

The Spanish Civil War in Catalan narrative

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Received 11 May 2010 · Accepted 30 June 2010

ABSTRACT

The first part of this article presents the literary output on the subject of the Spanish Civil War written during the war and immediately after it, between 1936 and 1939. What stand out from this time are brief, non-fictional narrative forms which were often meant for the press, such as chronicles from both the battlefield (where Pere Calders excels) and the home front. Among the fictional genres, short stories prevailed during the war, while the novel, a genre which requires the slow assimilation of experience, found its maximum expression in the post-war period in two canonical works by Joan Sales and Mercè Rodoreda, which shall be analysed in the second part of this article.

KEYWORDS: Civil War 1936-1939, narrative, chronicle, short story, novel

NARRATING THE WAR DURING THE WAR

The early 1930s had been a fertile period for Catalan prose in its different genres, particularly fiction. Critics' and publishers' opinions about the need to expand the reading public through attractive products, in an effort to consolidate a stable literary market, primarily affected the novel and the short story. In effect, the blossoming of these two genres reflects both the variety of the publishers' output, as they had stepped up projects and collections, and the fact that the works being published encompassed everything from in-depth examinations of certain prevailing trends in the European post-war period, like psychology, to the most obscure avant-garde experimentation.¹ This broad range continued in the war years, as is reflected, for example, in the authors who were awarded the prestigious Crexells Prize for the novel (granted by the Generalitat de Catalunya) and the modern, appealing catalogues of translations of the collections spearheaded by the publisher Josep Janés i Olivé.² Thus, some authors continued to construct their oeuvre within the parameters already existent during the 1920s, while other younger ones joined these already established currents, either bringing new developments or in some cases adapting their subject matter to the historical circumstances.

In fact, in the context of the debate on intellectuals' ties with their society, and specifically the reality of the deeds that occurred in July 1936, for the majority of working writers the act of writing "about the war"³ was only part of the commitment to write (*tout court*) which they had as professionals with the society to which they belonged. At that historical juncture, characterised by the clash between reason and barbarism, and in the circumstance of a threatened culture, writing was a fundamental part of a civic commitment which actually encompassed many other factors that played a part in achieving and continuing Catalan cultural life until the defeat in 1939.⁴ In 1938, the authoritative voice of poet Carles Riba linked the "trade" of writing to the "duty" to write in the article "Literatura i grups salvadors" (Literature and Saviour Groups) that appeared in the most prestigious of the cultural publications, the *Revista de Catalunya*. In this article, he conferred a value on literary creation that was not circumstantial yet that was simultaneously not detached from historical purpose: "seeing that it has to do with politics, yet according to a general, supreme scheme of saving the fatherland".⁵

In parallel, another writer in quite a different vein, Joan Oliver, warned about the dangers of impromptu literature or pamphleteering in the pages of the Marxist-leaning weekly *Meridià*. He stated that writers' service to society would be more effective the better they accomplish their first duty, which is to produce "good literature, artistic works, which save time and space and ennoble the name and memory of a land, and set a national personality in the assembly of great peoples. This, and nothing else, should be the ambition of a writer at the service of his fatherland and his language." However, he also adds:

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Likewise, literary endeavours are always necessarily slow work, one of purification and sedimentation, of picking and choosing [...]. Some of our best literary cultivators have begun to work on what will become the first fruits of their observation and talent applied to the vast phenomenon of the revolution and war. And their work will most likely not be, as some ill-intentioned and other ingenuous people believe, a dithyrambic ode to the destructive force of a people provoked by their own oppressors, nor demagogic praise of the earliest proof of a more equitable division of wealth, nor an unconditionally favourable picture of those months of bloody justice. All of these deeds will surely be the subject of their literary speculations, but all of it will be transformed into artistic fodder, into human values with no degrading concessions to partisan politics, extracting from that piece of pulsating history part of the immense ethical and aesthetic wealth it contains.⁶

Indeed, the war as a “subject of literary speculation” is present within the different genres, but it is interesting to consider the fact that within the historical context, the most immediate referent for prose was the war of 1914-1918,⁷ and the dialectic between immediacy and distance is not the least important of the reflections proffered by the critics. The distinction between written production “as the deeds are taking place” and production after the fact affects not only pragmatic issues, like time and the peace and quiet needed to write a novel (a condition which Oliver also mentions), or the limitations imposed by ideological censorship, which is inevitable in non-imaginative prose though not negligible in fictitious prose either (if only to avoid demoralisation among the civilian population), or in parallel, the military censorship of the most documentary genres targeted at the press. Rather, coevality also affects issues related to the adoption of a certain way of writing, the predominance of certain genres over others (brief news items, which develop material for periodicals) and the fluidity of the genre boundaries that characterise certain literary typologies which often hover somewhere between journalism and fiction.

Precisely with regard to the kinds of genres, the critics seem to agree that the subject of war written during a war requires brief, non-fictional narrative forms. Thus, celebrated writers and others who emerge within the historical period write chronicles from the battlefield, impressions and accounts of the campaign, anecdotes from the home front and many other kinds of texts. Furthermore, these genres are promoted by institutions and magazines:

Catalan soldier from the Republican army: the pages of this periodical are open to your contributions [...] send us narrations of war episodes you have experienced, or anecdotes of events that have happened to you or your mates.⁸

They are also recognised by critics as a subsidiary form of document for the novel of the future, especially because of their direct link to reality, justified through appeals to direct experience (which is therefore regarded as “authentic”) and real testimony (which is therefore regarded as “true”). In effect, these genres, inspired by the narrative models from World War I,⁹ sprang from the desire for attention to the current events and the testimonial desire to directly showcase the events and the impression or moral reflection derived from them. Therefore, they serve suggestion and immediate perception, momentary jottings on the ground more than the composition of elements, invention or re-creation inherent to realistic fiction. In short, they put a premium on the “truthful” over the “plausible”, sometimes to the detriment of literature. The writer Lluís Montanyà’s call to militiamen is quite explicit:

In these accounts, the author does not have to attempt any kind of literature. Personal impressions are enough [...]. Militiamen, soldiers: write your own “Campaign Diary”.¹⁰

There is also widespread consensus as to the value of direct experience in relation to the “little story”, the kind that, unlike “great stories”, philosophical treatises or heroic poetry, tries to provide an intimate, personal sense, the “human” side of war,¹¹ despite the provisional nature – or precisely because of it – that people attribute to this kind of narrative, “bottomless quarry from which the novelists of tomorrow will forge their war novels”.¹² Therefore, it serves as a guarantee which, in the case of the European war, will ensure subsequent novels or document historiography. The latter is an attribute that can even be detected in institutional requests:

On the initiative of the Institution of Catalan Letters, the Catalan writers who have been working at the front should compile and organise their war notes, their daily accounts, materials which, after being duly filtered, shall be published and shall constitute an enormously valuable document for the historic study of the war.¹³

Regardless, in those years what proliferated were chronicles written on campaigns, mainly targeted at periodicals. The product of a documentary reporting intention that lends itself to a variety of formal interpretations, the literary result is more protean, particularly because it is subsidiary to different models of prose and journalism. Thus, this “literature of experience” ranges from impressionistic jottings or reflective meditations (characteristic, for example, of the chronicles of writer Josep Sol for *Meridià*) to dispatches by newspaper correspondents (the ones by Joaquim Grau for *La Publicitat* or by J. Morera Falcó for *Treball*); from the scene experienced directly and episodic description of atmospheres or archetypal characters to the campaign account; from the simple “war anecdote” stripped of all literary intentions and at times

almost joke-like, to narrative forms whose conception or provenance brings them closer to a story. The different headings that introduce the literary sections in the press (“Chronicles from the Front”, “From my War Card”, “Narrations by Combatants”, “Anecdotes of the Fight”, etc.) do not allow not many genre distinctions to be made in this entire output beyond its characteristic hybrid nature. However, there are attempts to distinguish the genres in the announcements of competitions: the magazine *Amic*, published by the Culture Services at the Front, offered a prize for “the best narration of a war deed in the Republican army, preferably experienced by the narrator”, and another for “the best war anecdote, preferably told by one of its participants”. The weekly *Juliol*, published by the JSU, the youth section of the PSUC (Unified Socialist Party of Catalonia), distinguished between the prizes for “war chronicles and tales” and “war stories”.¹⁴

However, very rarely did this kind of journalistic prose appear, during the period and in Catalonia, in the guise of a volume with the explicit intention of narrative unity.¹⁵ Nor, as far as I know, has it ever appeared as a compilation of several authors, such as the one assembled by Marcel Acier from the chronicle letters written by the combatants in the International Brigades, published in 1938 with the title of *Des de les trinxeres espanyoles* (From the Spanish Trenches). However, books like *Diari de guerra* (War Diary, 1937) by writer Lluís Capdevila¹⁶ and *Impressions de viatge. Catalans a Madrid* (Travel Impressions: Catalans in Madrid, 1938) by politician Jaume Miravittles compile writings – some of them previously published in the Barcelona press – with a certain desire for unitary compilation, although they do not in fact successfully manage to avoid fragmentation. However, this is a procedure shared by foreign correspondents such as Jean Allouche, who compiled the reports written for the Parisian newspaper *L'Humanité* in *Nits de Sevilla* (Nights in Seville, translated in 1937 by Joaquim Vilà i Bisa).

Furthermore, the publishing projects on war themes spearheaded by the Institució de les Lletres Catalanes (Institution of Catalan Letters) were clearly divided into a novel collection and another “War Documents” collection, which was supposed to compile the output of soldier-writers: “works that must be simple campaign accounts, firsthand testimony about life at the front, things seen or gathered, written with simplicity and absolute sincerity and without any intention to fictionalise them”¹⁷ But even though this invitation was taken up by some (and the texts published in the press), including the aforementioned Josep Sol (in *Meridià* from the Eastern front) and Gifré Bosch (writing from the Aragon front in the “War Notes” section that regularly appeared in *La Publicitat*), or by others who, like Lluís Ferran de Pol, initiated projects (*Dietari de l'Ebre*, July 1938) that were later revived,¹⁸ none of them was actually published in a volume. Therefore, Pere Calders’ *Unitats de xoc* (Shock Troops), written and submitted in instalments but published as a single book, is the first and only volume in the collection.

In twelve consecutive episodes, the author (as a narrator-character) recounts his experiences from when he leaves Barcelona until he reaches the battlefield. He mixes campaign feats, events and anecdotes with impressions and reflections inspired by everything he was experiencing. The combination of these elements, the naturalness of the language, the firsthand perspective (far from the 19th century staging of “war theatre”) related to the sensitive notes by Enric Cluselles that illustrate the volume, supply a story that back in its day was regarded as a model and the most plausible way of writing about the war during the war.

For this reason, critic Rafael Tasis can claim that *Unitats de xoc* is “the kind of war literature that we have the right to ask of our soldier-writers today”. The critic deems that this book, along with the insightful *Vie des martyrs* (1917) by Georges Duhamel or the friendlier André Maurois book *Les silences du Colonel Bramble* (1918), translated into Catalan in 1930 by historian Ferran Soldevila, is a personal narration in a minor tone:

A series of brief notes, without emphasis yet backed by authentic emotion. Everything our war is and everything it represents is reflected in *Unitats de xoc*, the diary of a modest soldier who fights with full awareness of the intrinsic horror of war, yet also with the infinite pride of contributing with his toil and, if necessary, with his life, to earning his country’s freedom and winning this same freedom for the world that watches us indifferently. Right now, the book by Pere Calders is the best representation of Catalan war literature.¹⁹

It is indeed “brief notes, without emphasis”. If we have to talk about the attitudes and treatment of war literature, there are many writers who feel mistrustful of the poetics of the “deliri bèl·lic” (war craze),²⁰ who reject the romantic tradition of “ampul·loses descripcions” (bombastic descriptions) or “l’exaltació d’heroïsmes” (the glorification of heroics) in the words of Ramon Xuriguera, who had written from Paris before the war, referring to the bulk of the French tradition (unlike the ones cited by Tasis).²¹ And yet conversely, in the 1930s we can witness a certain proclivity for products in a realistic, protesting and/or pacifistic vein (Remarque, Glaeser, Barbusse), which are also the ones with the most repercussions, in Catalonia as well, and the ones at the root of the modern narrative on the topic developed after World War II.²² This is how the 1938 book by Pere Calders, *Unitats de xoc*, which envisions war as a devastating deed to which man contributes if not through conviction as to its hypothetical virtues, so popular in the late 19th century literature, than through the pure need to defend himself, can also be read as a call against war seen from pacifistic, civilians eyes that are equally or more anti-militaristic than Barbusse’s in *Le Feu*.²³

All of this together makes Calders’ story,²⁴ which revolves around standard archetypes in war literature, such as the vagaries of life at the front over the backdrop of a

military operation (the Republican forces' occupation of Teruel in late 1937), stand out as one of a kind, characterised by the anti-epic register or civilian vantage point which forestalls the usual confusion between the legitimacy of the forced defence²⁵ and the intrinsic values of the "warrior" attitude, more or less tinged with the military spirit. The social acceptance (regarding not the war but the codes of behaviour in civilian life) of the values of "honour" or "glory" (served up seldom and subtly) had been parodied (and their "conventional" origins explained) shortly before by the same author in *La glòria del doctor Larén* (Doctor Larén's Glory, 1936), an early declaration on the novelistic poetry that would prevail in his subsequent output within this genre.

Likewise, it seems obvious that Calders had read war authors from 1914, and he himself recounts this in the "Brigada de xoc" (Shock Brigade) episode to reinforce the distinction between "normal" people and "born" heroes, those who "are ready to die in any revolt", those who join any and all insurgencies or "go wage war on their own initiative". The fact that a peaceful man with clearly civilians dreams and misgivings about the military idiosyncrasy believes himself to be morally obligated to enlist and go to the front should not seem so strange, he indicates, in view of the experience of the past European war, although that one seemed set in remote times and therefore repeating it was "unthinkable":

It is clear that all philosophies devised around the Great War, and a reading of the war books, should have led us to warn against the simplicity of this way of thinking [the one that has "everyone in their vocation"]. But in fact, despite the fact that each of the war pictures that we see evokes the colour and content of the war settings in 1914 as we imagine them, to us that war was gripped in history and seemed as far away from us, in terms of the chance that it would be repeated, as the slaughters of the Christians or Napoleon's campaigns ("Brigada de xoc" episode).

This excerpt is important because it reveals the fixation on an experience not lived by the author but recognisable precisely through literary codes (of wartime narrations about the war from 1914-1918), and this consciousness is what in turn enables the codes of reality to be manipulated. This is demonstrated in the text itself, for example in the comical and/or parodical use of some of the recurring motifs in this kind of literature, which in some cases he even explains:

Regarding lice and war, I also had a personal opinion of which I was very fond. I was convinced that they were two things that could be perfectly disassociated by taking a bit of care, and I felt indignant every time someone wrote about war and mentioned lice. I attributed it to a lack of imagination. But now I admit that the others were right and that lice give the soldier char-

acter and keep him company. Experience, then, has enabled us to reach a conclusion on this matter: lice are not as bothersome as fleas and are much more confident and operate in better faith. (Episode: "La primera línia" [On the Front Line])

The personified treatment of the motif of lice is, in this case, very similar to the one used by Robert Graves in *Goodbye to All That* (1929), where two soldiers debate the wisdom of killing old or young lice (and decide that it is better to kill the young ones because the old ones can be trapped when they go to the young men's burial). Regardless of whether this is influence or simply confluence, the fact is that in *Unitats de xoc* Calders manipulates the clichés of the 1914 wartime narrative to violate the conventional relationships between "catastrophe" and "catharsis", as he would later do in fictitious narrative, in stories like "Fet d'armes" (Made of Weapons) and "El batalló perdut" (The Lost Battalion). This can also be seen in "La clara consciència" (The Clear Conscience, published in *Meridià* in 1938), where the author brings the bombardment into the everyday life of the city and uses it as the pretext for debunking the notion of free will versus fate.

Therefore, Calders fits within the current that rejects the rhetoric derived from the epic or saga, given the fact that after the outbreak of barbarism in a world that used to be perceived as civilised, one cannot describe either the catastrophe or the values that uphold it in the traditional way. Yet at the same time, the author uses the archetypes of the heroic and displaces them for a variety of purposes. Calders' undertaking in *Unitats de xoc*, that is, retelling a modest experience (of an undistinguished combatant not very well suited to the military life) and reflecting on it (the paradox of having to defend eminently civilian values from the army), totally appeals to the values of the common man. The book, as Carles Riba wrote in the preface, is fully rendered "within the sentiment of elementary human realities".

As is natural, home front experiences also engender narrations of deeds and scenes experienced: everything from the portraits of stock characters (the ambusher, the provocateur, the negligent one, etc.) with deliberately pedagogical purposes contained in the book by Manuel Valldeperes, *Els perills de la rereguarda* (The Perils of the Home Front, 1937), to the series of radio broadcasts by the "Home Desconegut" (Unknown Man, who was actually Jaume Elies Bracons) sponsored by the Comissariat de Propaganda (Propaganda Commission). With titles like *Crítica de la rereguarda* (Criticism of the Home Front, 1937) and *Xerrameques* (Idle Talk, 1938), this series contained episodes among citizens along the line of 19th century costumbristic humour. In the realm of high pedagogy, however, we should mention the narrations for children (an area very well covered given the period in time), including the sensitive book by illustrator Lola Anglada, *El més petit de tots* (The Smallest of All of Them), published by the Comissariat de Propaganda in 1937.²⁶

However, literary journalism is where we can best detect the pulse of civilian life, such as in the chronicles in the “L’accent de Barcelona” section of *Revista de Catalunya* published throughout 1938 by Andreu Avel·lí Artís, which were compiled into a volume years ago,²⁷ and especially the two titles by Cèsar-August Jordana in *Meridià*: “Simples esplais” (Simple Amusements) and “Monòlegs interiors” (Internal Monologues), also revived not too long ago.²⁸ Tributaries of everyday life and, therefore, chronicles of the most crucial stage in Barcelona’s home front, the former, “Simples esplais” combines observations and reflections which are not bereft of a certain morality (meaning value placed on moral dignity) well-seasoned with humour, about the atmosphere and psychology of a society subjected to material hardships, deprivations and bombardments. The thematic focus on the key points in urban life – the unreliable public transport service caused by blackouts, the lack of food and other common goods and the unease triggered by anti-aircraft alarms – has something of the user’s behaviour manual about it in a city that is caught in “special times” (and the author strives, in the first article, to distinguish this from “normal times”). Just like the humorous register, plays on words, double-entendres and ironic contrasts, this is a tactic aimed at buffering the collective circumstances which are clearly shared by the author and his readers. However, none of this conceals the seriousness of certain situations, although it does avoid the indecorous ascent into the realm of transcendence or banal sentimentalism (which was already quite common in the pamphlets) or the inopportune descent into defeatism.

The prose in “Monòlegs interiors” retains many of these procedures, but the range of registers expands considerably. First, there is more ethical reflection on attitudes, and therefore criticism of the gluttons or hoarders, as well as disparagement of escapists, the unaware or deserters run parallel to praise of those who fulfil their duty, especially the anonymous soldiers who fight, suffer and die at the front. However, the humour is also quite corrosive and the irony is biting. On the other hand, Jordana revisits the subject of Spanish and international politics, and just as he had done previously in the newspaper *L’Opinió*,²⁹ he wages a frontal attack against the mechanisms of power (and the ideologies that perpetuate them) which triggered, consented to and sustained the war. Thus, the civilian and religious power of the instigators is carefully analysed, especially the actions of representatives of the major European powers that are involved in the war on Franco’s side, both those who had a direct hand in it (Hitler, Mussolini) and the “consenters” (the insidious role of the factotums of “Non-Intervention”).

Jordana’s articles in *Meridià* also have a texture that is a truly innovative and yields some of the most brilliant and combative pieces in all the wartime press. Indeed, as the heading suggests, the “Monòlegs interiors” are an adaptation of one of the narrative conventions of the modern novel to the journalism of his day. Jordana, a novelist and

reputed translator, had shown a great deal of interest in this technique of penetrating the consciousness of fictional characters. He had also contributed to its successful and controversial introduction in Catalonia by his divulgation of James Joyce in *L’Opinió*, and especially by his translation of Virginia Woolf’s *Mrs Dalloway* for the Proa publishing house issued in 1930, only five years after the English original. At that time, back in the 1920s, neither Dublin nor London were cities at war; the Barcelona of 1938, however, was. Yet the internalisation of the city in those writers was testing a technique that spilled a lot of ink in Catalonia, in a debate parallel to the one on the urban novel, a debate that examined the process of change in the new perceptions of reality.³⁰ In 1938, by painting himself as a *flâneur* who walked and thought in the middle of a besieged city, the writer was testing a new way of adapting the genre to the model that strove to capture the impact of external deeds on the consciousness: the common man in the city at war expressed himself through stream of consciousness.³¹

Attention to reality, to the everyday experiences at the battlefield and the home front, also prevails in models of brief fiction, short stories, which tend to examine everyday, recognisable experiences of war (soldiers’ departures, life at the battlefield, the hardships at the home front, bombardments, etc.) and the attitudes and feelings they generated (bravery, loss, sadness, fear, etc.) based on realistic models and through subjects, situations and behaviours (including exemplary behaviour) already the stock in trade of the traditional wartime narrative. However, generally speaking, more attention is paid to the repercussions of the conflict on individual civilian life than to life in the trenches (and there are very few descriptions of firsthand combat). As is natural, the latter is almost always re-created by writer-combatants, like Avel·lí Artís-Gener, Agustí Bartra and Vicenç Riera i Llorca.

With regard to the fiction prose written during the period, short narratives are the most worthy output, as can be seen in a compilation from the 1980s which gathers together vanished texts from the literary journals or culture sections of newspapers and tries to include both the narratives of well-known authors and those of wholly unknown writers who emerged out of that particular point in history.³² The most outstanding examples are the stories published in *Meridià*, *Catalans!* and especially *Revista de Catalunya*. And some of the most important pieces are by Mercè Rodoreda, who was prolific in this genre during the war,³³ along with the narrations by C. A. Jordana and Xavier Benguerel. The latter excelled in “Xandri el titellaire” (Xandri the Puppeteer), which was part of the compilation *Tres contes de Guerra* (Three War Stories) which won the Narcís Oller Prize in 1938. However, it never managed to be published in Barcelona and instead was included in the volume *Sense retorn* (No Return) which was issued in Buenos Aires in 1939, one of the first books to be published in exile. *Tres a la rereguarda* (Three at the Home Front) would appear in the same collection (Edicions de la revista Catalunya from Buenos Aires) the fol-

lic writer Evelyn Waugh) and “The Common Man as Hero”,⁴⁶ prevailed in the output after the generation that experienced the war. And they have led to two canonical novels: *Incerta glòria* (Uncertain Glory) by Joan Sales and *La plaça del Diamant* (translated as *The Pigeon Girl* or *The Time of the Doves*) by Mercè Rodoreda.

TWO CANONICAL NOVELS: *INCERTA GLÒRIA* BY JOAN SALES AND *LA PLAÇA DEL DIAMANT* BY MERCÈ RODOREDA

Joan Sales' *Incerta glòria* appeared in 1956, the first novel published in Catalonia that focused on the war from the perspective of the defeated side. However, it is a work that was rewritten, expanded and revised until the 1970s.⁴⁷ Mutilated by censorship in its original edition, it was not until 1962 that the first entire version was issued, when Gallimard published the French translation by Bernat Lesfargues (*Gloire incertaine*). Later, however, more material was added in different editions, especially in the last part, leading critic Joan Triadú, its most avid scholar, to speak about these additions to the main thematic core as an “autobiographical literary segregation, as a highly authoritative expression of the author's total personality,

which in this case is presented as ‘concealed’ as per Thomas Wolfe's expression (that is, the kind of novelist who stuffs the novel, who conceals elements in it instead of delimiting it, making it the product of exclusions)”.⁴⁸

The meaning of Sales' work, for whom the war, experienced in the peak of his youth as a combatant, was his most important life experience, is always the return to this same experience, and primarily to its consequences and derivations in the moral order, that is, everything that displaces the conflict towards moral, ideological and/or religious conflict. Indeed, the real purpose of the book is to inquire into mankind's destiny and the ultimate meaning of his existence. Thus, the characters, who are sketched realistically (as are the episodes or atmospheres from both the battlefield and the home front) and reflect strictly lifelike human and ideological attitudes, also represent different quests for the absolute within an historical circumstance (the war and post-war years) that is an extreme situation which frames and gives meaning to moral reflection.

The book is organised into four parts which correspond to the voices of the different characters, who reveal themselves via letters or memoirs and offer their corresponding points of view on the same reality, experienced through different consciousnesses. Three characters share the same obsession with another character called Soleràs, who, like a collective consciousness, is a compendium of all the questions whose answer they do not know or do not dare to ask and extrapolates them in their extremes of lucidity or absurdity. Soleràs accumulates the concern with nothingness, with the sense of reality and the times which the other personalities have to differing degrees, and since he is the only one who dies during the war, he takes on a prophetic quality by foretelling “the nausea that will come afterward”. With his reflections, driven by the others, he shows himself to be the true “man” by accepting defeat as an essential component of the human condition. He is also the antithesis of another repulsive character, constructed in the style of Mauriac, the anti-man Lamonedà, a true “anti-Soleràs demon” who represents the synthesis of the individual and social evil that presides over life, seen from another perspective, and repeatedly, as a trajectory “between the obscene and the macabre”.

It is Soleràs, then, who wonders about the meaning of glory on behalf of all of them, and who determines its possible scope: “We were all born to conquer the universe yet we conquer nothing! The universe is beautiful but it doesn't let itself [...]. Why is it so beautiful if it doesn't let us possess it?” Thus, the thirst for glory, for grand, heroic and absolute causes, resides in the human consciousness, but its actualisation is limited: in love, by the impossibility of retaining fleeting happiness (“If we could make those moments eternal so they do not escape from our grasp...”); in war, because of the very human condition that distorts and degrades the original ideals (“There is in us an incomprehensible, unbearable duality. The first is the out-

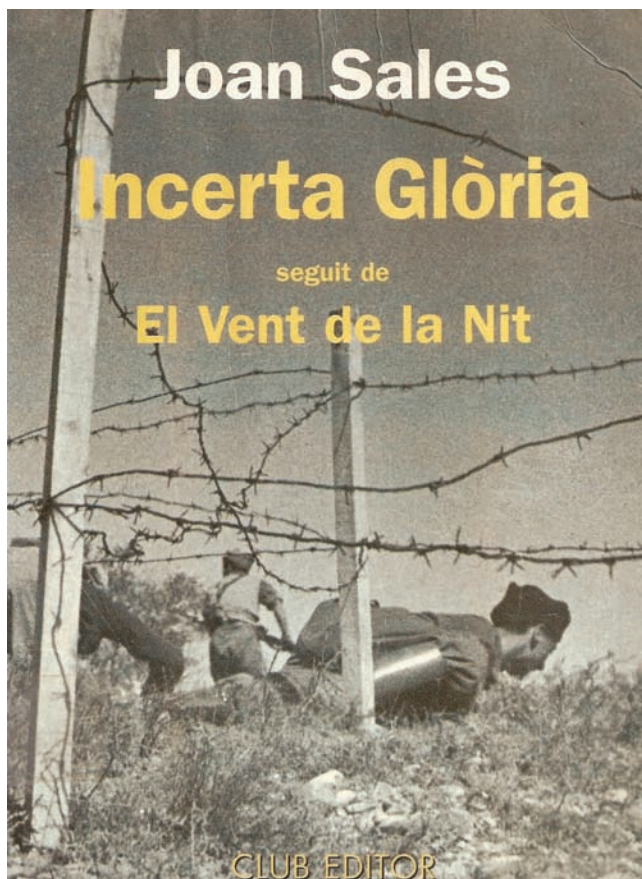


Figure 2. Front cover of the novel *Incerta glòria* (*Uncertain Glory*). This work won the 1955 Joanot Martorell prize. It is a novel centred on the war, recounted from the standpoint of the winners.



Figure 4. Mercè Rodoreda (1908-1983) in a studio photo taken in Geneva in the 1960s (Source: Arxiu de la Fundació Mercè Rodoreda). She is considered the most influential contemporary Catalan writer.

first chapter to the “cry of hell which I must have held inside me for many years” released in the middle of the square. And then, from the distance of time, she merges external reality, internal reality and different ways of appropriating them, that is, all the elements that form part of experience, from the conscious to the subconscious.

However, the perception of one’s own past does not tend to move through aseptic territory, and so the life of Colometa is “recalled” with more or less emotional empathy for the material evoked. This attitude is sustained throughout the entire discourse, which often alludes to the fluctuations of memory as an essential component of the narrative act, both to acknowledge the gaps (“things I don’t remember”, “things that are erased”) and to stress the meaning of the things recalled the most clearly (or recalled the most often) and to identify them in relation to the turning points in her life narration. This operation literarily re-creates the real processes of selective memory and reaches its utmost efficacy in the excerpt from Chapter 14 on the proclamation of the Republic (“*I still remember that fresh air, an air, every time I remember, which I have never again been able to feel. Never again.*”), parallel to the stress on forgetfulness when, in Chapter 33, she recounts the occupation of Barcelona by the victors (“How we survived those days I don’t know [...]. I don’t know who told me they were handing out

food somewhere, I don’t remember where, and I went there. I don’t know”).

However, parallel to this selective attitude, there are many discursive elements, most notably the motifs that anchor the symbolic plot, which make the narration “reveal” more things than what is derived from the simple desire to list events. Both mechanisms, the selective attitude of the voice (things are not said because people still “think” that they cannot be “said”) and its capacity for revelation (the things that are said without thinking that they are said) are part of the common behaviour of all “real” narration to an interlocutor. And the craft of fiction re-creates it (but does not imitate it) by altering the measure of the components according to their “importance”, thus fostering and extending the symbolic and poetic weight of the text. Therefore, the different elements of reality that the fiction includes, the geographic space or historical framework of the novel, appear to be assimilated in this voice, and they are part of it, among other reasons because the historical events are an integral part of the life experience and transformations (and the space in which this life takes place) of the subject of the story. They are not simply a “framework”; rather they are an essential, totally determining part of life, of its constituent elements, and they shape it (they *are* life, according to the saying “My dear, these things are life” which introduces the novel) and then that sustain a narration about life.

One of the most prominent features of Mercè Rodoreda’s writing is in fact that the often highly detailed precision of the elements of reality (streets, shops and shop windows, interiors of homes, objects, place names, expressive vernacular forms), the fit of the characters within their environment, within recognisable ways of life, within a specific urban geography and decisive historical events, in no way undermines the heavy symbolic density of the discourse; rather it sustains it and constitutes the bulk of it. For example, the formidable description of the “marketplace” in Chapter 14, because of its clearly intentional place within the narration (right before the excerpt on the proclamation of the Republic), serves a function that extends far beyond a chance evocation of the setting: it suggests a moment in life, brimming with smells and colours, which, however, also contains the seeds of death. And it also quite explicitly revives the motif of food (present from the beginning of the story, given the fact that as a young, unmarried girl Colometa worked in a pastry shop), a motif that appears recurrently through the entire novel (including pigeon feed, as well) and sets the wartime off from the immediate post-war period: the “feed grocer” is the one who feeds the pigeons, who saves Colometa from suicide by offering her food and work when she and her children are literally dying of hunger.

It is because of this multifaceted voice that we can clearly discern the historical point in time in Natàlia’s story, the collective events (political, social and wartime) which are derived from everything that the discourse re-

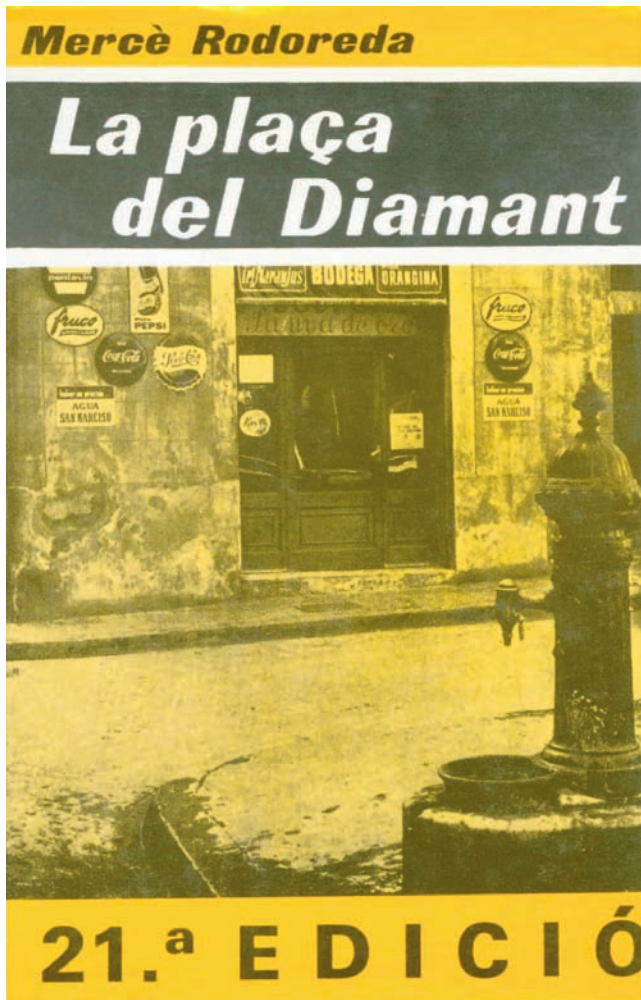


Figure 8. Front cover of the novel *La plaça del Diamant* (*The Pigeon Girl*). Published for the first time in 1962, it has been translated into more than 20 languages.

changes it prompts, who takes to the streets with his friend Cintet and, when they are going off to war, tells his wife not to worry, “that it was totally unimportant because our entire life was changed and it would change even more but for the better and that we would all be rewarded with the results”. This revolutionary enthusiasm (which contrasts with the disenchantment he shows when he returns from the front, ill, dirty and malnourished) is shared by the main character’s friend, Julieta, who represents an ingenuous dream of collective happiness through a discourse with libertarian echoes.

However, of all the positions, there is one that is particularly significant: that of Mateu. He does not share Quimet or Julieta’s revolutionary fervour; rather he reflects the sector of Catalanist republicanism closer to that of the author, Mercè Rodoreda. Mateu, who from the start is shown to have a strong romantic streak, is, just like the main character of Pere Calders’ *Unitats de xoc*, a “man of peace” who sets off for the front because “there’s nothing for it”, because there is no other alternative to military’s armed uprising and because victory “is everyone’s concern, and if we lose they will erase us from the map”.

Thus, *La plaça del Diamant* is also, among many other things, a novel about the war in one of the most modern modalities of the genre: the tale of the survivor of horror. This is what the main character does: she tells not how history is made but how history is suffered. As a result, Rodoreda’s voice of Natàlia-Colometa falls within an important variation: one we could call “The Common Woman as Hero”. This can be added to the “common men” of Calders or Jordana, who preach a revision of the category of “hero”, among other categories that the horror of modern war, seen from the eyes of the 20th century, has rendered irrelevant.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

- [1] A tentative summary of the literary currents during this period can be found in Maria CAMPILLO and Jordi CASTELLANOS. *La literatura del 1925 al 1939*. In: Albert BALCELLS (coord.). *Història de Catalunya*, vol. VI. Salvat, Barcelona 1982, pp. 220-231. For the genesis and development of relations between aesthetic currents and the culture market, see Jordi CASTELLANOS. “Mercat literari i cultura nacional (1882-1925)”. *Els Marges*, no. 56 (October 1996), pp. 5-38, and Josep Maria BALAGUER. “Algunes consideracions generals sobre la literatura des de la fi del Noucentisme fins al final de la Guerra”. In: Pere GABRIEL (dir.). *Història de la cultura catalana*, vol. IX: *República, autogovern i guerra, 1931-1939*. Edicions 62, Barcelona 1998, pp. 119-134. For the Republican stage, see Josep Maria BALAGUER and Margarida CASACUBERTA. “L’embranzida cultural”. In: Borja de RIQUER (dir.). *Història, política, societat i cultura dels Països Catalans*, vol. 9: *De la gran esperança a la gran ensulsiada (1930-1939)*. Fundació Enciclopèdia Catalana, Barcelona 1999, pp. 170-189. For short fiction, see Maria CAMPILLO. “Estudi introductori”. In: *El conte 1911-1939*. Edicions 62, Barcelona 1983, pp. 7-30. For the female market, see Neus REAL I MERCADAL. *Dona i literatura a la Catalunya de preguerra*. Publicacions de l’Abadia de Montserrat, Barcelona 2006. For the novel, see Maria CAMPILLO. “La literatura i les institucions literàries. La novel·la”. In: Pere GABRIEL (dir.) *Història de la cultura catalana*, op. cit., pp. 135-148.
- [2] They can be found in Jacqueline HURTLEY. *Josep Janés. El combat per la cultura*. Curial, Barcelona 1986, pp. 354-362.
- [3] It should be borne in mind that within the thematically committed literary corpus, revolutionary literature reflects influences and models that are different to those of war literature. See Ricard VINYES. *La presència ignorada. La cultura comunista a Catalunya (1840-1931)*. Edicions 62, Barcelona 1989; Jordi CASTELLANOS. “Literatura i compromís social

- en els anys trenta". *Els Marges*, no. 69 (January 2002), pp. 7-23; Natàlia KHARITONOVA. "Escriptors compromesos? Sobre el moviment d'escriptors revolucionaris Catalans". In: *La projecció social de l'escriptor en la literatura catalana*. Punctum & GELCC, Lleida 2007, pp. 425-436. However, throughout the course of the conflict, the praxis was conditioned by the twofold outlook (war and revolution) that characterised the historical deeds of 1936. Further information in Maria CAMPILLO. "La literatura de la guerra civil". In: *Literatura de la guerra civil. Memòria i ficció*. Institut d'Estudis Ilerdencs, Lleida 2002, pp. 27-48.
- [4] See Maria CAMPILLO. *Escriptors catalans i compromís antifeixista (1936-1939)*. Curial - Publicacions de l'Abadia de Montserrat, Barcelona 1994; IDEM, *La cultura entre el front i la rereguarda*. In: Borja de RIQUER (dir.). *Història, política, societat i cultura dels Països Catalans*, vol. 9, *op. cit.*, pp. 350-369.
- [5] Carles RIBA. "Literatura i grups salvadors". *Revista de Catalunya*, x: 85 (April 1938), pp. 475-484; Joaquim MOLAS (ed.). *Carles Riba. Llengua i literatura*. Edicions 62, Barcelona 1965, pp. 57-65 (compiled in IDEM, *Obres Completes/3, Crítica*, 2. Edicions 62, Barcelona 1986, pp. 587-602).
- [6] Joan OLIVER. "Literatura de Guerra". *Meridià. Setmanari de literatura, art i política. Tribuna del front intel·lectual antifeixista*, I: 9 (11-III-1938), p. 1.
- [7] This is not the place to examine their reception before the conflict of 1936, but we should mention the importance of genres like the chronicle (such as *La guerra contada por los soldados*) within the collection of leaflets "Páginas de actualidad 1914-1917", or the compilation by Román Jori in *Voces de guerra 1914-1916*, published in Barcelona in 1916. With regard to the novel, Remarque's *Res de nou a l'oest* had quite a large readership. It was issued in Catalan in 1931 by Proa publishing house in a translation by Joan Alavedra, with an unusually high print run. One cause for reflection was the scarce influence of the Spanish-Moroccan War on the Civil War, except in Josep Maria Prous i Vila, who had written earlier on this subject in poetry and narrative.
- [8] *Amic. Publicació quinzenal per a esplai del soldat català de l'Exèrcit de la República, editada pels Serveis de Cultura al front de la Generalitat*, I: 6/7 (April 1938), p. 3. This publication has been issued in a facsimile edition by the Fundació Carles Pi i Sunyer (not for sale) as part of the commemorations of "Barcelona 1938, capital de la República".
- [9] Studied in a seminal work by Paul FUSSELL. *The Great War and Modern Memory*. Oxford University Press, London 1977.
- [10] Lluís MONTANYÀ. "Dietaris de Campanya". *La Publicitat*, 10-IV-1937. Also Rafael Tasis, a critic and expert on the novel, insists that these texts might be "a pure document without any literary intention, but truthful". See Rafael Tasis. "Literatura de Guerra". *Meridià*, I: 28 (22-VII-1938), p. 6.
- [11] This is indicated, for example by authors such as Avel·lí ARTÍS. "La petita història de la Guerra". *Meridià*, I, 42 (28-X-1938), p. 6.
- [12] Rafael Tasis. "Literatura de Guerra", art. cit.
- [13] "Carnet de les Lletres". *Meridià*, I: 9 (11-III-1938), p. 6.
- [14] *Juliol*, III: 90 (4-VI-1938), p. 3.
- [15] The volume published in 1937 by the Grup Sindical d'Escriptors Catalans, *Escriptors de la Revolució*, is a complete miscellany (poetry, stories, essays, etc.).
- [16] In the prologue to *Alcanyís*, signed at the battlefield, he states that he wrote it "to sincerely, crudely express what I have seen and what I have experienced". Lluís CAPDEVILA. *Diari de guerra*, Barcelona 1937.
- [17] According to the official minutes of the Institució de les Lletres Catalanes, they originally included Josep Sol, Lluís Casals, Gifré Bosch and Manuel Cruells. Later they were joined by Lluís Ferran de Pol. See CAMPILLO. *Escriptors catalans...*, *op. cit.*, p. 319, notes 389 and 394.
- [18] See the publication processes in J. V. GARCIA RAFFI. "Un de tants o la memòria de la derrota". "Epíleg" in Lluís FERRAN DE POL. *Un de tants*. Club Editor, Barcelona 2009, pp. 121-138. Occasionally the authors themselves have revived and published texts written at the front, including Edmon VALLÈS. *Dietari de guerra (1938-1939)*. Edicions 62, Barcelona 1980.
- [19] Rafael Tasis. "Literatura de Guerra", art. cit.
- [20] Josep GIMENO-NAVARRO. "Un poeta davant la Guerra". *Meridià*, I: 28 (22-VII-1938), p. 3.
- [21] Ramon XURIGUERA. "Més llibres de Guerra". *La Veu de Balaguer*, no. 38 (3-XI-1929).
- [22] See for example Alan MUNTON. *English Fiction of the Second World War*. Faber and Faber, London 1989, and Bernard BERGONZI. *Wartime and Aftermath*. Oxford University Press, Oxford-New York 1993.
- [23] I mentioned several things regarding the influence on the narrative produced in World War I on Catalan non-fictional genres in Maria CAMPILLO. "Estudi introductor" in Pere CALDERS. *Unitats de xoc*. Edicions 62, Barcelona 1990, pp. 5-27.
- [24] Which more than a few people who lack understanding today insist on considering a "novel", when the genre operation is precisely one of its hallmarks. Even apart from the "formal" aspect (the author would send in chapters as he wrote them), the modernity of the text lies in the author's deliberate construction of the narrative voice (of the identity of the narrator with the same name), a split of which the majority of writers in the genre of autobiography were not, and are not, aware. Regarding the subject of war, this modality also contains characteristic

- products, one of which is clearly *Unitats de xoc*. For the distinction between autobiographic and fictional war texts, see Bernard BERGONZI. *Heroes' Twilight. A Study of the Literature of the Great War*. Carcanet, Manchester 1996, pp. 139-189. Regarding the modernity of Calders' text, see Maria CAMPILLO. "The Common Man as Hero: Cròniques de la guerra del 36". In: *Concepcions i discursos sobre la modernitat en la literatura catalana dels segles XIX i XX*. Punctum & GELCC, Lleida 2010, pp. 187-200.
- [25] And perhaps it should be recalled that like Maurois, Pere Calders volunteered to go to the front.
- [26] The Alta Fulla publishing house issued a facsimile edition in 1978.
- [27] Andreu A. ARTÍS "Sempronio". *L'accent de Barcelona 1938*. Edicions 62, Barcelona 1985.
- [28] C. A. JORDANA. *Barcelona 1938: La veu de les sirenes*. Edicions de 1984, Barcelona 2008.
- [29] After Hitler rose to power, Jordana took a combatively anti-fascist stance (when not nearly everyone was even aware of the threat), and in the pages of *L'Opinió* he denounced the fact that Nazis and Mussolini's groups all over Europe enjoyed a freedom of movement that he regarded as dangerous. He had also denounced, extremely early for Spain, the Nazis' persecution of the Jews, which he revisits in the "monologues" as well.
- [30] See Jordi CASTELLANOS. "Barcelona: ciutat i literatura". In: *Literatura, vides, ciutats*. Edicions 62, Barcelona 1997, pp. 137-185, and Margarida CASACUBERTA and Marina GUSTÀ (ed.). *Narratives urbanes. La construcció literària de Barcelona*. Fundació Antoni Tàpies - Institut de Cultura de Barcelona, Barcelona 2008.
- [31] See CAMPILLO. "The Common Man as Hero...", art. cit.
- [32] Maria CAMPILLO (ed.). *Contes de guerra i revolució (1936-1939)*, vols. I and II. Laia, Barcelona 1982.
- [33] Mercè Rodoreda, who did not want to revive anything from before 1939, authorised the publication of the war stories in this 1982 compilation. Once the edition was sold out, they were reproduced by Carme ARNAU (ed.) in Mercè RODOREDÀ. *Un cafè i altres narracions*. Fundació Mercè Rodoreda - Institut d'Estudis Catalans, Barcelona 1999.
- [34] I compiled the latter, which was not included in *Contes de guerra i revolució...*, op. cit., in C. A. JORDANA. *Quimet dels Lleopards i altres contes*. Laia, Barcelona 1983, reissued in 1989 under the title *L'atemptat i altres contes*, Laia, Barcelona 1989. The nature of these lengthy stories, which feature three boys, has led some critics to regard the series as a "novel". See Josep FAULÍ. *Novel·la catalana i guerra civil*. Publicacions de l'Abadia de Montserrat, Barcelona 1999. This book is useful for categorising certain aspects of the war in post-war novels.
- [35] Rafael TASIS. "Literatura de Guerra", art. cit.
- [36] Rafael TASIS. "Una novel·la ingénue". *La Publicitat*, 3-VII-1938.
- [37] Rafael TASIS. "Revista de llibres". *La Publicitat*, 30-XI-1937. Likewise, the review of the revolutionary-themed novel by Josep M. Murià is entitled *Els dos puntals o el cinisme gratuït de l'adolescència*, *La Publicitat*, 10-VII-1938.
- [38] Faced with the paper problem, the Institució de les Lletres Catalanes prioritised the publication of the monthly *Revista de Catalunya*.
- [39] It is possible that part of the material from this novel, or more accurately what might have been its central motif (the blue nights caused by the streetlights painted blue as a civil protection measure against bombardments) was meant for *La plaça de Diamant* (at the start of chapter 31), but we have no way of demonstrating this.
- [40] See Maria CAMPILLO. "Un capítol de la novel·la inèdita *Flames de juliol* de C. A. Jordana". *Els Marges*, no. 74 (autumn 2004), pp. 77-96.
- [41] There are many Catalan novels either focusing on the war or somehow referring to it. See Josep FAULÍ. *Novel·la catalana i guerra civil*, op. cit., and especially Helena MESALLES. "Bibliografia de la memòria i ficció de la Guerra Civil espanyola en la literatura catalana". In: *Literatura de la guerra civil. Memòria i ficció*, op. cit., pp. 261-353. For a highly comprehensive examination of this issue on Mallorca to date, see Josep MASSOT I MUNTANER. "Literatura de la guerra civil a Mallorca". In: *Literatura de la guerra civil. Memòria i ficció*, op. cit., pp. 81-132.
- [42] The author notes in a preliminary note that much of it was written while the war was still being waged and that "the documentation used as well as the literary style come from that period", but that he had not retouched it in order "to not remove all the naturalness and truthfulness that it had at that dramatic time".
- [43] As stated in the prologue to the reissue by Editorial Pòrtic, Barcelona 1969, pp. 7-9.
- [44] Rafael TASIS. "Literatura de Guerra", art. cit.
- [45] Andrew RUTHERFORD. *The Literature of War. Studies in Heroic Virtue*. Macmillan Press, London 1989. Second revised edition.
- [46] "The Common Man as Hero: Literature of the Western Front" (with reference to the paradigm represented in Remarque's extremely popular book *All Quiet on the Western Front*).
- [47] See the complicated gestation of the text in Xavier PLA. "Una obra en moviment. Aproximació a la gènesi textual d'*Incerta glòria*, de Joan Sales". In: *Literatura de la guerra civil. Memòria i ficció*, op. cit., pp. 209-216.
- [48] Joan TRIADÚ. "Panorama de la novel·la catalana". *Serra d'Or*, no. 120 (September 1969), pp. 63-65. See also Joan TRIADÚ. *La novel·la catalana de*

postguerra. Edicions 62, Barcelona 1982, pp. 51-54 and 182-186, and “*Incerta glòria*” in *Literatura de la guerra civil. Memòria i ficció, op. cit.*, pp. 183-203.

- [49] According to the author himself, the title of the novel comes from verses by Shakespeare, from the end of the third scene of the first act of *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*: “O, how this spring of love resembleth/ The uncertain glory of an April day”.
- [50] See Jordi CASTELLANOS and Maria CAMPILLO. “La novel·la catòlica” and “Joan Sales”. In: Joaquim MOLAS (dir.). *Història de la literatura catalana*, vol. XI. Barcelona 1988, pp. 71-80.
- [51] This is the proposal put forth by Xavier PLA. “*Incerta glòria de Joan Sales o una poètica de l’excés*”.

Miscel·lània d’homenatge a Modest Prats, II. *Estudi General, Revista de la Facultat de Lletres de la Universitat de Girona*, no. 22 (2002), pp. 529-553.

- [52] There is quite an extensive bibliography on Mercè Rodoreda, especially thanks to Carme Arnau, who has also curated and written the prologue for the last edition of her complete narrative. See Carme ARNAU. “Mercè Rodoreda i la novel·la”. In: Mercè RODOREDÀ. *Narrativa completa*. Edicions 62, Barcelona 2008: vol. I: *Novel·les*, p. XXIII-XLVII, and vol. II, *Mercè Rodoreda i el conte*, p. IX-XXXII.
- [53] Regarding the subject of the civil war in this novel, see Maria CAMPILLO. “*La plaça del Diamant: el substrat històric en una narració de vida*”. *Els Marges*, no. 70 (September 2002), pp. 5-23.

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Maria Campillo is a full professor of contemporary Catalan literature at the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona. She has published studies on 20th century culture and literature, particularly focused on narrative from the 1930s, the war and the post-war, as well as on some of the important authors from these periods. Her publications include the book *Escriptors catalans i compromís antifeixista, 1936-1939* (1994) and several works on literature in exile. She was also a contributor to *Història de la literatura catalana* directed by Joaquim Molas (1988), to *Història de la cultura catalana* directed by Pere Gabriel (1998) and to *Història, política, societat i cultura dels Països Catalans* directed by Borja de Riquer (1999).