

STABAT BY VÍCTOR SUNYOL:
A VULNERABLE ERGODIC

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As we have seen in the preceding pages, Catalan literature has a strong tradition of explorational poetry (as J.V. Foix liked to call it). With the study of Joan Brossa's *Les suites de poesia visual*, we have tried to look in-depth at a trend which, based on the classic avant-gardes, would impose itself on much of Catalan poetic creation, such as conceptual or visual poetry, with elements that approach the idea of ergodic literature put forward by Espen Aarseth.

It appears evident, however, that the tradition of breaking away that is represented significantly by J.V. Foix and Joan Brossa still lives on in some of the more contemporary poets. This would be the case of Víctor Sunyol (1955).

His is a complex work, since his aim is to explore the limits of language. In the "author's note" of his book *Ni amb ara prou*, he writes: "At present, this pursued worth (and that of the texts) is aimed principally and frontally at the problem (if that is what it is) of 'discourse', of 'saying' (that terrible verb that denies itself only in its formulation)".¹ Despite the difficulty of his poetic proposal, Víctor Sunyol is accustomed to accompanying his poems with notes that, in some way, dress the text, albeit without the aim of explaining it. It is a question of giving the reader some keys, as though he wanted to enter into the process of creation of the poems, as though he wanted to be by our side when reading them, accompanying us, guiding us, showing us the many readings, opening up for us the horizon of interpretation; making us part of his vulnerability. For example, in his book *Moment*, which contains Sunyol's poetry from 1982 to 1986, we find an interesting text entitled "Notes (biogràfiques) a Moment", which was published in 1995. Here we can read the following, as a presumed "biographical" note: "[...] Taking language to the limits (limits that he himself is forced to mark out) becomes fundamental; the limit is the only sphere of creation of the text (and

of knowledge of the text and the author; and, therefore, the reader), the sphere where it acts at liberty and where language cannot impose itself as truth”.²

This irrevocable commitment to language, to the point of seeking its limit, is synthesised in *Stabat*, a book that culminates the work of poetic exploration, of a high creative risk, that the poet from Vic has developed over recent years.³

At first glance, one could think that the risk of this book is merely formal, but we should not remain here. The book is divided into two blocks: *Stabat* and *Set*. Based on the 21 tercets of Giacomone di Todi’s *Stabat Mater* (where the image of the Pietà is central), which are the embryo of the first block, a poem is generated, “caused” by each of the original tercets, footnotes that reflect as complement on language and poetry, comments that try to “explain” the poem that has emerged from each of the tercets, and some final notes of writing poems that serve to enrich (and to question) the reading course taken. The texts of *Set*, in turn, follow the last six words of Christ on the cross. The whole, then, is of a complexity of layout that even makes the “printed book” format insufficient as the most suitable for reading.

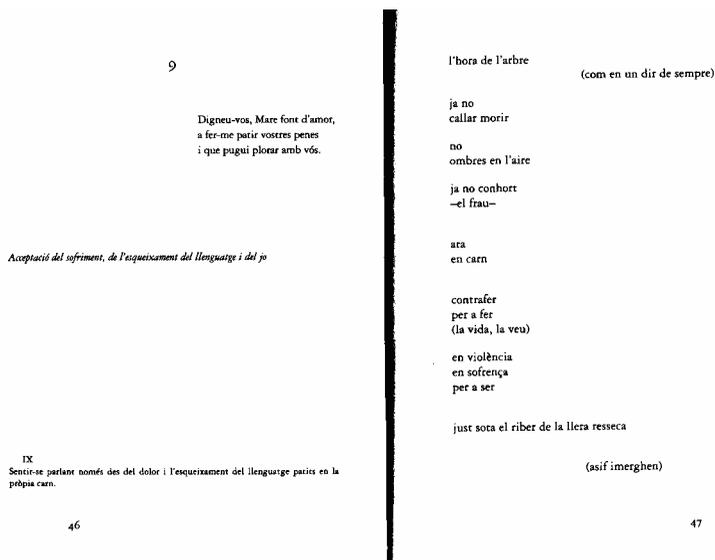


Figure 1. Different kinds of discourses in *Stabat* by Víctor Sunyol are shown in this page.

As I was reading *Stabat*, I could not cease to imagine the undeniable gains that this book would have had if it had been translated into an electronic format. I will give a brief example. As I commented earlier, the end notes do not simply serve to understand better the process of reading the book, but they also help to reconfigure new readings; we are told that the scheme of the work is circular, in the shape of an almond, which illustrates the return path and the return of thought path (which culminates nothing, which goes nowhere) that is constructed throughout the route. This “form” arises when the author realises that, based on a specific poem, where the subject of the river is central, the poems become symmetrical: that there are relationships, for example, between 9 and 11, 8 and 12, etc. A relationship based on common conceptual and textual elements. A bond, then, between each word in the poems written by Sunyol that have concomitants with Giacomone di Todi’s original tercets. This layout, I feel, demands a visualisation and the possibility of being able to journey without hindrance between those parts of the book that coexist with the poems and that need a relationship of contiguity, of physical proximity. This is a poetic work that goes beyond the limits of the book as we have perceived it until now and demands, for a leap in the dimension of understanding, to be transferred to a medium such as the electronic one.

<i>esquema del llibre</i>	<i>elements textuals que es repeteixen</i>
21	[colofó : no esperis res]
2 0	el gual –asif imerghen–
1 19	dissolt
2 18	ara des de sempre ara només ara sempre / lacerant
3 17	llindar / cap altre
4 16	per ja mai més / i tampoc / per sempre
5 15	d'així absent
6 14	des de amb dins / estar
7 13	ametlla
8 12	el mur
9 11	el pas del riu –asif imerghen–
1 0	el pas del riu –asif imerghen–
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Figure 2. This is the description made by the author, with the inclusion of the textual elements that are repeated in every part.

It would be a mistake, though, to think that the radical nature of Sunyol's book is only present in its structuring. It goes beyond that. Through the cohabitation of various discourses (translation, poetic creation, the draft of a "type of poetics" of philosophical scope and an interpretative essay), this book shows us the vulnerability of language in all its aspects.

Consequently, in the poems generated from *Stabat Mater* we are present at the progressive distancing from the central reference that is the image of the Pietà (the most unbearable symbol of death: the dead child in its mother's arms) to be present at a purging of the poetic language, which is the awareness of its impossibility to say ("poetry, always faced by the corpse that is language"), and which goes on to the exploration of a poetic language capable of finally freeing itself from all referential and imitative illusion ("language, recognising itself in its reality of mirage, of uselessness"). We find, then, the prior language, without nouns or verbs, essential, pure: made only of prepositions, conjunctions and adverbs.

Sunyol makes his own the radical twist that Heidegger gave to our perception of language and which leads us to an irreversible opening when thinking of our place in the world. It was in his "Letter on Humanism" of 1946 that Heidegger made his famous assertion that "Language is the house of Being". This conception of the Being in language surpasses the singular logic of grammar. The idea of language as a simple instrument, crystalline transmission of thought, is shattered here in such a way that an entire tradition of intellectual understanding is placed in crisis. It frees us from the intellectual ambitions of the metaphysic, from a form of thought and from the existence that believes itself to be in a position to dominate and reveal the logic of the world. Sunyol assumes that there is a stricter thought than the conceptual, as Heidegger said. A supplement that exceeds and denies the logic of the explanation. It is for this reason that in the end notes he insists that they are not notes that set out to "explain" the poems, that they are not intended to become hermetic. Language speaks and at the same time remains indecipherable.

Not in vain has Víctor Sunyol compared this concept of weakness of language with the idea of awareness of emptiness, of not being able to say anything, of utter silence, while attempting to construct a discourse made out of the remains of the shipwreck that is language. It is placed, then, in the antipodes of that language that comes from the full awareness of language, that is not aware of its muteness, of

its uselessness. His wants to be a poetry made by someone who has seen language for what it is in its uncertain nakedness.

“And its talk will, for that, become muteness”, we read in *Stabat*. In a language subject to the possible interference of a reply, what sustains discourse is silence. Silence continually envelops language. Silence opposes resistance to the purely rational understanding of language, since it feeds the shadows that place it under discussion and frustrate the logic that instrumental interest would want to impose. Meanings slip through the fluctuating significance, language becomes opaque, mystery reappears, because silence is not synonymous with nothing: it is a question that is posed in the space where language becomes evident. Silence is the sonority that makes language possible. Silence is not residual, it is essential. Silence is the essence of language.

The round, almond shape that conforms the poems in *Stabat* is not casual. Not in vain, as the essayist and film-maker Trinh T. Minh-ha wrote, can it be said that “life is round”. Following the route of this type of thought, then, proposed to us by Sunyol’s writing, means assuming the impossibility of showing a definitive starting or finishing point, and, with that, assuming a potential dispersion of any attempt at mastery. It means having to face a freedom that Lévinas defined as infinite.

All of this involves a shattering of the ego that speaks, that ends up producing an unexpected ethical benefit. It is also, however, a route of extreme fragility. *Stabat* proposes a poetry of inquiry. It leads us, on the one hand, to the impossibility of the language to say anything, but above all it brings us face to face with a vulnerable ergodic.

NOTES

1. Sunyol (1984).
2. Sunyol (1995).
3. Sunyol (2004).

REFERENCES

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Sunyol, Víctor (1995) *Moment (poesia 1982-1985)*. Lleida: Pagès Editors.

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