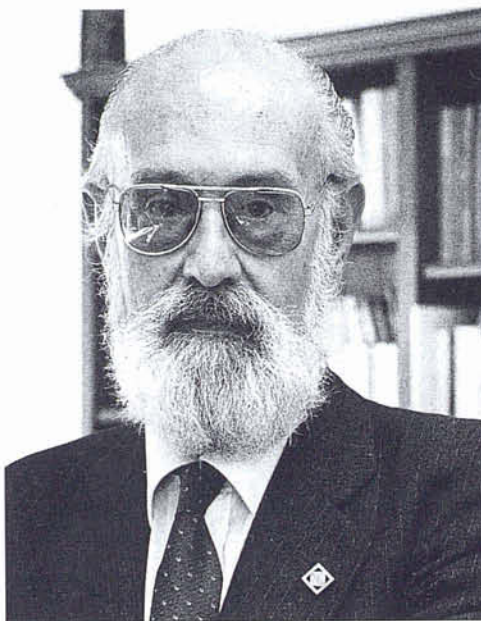


JOSEP MARIA LLOMPART



JOSEP MARIA LLOMPART (PALMA DE MALLORCA, 1925-1993) MADE HIS NAME AS A POET, AND ALSO AS A STUDENT AND CRITIC OF LITERATURE. HE WAS PRESIDENT OF THE OBRA CULTURAL BALEAR AND OF THE ASSOCIACIÓ D'ESCRITORS EN LLENGUA CATALANA. IN 1982, HE WAS AWARDED THE PREMI D'HONOR DE LES LLETRES CATALANES. ABOVE ALL ELSE THOUGH, HE WAS A MAN WHO OCCUPIED WITH UTMOST DIGNITY HIS PLACE IN THE ISLAND'S SOCIAL FABRIC.

MARIA DE LA PAU JANER AUTHOR

Josep Maria Llompart, a Majorcan poet belonging to the so-called generation of the fifties, died a few months ago in Palma, the city where he was born sixty-seven years ago. His death coincided with a series of events held throughout the winter, by which both the Balearic Isles and Catalonia set out to recognize and celebrate his work as someone devoted to culture. A university lecturer, a lover

of literature, translator, a brilliant speaker, a subtle writer, conversationalist and, especially, a great poet, whose life was committed to the cultural and political reality around him. A constant critic of the Franco dictatorship and an active intellectual throughout the sixties and seventies, he was a man of word and deed, who occupied with utmost dignity his place in the Island's social fabric.

He had a profound knowledge of the Catalan language and defended its rights when, once out of childhood and after a family education in Castilian, he discovered it as his own language. The poetic universe he built up was coherent and solid. He too, like Carles Riba, Josep Vicent Foix and Salvador Espriu, took on the job of preserving the voice of the people. The following words by Salvador Espriu could just as well have

Vigil

*The path of sorcery and doorway to mystery.
A September love sheds its leaves over you,
birthday cards and Sunday bells,
the ultimate joy of an unruly skin.
For you the sun danced, you knew the anxiety,
the yearning of the gods, the infancy of days,
you learned the lips, felt in the pulse
the beating of a twilight of simplicity and pain.
Now you are ready, go over to the door.
Now let the lady of the evening come.*

Vigilia

Camí dels sortilegis i porta del misteri.
Un amor de setembre se't desfulla a la boca.
postals d'aniversari, campanes de diumenge,
el goig definitiu a la pell alçada.
Per a tu ballà el sol, saberes el desfici,
la frisança dels déus, la infantesa dels dies,
li aprengueres els llavis, sentires en els polsos
el batec d'un crepuscle de senzillesa i pena.
Ara ja estàs a punt, atansa't a la porta.
Ara ja pot venir la dama del capvespre.

been his: "...we have lived to save your words, to recover the name of each thing". So it is not difficult to see how Llompart's poems reflect this profound passion for the words that "...have matured within me like a fruit. Now I am theirs and perhaps of men."

Unity and coherence of content and constant experimentation with form are the most characteristic features of Llompart's poetry. In the early *Poemes de Mondragó*, published in 1961 as a collection of unconnected poems, we find the harmonious construction of a series of symbols that keep turning up throughout his work: concern for the different stages of human life, which he relates to the cycle of the four seasons, with the construction of a double semantic field. On one hand, autumn and winter, along with evening and night, a time for nostalgia and remembrance, a reality that comes closer and closer to the idea of sickness and death. A time permitting the yearning from which writing is born. A yearning for spring, according to the poet himself. On the other hand, then, spring and summer, with the noontime splendour and the morning, a past time of paradises lost in the recreation of the Proustian legend. This is the basis from which Llompart's main themes arise: the theme of childhood, always wavering between yearning and criticism. A yearning for that long-gone world, nos-

talgia because now nothing can bring back past life, not even the sweet shelter of familiar landscapes; but nevertheless irony in their remembrance, when the poet's voice mocks the founding premises of the family environment. Criticism of religion, or rather, of this religion's forms, which often become a disguise for deceitful attitudes, criticism also of the imposition of a foreign language, and of the symbols making up a world he at once rejects and idealizes.

The theme of love, touched on only fleetingly, like something dreamt of rather than lived, as though he wanted to cast a veil over intimacy and experience, and take refuge in literature. Because Llompart's poems can have a double origin: they come from life experience, any episode from the poet's life—a journey, an encounter, an observation, a thought—, or from the cultural experience—something he read. The poet, a man of profound and rigorous intellectual formation, knows how to build his own world out of the dense forest of his reading. In an attitude we might describe as *metaliterary*, he is able to create literature out of literature itself—in other words, to drink from the oldest springs to create entirely new fictions.

But the great theme in the poetry of Josep Maria Llompart is that of death. It appears as a symbol in his earliest poems and gets gradually stronger and

solider as the writer's work develops. It is at its most intense in the last three books of poems: *Mandràgola*, *Jerusalem* and *Spiritual*, a triad of great poetic maturity in which the poet shows his mastery of the language and the richness of the poetic world that comes of it. In *Mandràgola* the poet creates a series of characters that work as symbols: beside Espriu's white woman, a representation of death, the figure of Agnès is nothingness, total disappearance, the negation of everything. Antònia, on the other hand, symbolizes the increasingly remote world of childhood. In some poems, Agnès and Antònia allegorically embrace.

But *Jerusalem* is unquestionably the most mature of the three books. Conceived as a piece with an almost architectural organisation, rounded and perfect, in which the magic numbers three and seven play a crucial role, it tells the story of a pilgrimage. The central character is a traveller following the long paths of the limits of life, where everything finally crumbles, in search of beauty. Beauty that takes shape in the elegant towers, surmounted by archers, of the celestial city. But we can never reach Jerusalem. What we can do, though, is to drink in the intensity of poems that draw landscapes and paths. Josep Maria Llompart, poet, leaves us a legacy of beauty. ■