsuk.asp?nom1=muri%E0&nom2=&cercauk2=Search&quinform=form1&NRegistre=1&idregistre=2424>

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**WEB: Què hi ha a la Biblioteca de Catalunya**

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**WEB: Què hi ha a les biblioteques universitàries catalanes (CCUC)**

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**WEB: Per comprar-ne llibres**

<http://www.llibres.cat/ca/detall-autor/muria-i-romani-anna>



**WEB: Articles de l'autora (Traces)**

<http://traces.uab.cat/search?f=author&p=Muri%C3%A0%20Anna&sc=1&ln=ca>



**WEB: Articles sobre l'autora (Traces)**

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**WEB: Works in the Biblioteca de Catalunya**

[http://cataleg.bnc.cat/search\\*eng/?searchtype=a&searcharg=Muri%C3%A0+Anna&sortdropdown=-&searchscope=13&searchscope2=13&SORT=D](http://cataleg.bnc.cat/search*eng/?searchtype=a&searcharg=Muri%C3%A0+Anna&sortdropdown=-&searchscope=13&searchscope2=13&SORT=D)



**WEB: The author in The European Library**

<http://search.theeuropeanlibrary.org/portal/en/search/%28%22creator%22+all+%22muri%C3%A0+anna%22%29.query>



**WEB: The author in the Congress Library (US)**

<http://catalog.loc.gov/cgi-bin/Pwebrecon.cgi?DB=local&PAGE=First>



**WEB: The author in the COPAC Catalogue (UK)**

<http://copac.ac.uk/search?&au=Anna+Muri%C3%A0>

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## Comments on the author

### Criticism



**WEB: Anna Murià**

Pàgina de l'escriptora a l'espai "Catalunya des dels tròpics. Les lletres catalanes de l'exili a Mèxic".  
<http://www.uoc.edu/lletra/exili/cat/noms/amuria/index.html>



**WEB: Murià va viure a l'exili**

Pàgina de lletrA dedicada a aquest tema.  
<http://lletra.uoc.edu/ca/tema/exili/>



**WEB: Pàgina de l'AELC**

Biografia, publicacions i bibliografia.  
<http://www.escriptors.com/autors/muriaa/>



**WEB: Anna Murià**

Writer's page in the space "Cataluña desde los trópicos. Las letras catalanas del exilio en México"

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<http://lletra.uoc.edu/exili/esp/noms/amuria/index.html>



**WEB: Murià in exile**

LletrA page devoted to this topic.

<http://lletra.uoc.edu/ca/tema/exili/>



**WEB: "Set dècades dedicada al periodisme i la literatura"**

Entrevista publicada a *Visquem Terrassa* núm. 44 (gener 2001).

<http://www.terrassa.org/ajuntament/comunicacio/entrevistes/annamuria.htm>



**PDF: "La llarga i feliç vida d'Anna Murià"**

Ressenya a l'*Avui* (27/05/04) de la biografia d'Anna Murià escrita per Montserrat Bacardí, *Anna Murià. El vici d'escriure*.

<http://www.traces.uab.es/tracesbd/avui/av02664.pdf>



**WEB: Elogi d'El llibre d'Eli**

Des de Mèxic, Francesca Gargallo elogia sense reserves la versió castellana d'aquesta obra de Murià.

<http://www.difusioncultural.uam.mx/revista/may2002/gargallo.html>



**WEB: El llibre d'Eli**

Sam Abrams, Mercè Ibarz i Maria Antònia Oliver opinen sobre l'obra d'Anna Murià.

[http://www.escriptors.com/autors/muriaa/pagina.php?id\\_sec=998](http://www.escriptors.com/autors/muriaa/pagina.php?id_sec=998)