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Rosa Leveroni



Rosa Leveroni

Luisa Cotoner Cerdó (Universitat de Vic)

Barcelona, 1910-1985. Poet and librarian

Rosa Leveroni i Valls was born in Barcelona on 1 April 1910, "daughter of that still-happy Barcelona bourgeoisie", to put it in her own words. She studied at the Príncep d'Astúries (Prince of Asturias) College and with the "Dames Negres" (Black Ladies) in the Passeig de Gràcia, her subjects including music and languages. Again, she read any book that fell into her hands. However, the really decisive influence in her education came when she started at the Librarians' School in 1930, just after it had been re-established by the Barcelona Provincial Council, in the days when its director was Jordi Rubió i Balaguer. Here, apart from the subjects strictly pertaining to librarianship, she studied classical languages, history of civilisations, literature, history of the book, notions of palaeography under the guidance of a teaching staff that included such eminent names as Jordi Rubió himself, Marçal Olivar, Pere Bohigas, Joan Petit, Lluís Nicolau d'Olwer, Rafael Campanals, and [Carles Riba](#), the latter teaching General Literature, and Ferran Soldevila, who taught History of Catalonia.

The exchange of concerns between teachers and students, the out-of-hours activities that were encouraged and, in particular, the atmosphere of friendship that frequently meant that intellectual admiration turned into amorous crushes, shaped Leveroni's personality and determined her literary vocation. Hence, thanks to the fidelity of her friendship for Carles Riba she was his link, during his exile, with the nuclei of republican resistance in Catalonia as well as depositary of his [Elegies de Bierville](#) [Bierville Elegies]. In turn, the historian Soldevila was to be her great love and one her intellectual interlocutors, perhaps the main one, until his death in 1971. When she completed her studies in 1933, she was awarded a scholarship for further training in Madrid and to write a thesis on children's literature. In the fateful year of 1936, she started working as a librarian at the first Autonomous University of Barcelona, and she also completed two years of an Arts Degree during the Civil War.

It was at this time that her first book of poetry *Epigrames i cançons* [Epigrams and Songs] (1938), was a finalist for the 1937 Joaquim Falguera Prize. This was published with a "Letter-Prologue" by the maestro, Carles Riba, in which one finds the following words, "You seek to preserve your intimacy in prefixed, brief and clean ambits". Indeed, one can detect in this volume the aesthetics of the [Noucentistes](#) [members of the early twentieth-century politico-cultural movement in the service of bourgeois reformism] and Catalan post-symbolists, along with a good part of the European poetic tradition. Present, too, are the mainstays of her poetic career: love, almost always star-crossed, solitude and the desire to capture the mystery of nature in order to fuse with nature.

After the war, the purge of Generalitat (Catalan Government) civil servants meant that she was no longer able to keep working in her profession as librarian. Yet, for all its violence, the repression could

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not break her convictions. On the contrary, Leveroni became one of the main activists in the group that formed around Carles Riba, who was then the leader of the movement for cultural recovery. Besides writing for the clandestine reviews *Poesia* (1940) and *Ariel* (1946), she acted as a point of contact for the intellectuals in exile and, as noted above, it was Leveroni who was in charge of distributing Riba's *Elegies de Bierville* (1943) among the resistance. In the 1940s, she took part several times in the "Jocs Florals" literary competitions organised by the exiles. Her "Dotze cançons" [Twelve Songs] won the Catalan Language *Jocs Florals* of London (1947); while "Tres poemes" won the Lee Publishing House Prize in the Catalan Language *Jocs Florals* of Paris (1948).

Nonetheless, it was not until 1952 that she published her second collection of poems, *Presència i record* [Presence and Memory], this time with a Prologue by *Salvador Espriu* and also including the poems of her earlier book. Four years later she produced one of the best exemplifications of Catalan amorous lyrical poetry, *Cinc poemes desolats* [Five Desolate Poems], verses invoking *Ausiàs March*, which received the "Flor Natural" award in the Catalan Language *Jocs Florals* of Cambridge (1956). In these compositions, Leveroni persists with her themes of solitude, disillusionment, absence of hope, the passing of time, the desire to "return to the land", which entails death as the only way of assuaging the suffering of being alive. Perhaps it is this waning of desire that moved Leveroni to withdraw from literary circles for decades and to "save my cry in the darkness", as she says in one of her poems.

Nonetheless, in 1981, she compiled her oeuvre in *Poesia* [Poetry], which was published with a Prologue by *Maria Aurèlia Capmany*, along with two epilogues reproducing the texts that Riba and Espriu had written, respectively, as prologues to the volumes of 1938 and 1952. The acute gaze of Capmany described Leveroni "as if she were a restless traveller from Florence to London who, undecided and by chance, between journey and journey, had remained here, in the General's dark Barcelona", this highlighting, I believe, the European-tending character exuding from her verses along with an impression of "a brilliant solitude in a universe of discreet, grey, non-strident tonalities". Also included in the volume are "Altres poemes" [Other Poems], a compilation of contingent compositions including "Homenatge a Anglaterra" [Homage to England] and "Homenatge a Gabriel Ferrater" [Homage to Gabriel Ferrater].

Leveroni, a member, along with Salvador Espriu, *Joan Vinyoli*, Teixidor, Maria Perpinyà, *Joan Triadú* and Palmira Jaquetti, of the generation that she called "lost" was always very clear about the need to "pass on the torch" of the great Catalan poets to the coming generations. Her world view springs, then, from a poetic voice that feels it is heir to a tradition, a culture and a language, though it speaks with unquestionable originality. In 1982, the Generalitat (Government) of Catalonia awarded her the Creu de Sant Jordi (Saint George Cross).

Rosa Leveroni's work, however, is not confined to poetry alone. In fact, her prose writing is more extensive although most of it remained unpublished in her lifetime. Indeed, she only published a few stories such as "L'estranger" [The Foreigner] and "El return" [The Return] in the review *Ariel* (July 1947) and in *Antologia de contistes catalans 1850-1950* [Anthology of Catalan Short Story Writers 1850-1950] (published in 1950) respectively, as well as a number of essays: "Bibliografia de Josep Puig i Calafalch" [Bibliography of Josep Puig i Calafalch] (1947), which was jointly authored with Maria Montserrat Martí; "Les imatges marines en la poesia d'Ausiàs March" [Marine Images in the Poetry of Ausiàs March] in *Bulletin of Hispanic Studies* (1951); and an epistolary of Carles Riba in the volume in homage to the poet, *In Memoriam Carles Riba* (1959-1969), which was published in 1973. Leveroni died in August 1985 shortly before the appearance of the volume *Contes* [Stories] (1985), edited by Helena Valentí.

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Fortunately, recent years have seen the recovery of a good part of Leveroni's work that is held in the Leveroni Bequest of the Biblioteca de Catalunya (Library of Catalonia). This ample collection of manuscripts and typescripts, which scholars are slowly making available to the general public, enables one to discover new aspects of a delightful personality. Hence, with the publication of *Confessions i Quaderns íntims* [Confessions and Intimate Notebooks] (1997), edited by Enric Pujol and Abraham Mohino Balet, aspects of Leveroni's relationships with Ferran Soldevila and Carles Riba have now come to light. *L'Epistolari. Rosa Leveroni – Josep Palau i Fabre* [Epistolary: Rosa Leveroni – Josep Palau i Fabre] (1998), edited by de Natàlia Barenys, is another window on to her world and one of great documentary and literary value. The following year, the review [Reduccions](#) (1999) offered a sample of her activity as a translator, publishing her version of T.S. Eliot's *The Wasteland*, with Carles Riba's corrections. This is a side of her work that is still largely unknown, according to the list of translations from English and French of fragments, poems and stories of a wide range of writers, including Mariana Alcoforado, Mary A. Coleridge, Aldous Huxley, Rudyard Kipling, Katherine Mansfield, Boris Pasternak, and Japanese tankas, which have been reviewed by Pilar Godayol (*Catalanes del XX*, 2006). In 2000 Rosa Lentini published an anthology of poems by Leveroni in a bilingual Catalan and Spanish edition titled *La casa desierta y otros poemas* [The Deserted House and Other Poems], this volume including a good number of previously unpublished poems. Also in 2000, the Biblioteca de Catalunya brought out *Llibres i papers de Rosa Leveroni: catàleg de l'arxiu literari* [Books and Papers of Rosa Leveroni: Catalogue of the Literary Archive] (2000), a guide that makes it possible to follow the thread of Leveroni's creation through the labyrinth of the personal archive she bequeathed.

All in all, one is led to believe that the recovery of Leveroni's oeuvre is guaranteed thanks, also, to the valuable monographic studies such as that proffered by Abraham Mohino Balet in 2004, *La prosa de Rosa Leveroni: instantànies de l'èsser* [Rosa Leveroni's Prose: Snapshots of Being] or with the recent publication, jointly edited by Abraham Mohino Balet and Enric Pujol Casademont, of *Cartes d'amor i d'exili: Rosa Leveroni, Ferran Soldevila* [Letters of Love and Exile: Rosa Leveroni, Ferran Soldevila] (2009). Today, Rosa Leveroni lives on, not only in the memory of her staunchest admirers, but also in the shelves of libraries and bookshops of our country. One only needs to go and see. An effort well worth making.

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Bio-bibliography

Biography

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