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Maria Antònia Salvà



Maria Antònia Salvà, the Root of Words

In a magnificent poem, worthy of inclusion in any anthology of Catalan poetry -any one of those anthologies that, after a certain point, have almost systematically ignored her work- Maria Antònia Salvà evokes the ferocious, surprising capacity for survival of a cactus. As tends to be the case with many of her poems, behind the description of country life or a landscape is the suggestion, as Llompart said, of "an imperceptible symbolic sense, hazy and barely insinuated". I cannot read, then, the ten verses of the aforementioned collection without this symbolic sense being forcefully present and, perhaps beyond the conscious intentions of the Mallorcan poet, they become for me a kind of allegory of the woman writer whom, in a memorable book, Tillie Olsen called a "survivor". First, is the simple fact that Salvà should have picked up her pen and stood up against the silence that has been assigned to the female sex through the ages. Hence her "monstrous" side, which is to say her susceptibility to being revealed in her exceptional nature or strangeness. She is like the cactus, a desert plant, "monstrous retille of speckled skin, of clammy entrails", adapted to a hostile environment, "drinking up the sunlight" in a corner until "its malice awakened, twisting and turning it cracked the pot". Second, Maria Antònia Salvà might be seen as a survivor because, for all the traditional difficulty of making known the immense majority of works written by women, with some effort and foraging around in second-hand bookshops, potential readers -men and women- who are interested and are sufficiently tenacious can find her work. And if their pleasure in poetry is not yet blunted, they will discover a good number of poems that deserve to be rescued from this condescending semi-oblivion to which they seem to have been condemned. In this regard, too, her fortune seems to resemble that of the cactus which, having been dumped on a dry wall "beyond the orchard, out of sight", is capable of opening up a way "through hard stones, / digging down through chinks and seams" and, with ferocious effort, managing to be a survivor.

I have said "survivor" and, significantly, this same word in English and in plural form, *Survivors*, is what Sam Abrams chose as the title for his bilingual anthology of Catalan women poets, which was published by the Institute of North-American Studies a few years ago. Maria Antònia Salvà is not only one of the poets whose work appears, but also she is the one who heads the selection. This, in fact, is because here we have the first major woman bard in the history of Catalan poetry. Before her, in Catalan, there had hardly been any poetic expression at all of the way women experienced the world and things, the peculiar point of view that imparts, at least, a different involvement in reality and history, experience transformed into rhythm and sense through a woman's word. Certainly it would be totally unjust to overlook earlier contributions: the meagre collection of samples of anonymously written medieval poetry or that which was signed (with names from Constança de Mallorca to Tecla de Borja), or the undeniable but difficult-to-extricate female contribution to folk poetry and, to go still further, the verses of women who participated in the literary competition of the [Jocs Florals](#) and in the cultural renaissance movement of the [Renaixença](#).

Hence, by the nineteenth century, the name of "pioneer" would unquestionably suit Josepa Massanès

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(Tarragona 1811 - Barcelona 1887), which is not to ignore a whole series of less illustrious names, for example Emília Sureda, a poet and close friend of Salvà who died prematurely in 1904, or other key names that have, however, shone more brightly in other genres, which is the case of Dolors Monserdà. Nonetheless, if, as I have said, it would be unjust to forget all these precursors, it would also be unjust to pass over the qualitative leap that the publication of Maria Antònia Salvà's first book *Poesies* (Poems) meant in 1910. It is worth noting that its literary significance was immediately grasped and emphasised by such exigent writers and critics as

[Riba](#) and Folguera, who were unstinting in their praise and, in particular, [Carner](#), who wrote the Prologue to her second book *Espigues en flor* (Stalks in Bloom - 1926)

and who, in 1957 published an extensive anthology of her work introduced by an interesting and fervent critical study. After that, with notable exceptions, she has been underrated and written off as a non-essential appendage to the Mallorca School. Ignorance of her work has followed hard on the heels of this lack of appreciation. With writers who, like Riba or Carner, believe in the *eternal feminine essence* and in a specificity of women's poetry, with a high regard -in terms that are now somewhat questionable perhaps- for the contributions of her peers or predecessors, a prevailing vision has appeared, offering behind an implicit or explicit denial of any sexuality, which is tucked away beneath the supposed *neutrality* of the text, an absolutely androcentric overview of Catalan poetry. These latent premises only lead to a dead end. To the extent to which they are not considered different, women poets are dispensable. If they are seen as different, in the short or long term, this difference turns against them and makes them inferior ?

I think that any woman writer, right through to today, has to be studied and understood in two different ways but in parallel, first, in relation to the literary tradition they come from and the work of their male and female contemporaries and, second, in the context of a feminine genealogy of literature that, it must be said, we have only just begun to delineate. Her value, outside the sexist canon, will certainly have to emerge from the intersection of these two domains. Tomorrow's meeting organised by the [PEN Club](#) at which Catalan women poets of today are paying tribute to Maria Antònia Salvà should be understood in this sense: bringing her back as one of the names that must be borne in mind in any overview of Catalan poetry, while recognising her as one of our most outstanding forebears and highlighting the continued presence of poets of the female gender -a presence that is far too often held in low esteem and reduced to one or two names as a *token* in our literary landscape.

Article published in the newspaper *Avui* (30 March, 1995)

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They Have Said ...

Poets were like demigods to her and what she most longed for was to have a brother who was one.

This was the time that *Canigó* and *Caritat* (Charity) by [Verdaguer](#) were published. These works were a great revelation to her and she learned them by heart, just as she'd learned poems by [Marià Aguiló](#), whom she particularly admired for the smooth flow of his verse and for the likeness of his poetry with popular songs, of which she'd made a considerable collection straight from the mouths of country people and farm labourers.

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It was at the height of her enthusiasm for Verdaguer when she gave herself totally to writing but without anybody, even her father, seeing her work. Despite her reserve, father [Costa i Llobera](#) learned of her pastime and wanted to read her verses. She could not refuse to show him and the great poet not only encouraged her verbally but, after having requested a copy of one of the poems, "Orfanesa" (Orphaned), had it published very soon afterwards in *La Tradició Catalana*.

Introductory note to *Poesies* (Barcelona, Lectura Popular, Biblioteca d'Autors Populars, 1910).

The lofty words of [Miquel Costa](#) captured the meaning in his Prologue to *Poesies* by Maria Antònia Salvà. "The discrete simplicity, naturalness without vulgarity, effortless propriety, exquisite taste, a fount of ingenuous goodness and delicate sentiment without strange fits of rapture". These were the virtues pondered by the illustrious poet. The simplicity, discretion, goodness, the gold and honey of Maria Antònia's verses.

Tomàs Garcés, Prologue to Maria Antònia Salvà, *Els poetes d'ara: Maria Antònia Salvà* (Poets of Today: Maria Antònia Salvà - Barcelona, Lira, 1923).

But what I am sure about is that there is an angel that fills with quiet clarity and fine-tuned harmonies the verses of Maria Antònia Salvà. If you wish to explain to yourself the intimate charm, the profound, graceful emotion of the songs that will very soon go in through your eyes to expand in your soul, do not forget those lines of the traditional song: "Un àngel va entrar / per la finestra" (An angel came in / through the window).

Angelic order, the intimate pleasure of everything in its proper place, of every emotion captured in melodious, becoming music, of each duty carried out in the gratification of patience, of each dream in the tireless shelter of hope, of each suffering in the sweet and difficult swaddling of charity.

[Josep Carner](#), Prologue to M.A. Salvà, *Espigues en flor. Poesies* (Barcelona, Altés, 1926)

My pleasure in poems and songs in general could almost be said to be innate to me. My wet-nurse -a robust young country girl, whose nickname was "flauta" (Flute) and for whom I had no flaw, used to say that by the time she weaned me I already knew a whole string of songs. What these songs were I never asked her.

Fragment from "De la infantesa" ("On Childhood) in Maria Antònia Salvà, *Entre el record i l'enyor* (Between Memory and Longing - Palma de Mallorca, [Moll](#), 1955)

This was, then, a true poetic birth determined not at all by the simple pleasure of rhyming but by the direct goal of evocation. It is, again, as groping as it is close to divining and the metaphor is vital and not at all logical, while the anecdote, necessary as a departure point, is always inferior to the song.

[Josep Carner](#), Prologue to M. A. Salvà, *Antologia poètica* (Poetic Anthology - Barcelona, Selecta, 1957)

The treatment of love in the [Renaixença](#) is neither transgressing nor rebellious and, when written of by women tends to be put through the prism of the mother-child relationship, as is the case of Maria Antònia Salvà, whose life went by undisturbed by major events.

Although she never married or had children and was a poet, she considered, as is reflected in her

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work, that a woman's mission was precisely that of marrying and having children and not writing. She does not apologise for the fact of being a spinster and not having offspring because nobody chose to marry her and she is not responsible for that, but she is responsible for being a writer. She always speaks of this fact with humility, almost as if she is seeking forgiveness. This is why [Miquel Ferrà](#), with whom she conducted an extremely interesting correspondence writes to her in one of his letters: "A woman doesn't have to keep apologising for being intelligent and having a heart and, when God grants her this privilege, she must lead a slightly more documented life". Ferrà chides her because Maria Antònia is afraid of being an intellectual and does not want to be taken for a bookworm even though she is one.

[Carme Riera](#), «Un poema inèdit i un comentari» (An Unpublished Poem and a Comment), AA.DD. *Lectures de Maria Antònia Salvà* (Readings of Maria Antònia Salvà - Barcelona, PAM, 1996)

At the end of her life, Salvà used the image of a *bee* to present herself, a bee that has wanted to be a "pilgrim of humble dress" to track back over her particular nature, her personal experience including love, the passing of time and loneliness, and then to call it a day because, "My honeycomb untimely was a troublesome thing: / the new folk today in different honey delight ? / The bee -never mind! / Through thistle or rose on the wing / it found its way to the sky." It is a poetic image which, like that of the spider, Salvà frequently uses throughout her work to designate herself and it brings her close to a completely different tradition, that of women's poetry that evolved over the nineteenth century with names like Emily Dickinson.

[Lluïsa Julià](#), «L'"Antologia" carneriana de Maria Antònia Salvà» (Carner's Anthology of Maria Antònia Salvà), *Serra d'Or*, (1996)

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A selection of texts

Text



WEB: Magisteri Teatre-Mag Poesia

Quatre poemes: "Libèl·lula", "La petxina", "Quatre coses" i "Al roserar".
<http://www.mallorcaweb.com/mag-teatre/poemes-solts/salva.html>



WEB: Selecció de Poesia Catalana

Reprodueix el poema "D'un cactus" amb traducció a l'anglès.
<http://www.uoc.edu/lletra/especials/folch/salva.htm>



WEB: "Una rosa"

El poema de Salvà en una pàgina que recull poemes catalans sobre Sant Jordi.

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<http://www.xtec.es/~mdomingo/stjordi/poemes.htm>



WEB: Magisteri Teatre-Mag Poesia

Four poems: "Libèl·lula" (Dragonfly), "La petxina" (The Shell), "Quatre coses" (Four Things) and "Al roserar" (In the Rose Garden).

<http://www.mallorcaweb.com/mag-teatre/poemes-solts/salva.html>



WEB: Selection of Catalan Poetry

Reproduces the poem "D'un cactus" (On a Cactus ` with a translation into English.

<http://www.uoc.edu/lletra/especials/folch/salva.htm>



WEB: "Una rosa" (A Rose)

Salvà's poem in a page specialising in Catalan poems about Sant Jordi (Saint George).

<http://www.xtec.es/~mdomingo/stjordi/poemes.htm>



AUDIO: "La petxina" interpretat per Maria del Mar Bonet

"La petxina" interpretat per Maria del Mar Bonet

<http://www.musicadepoetes.cat/app/musicadepoetes/servlet/org.uoc.lletra.musicaDePoetes.Titol?autor=201&titol=1775>

Other



TXT: Diàleg Salvà/Marçal

Diàleg Salvà/Marçal

http://lletra.uoc.edu/anterior/noms/masalva/html_especials/mariaantoniasalvaaltres1.html



TXT: Diàleg Salvà/Pessarrodona

Diàleg Salvà/Pessarrodona

http://lletra.uoc.edu/anterior/noms/masalva/html_especials/mariaantoniasalvaaltres2.html



TXT: Salvà/Marçal dialogue.

Salvà and Marçal in dialogue.

http://lletra.uoc.edu/anterior/noms/masalva/html_especials/mariaantoniasalvaaltres1.html



TXT: Salvà/Pessarrodona dialogue.

Salvà and Pessarrodona in dialogue.

http://lletra.uoc.edu/anterior/noms/masalva/html_especials/mariaantoniasalvaaltres2.html

Bio-bibliography

Biography



WEB: A la Hiperenciclopèdia

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http://www.enciclopedia.cat/fitxa_v2.jsp?NDCHEC=0058323



WEB: The author in the Catalan Encyclopaedia

<http://www.grec.cat/cgi-bin/heclangl2.pgm?&USUARI=&SESSIO=&NDCHEC=0058323&PGMORI=E>

Bibliography



WEB: Què hi ha a la Biblioteca de Catalunya

http://cataleg.bnc.cat/search*cat/?searchtype=a&searcharg=Salv%C3%A0+Maria+Ant%C3%B2nia&sortdropdown=-&searchscope=13&searchscope2=13&SORT=D



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

http://ccuc.cbuc.es/search*cat/a?SEARCH=Salv%C3%A0+Maria+Ant%C3%B2nia&sortdropdown=-&searchscope=23



WEB: Què hi ha a les biblioteques públiques

<http://argus.biblioteques.gencat.cat/iii/encore/search/C|SSalv%C3%A0+Maria+Ant%C3%B2nia|Originalresult|U1?lang=cat&suite=pearl>



WEB: Per comprar-ne llibres

<http://www.llibres.cat/ca/detall-autor/salva-i-ripoll-maria-antonia>



WEB: Articles de l'autora (Traces)

<http://traces.uab.cat/search?f=author&p=Salv%C3%A0%20Maria%20Ant%C3%B2nia&sc=1&ln=ca>



WEB: Articles sobre l'autora (Traces)

http://traces.uab.cat/search?ln=ca&p=Salv%C3%A0%2C+Maria+Ant%C3%B2nia&f=keyword&action_search=Cerca&c=Traces+%3A+base+de+dades+de+llengua+i+literatura+catalanes&sf=&so=d&rm=&rg=10&sc=1&of=hb



WEB: Works in the Biblioteca de Catalunya

http://cataleg.bnc.cat/search*eng/?searchtype=a&searcharg=Salv%C3%A0+Maria+Ant%C3%B2nia&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+%22salv%C3%A0+m aria+ant%C3%B2nia%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=Maria+Ant%C3%B2nia+Salv%C3%A0>

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Comments on the author

Criticism



WEB: Pàgina de l'AELC

Biografia, informacions, publicacions.

<http://www.escriptors.com/autors/salvama/>



WEB: Lluçmajor i la literatura

Fitxa sobre l'autora al web de la ciutat mallorquina de Lluçmajor.

http://www.llucmajor.org/portaLLucmajor/fdes_d4_v1.jsp?contenido=737&tipo=6&nivel=1500&codMenuPrimerNivel=89&codMenu=210



WEB: AELC Website

Biography, information, publications.

<http://www.escriptors.com/autors/salvama/>

Miscellaneous



WEB: Literatura mallorquina

Text de la GEC que presenta de forma molt sintètica la literatura de l'illa.

<http://www.xtec.es/~Irius1/alcover/contextbaix.htm>



WEB: Mallorcan Literature

Text by the GEC (Catalan Encyclopaedia Group) offering a highly synthetic presentation of the literature of the island.

<http://www.xtec.es/~Irius1/alcover/contextbaix.htm>

The author 2.0

Blogs of blogs



WEB: La blogosfera diu...

http://blogsearch.google.es/blogsearch?hl=ca&ie=UTF-8&q=Maria+Antònia+Salvà&lr=lang_ca



WEB: The blogosphere says...

http://blogsearch.google.es/blogsearch?hl=ca&ie=UTF-8&q=Maria+Antònia+Salvà&lr=lang_ca