

A note from the translators

Maria-Mercè Marçal is probably one of the most-widely read contemporary Catalan poets. She wrote poetry, prose, a novel entitled *The Passion According to Renée Vivien*, and translated into Catalan a number of writers such as Margerite Yourcenar, Leonor Fini, Colette and the Russian poets Anna Akhmatova and Marina Tsvetaeva. She wrote prodigiously and tirelessly and her writings were much praised. Among the many awards she received are the Carles Riba Prize and Carlemany Prize for fiction, two of the most prestigious in Catalan literature. She had a pioneering role in developing an entire body of thought on feminism and Catalan literature and her poetry reflects awareness and concern for topics and themes never previously encountered in Catalan poetry, such as pregnancy, motherhood, sapphic love and the process of fighting cancer.

Born in 1952 in the interior of Catalonia at Ivars d'Urgell (Lleida), at the height of Franco's dictatorship, Marçal was educated in Castilian, ignoring the existence of the Catalan literary tradition. It was not until she started her studies at the University of Barcelona that she discovered the richness of Catalan literature. With feminism and the cultural revival of the Catalan language there emerged a reason for writing poetry. In this sense, her first book entitled *Cau de llunes (Den of Moons)*, published in 1977, which won the prestigious Carles Riba Prize in 1976, announced the main concerns of her poetry:

A l'atzar agraeixo tres dons: haver nascut dona,
de classe baixa i nació oprimida.

I el tèrbol atzur de ser tres voltes rebel.

*I am grateful to fate for three gifts: to have been born a woman,
from the working class and an oppressed nation.*

And the turbid azure of being three times a rebel.

But after this first book her poetry predominantly concentrated on one of these points: 'to have been born a woman'. At the heart of this theme we find in her following books how the woman poet explores her subjectivity from different angles and perspectives: as a mother, as a lover, as a daughter, etc. In *Bruixa de dol (The Mourning Witch)* (1979), these poems display the solidarity among women through the images of the 'witch' and the 'fairy'. It follows *Sal oberta (Open Salt)* (1982) and *Terra de Mai (The Never Land)* (1982), both groundbreaking collections in Catalan poetry. *Open Salt* considers the problems and controversies of pregnancy and motherhood from a heterodox perspective. *Terra de Mai* is a collection of fifteen sestinas describing the joys and sorrows of a lesbian relationship with her lover Mai. In *La germana, l'estrangera (The Sister, the Stranger)* (1985), Marçal shows her conflicts with traditional models of motherhood. In the last collection to be published while she was still alive *Desglaç (Thawing)* (1989) she uses Sylvia Plath's poem 'Daddy' as a starting point for an analysis of patriarchal power in the light of the death of her father Antoni Marçal. At this first poetic stage Marçal was preoccupied not only with content but also with structure. She mastered her craft, developing classical forms such as sonnets and sestinas.

Inspired by the sound of her inner voice, we began to think of the possibilities of translating Marçal. This inner voice, which is the stimulus behind any translation, was drawing us in as translators. Soon Montserrat Abelló and I set ourselves the job of entering into the mind of this great woman poet. Marçal's poems display an enthusiasm for life; a life as poetry that demands to be shared. We obeyed the call, running after Marçal's poems like a journey through time, through another language, as if we were trying to save her from death.

This edition contains the last book of poems written by Marçal and posthumously published by her friend and critic Lluïsa Julià

two years after her death. In the course of a year working on these translations, we became aware of the challenge of *The Body's Reason* with its rejection of classical versification. While it would seem that the use of free verse simplifies our job as translators, the precision and accuracy of the internal rhythms present other challenges and we have attempted as far as possible to represent the deep meaning of every word and the subtle thoroughness of Marçal's poetry.

Noèlia Díaz Vicedo
Montserrat Abelló