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Literary news about Joan Sales in Lletra, the Open University of Catalonia (UOC) virtual space for Catalan literature

< <http://lletra.uoc.edu/en/author/joan-sales> >

Joan Sales



It's been said...

Joan Sales (Barcelona, 1912-1983) was a writer and publisher. He obtained a degree in Law in 1932 and was a member of Bloc Obrer i Camperol (BOC – Workers' and Peasants' Bloc) and PSUC (the Catalan Communist Party – [literally] “United Socialist Party of Catalonia”). In the Civil War he fought on the Madrid and Aragon fronts, after which he went into exile in France in 1939. In 1942 he moved to Mexico and then returned to Catalonia in 1948, after which he became a publisher. His collection of poems *Viatge d'un moribund* (A Dying Man's Journey) was published in 1952 and this was followed by his most famous novel *Incerta glòria* (Uncertain Glory), which did not appear in its definitive edition until 1971.

There are few writers like Joan Sales, who leave in the reader a sense that is so alive, direct and intense of his desire to explain himself: to explain himself and explain everything as if wishing to preserve from oblivion and confusion all that he has experienced. His response to this desire seems to have been all the episodes and characters making up the great frieze of *Incerta glòria* (Uncertain Glory), and the constant narrative meanderings that detain and disperse the narrative thread, giving the impression of having been driven by the imperative of testifying to their world without holding back any memory, any nuance or any sensation. Then again, the constant corrections and amplifications to which Sales submitted the novel - in 1956, 1962, 1969, 1971, 1981 - also make one think (censorship aside) of this same wish not to overlook anything and to give reverberation to what has already been said so as to make it even more revealing of an unrepeatable experience. Finally, this also seems to suggest that Joan Sales' entire literary work - *Incerta glòria*, *Cartes a Màrius Torres*, (Letters to Marius Torres) and *Viatge d'un moribund* (A Dying Man's Journey) - is nothing more nor less than variations on the theme of the same literary world, the same experience, to which he returns again and again. The literary sensibility transpired by all this material is, I insist, that of a great conversationalist. This is a fervent conversationalist who is passionate about his story - a mixture of moral duty and narrative passion - and who wants to bear witness to what he has seen and felt as if it depended on him, and him alone, to let us know.

And it did depend on him. Even if only with regard to the material of the novel, Sales must have been aware that telling stories about the Civil War from the point of view of the vanquished was not precisely the most propagated version in 1956. Still less when the leading characters, who are unequivocally portrayed as defending the legality of the Republic by taking up arms, should have Christianity as a constant theme in their epistolary conversations - and in their lives - thereby compensating for the ideological schematisation and polarisation that each of the two sides encouraged.

This, however, is a stance that goes far beyond an honest desire for historical equanimity. Joan Sales' characters have dense inner worlds and thus really live the war without being merely its symptom. For Joan Sales, a man is not the side he is on, and to understand this it is necessary to recall that the characters - and Sales himself - do not think twice about risking their lives for their convictions. The war, in this sense, is an inescapable circumstance, but not the identity, of Sales'

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narrative world. This perspective bestows on the historical frieze a complexity that is as uncomfortable as it is valuable and characters as different as an anarchist and a soup noodle manufacturer are presented to the reader with direct, authentic and convincing emotional proximity. Sales does this with the naturalness of one who speaks of personalities and not, therefore, of figures that are ready-made for the consumption of idealisation or discrediting.

What I am noting, however, might make the reader think that we are talking about a sort of vague tolerance that is either trotted out as a display of some moral imperative or that is distilled by a neutral or indifferent intellectual scepticism. It is neither of the two. Sales' characters share, rather, the anti-intellectual attitude of the ordinary man for whom a crime is a crime and a political careerist is a shameless opportunist however much ideological make-up is applied. For Sales, the problem is not one of tolerance but of complexity and when he narrows his narrative focus on a particular character it is to reveal an intricate moral story. This complexity also becomes patent in the structure of the novel, which is woven with the direct testimonies of the characters and is hence made up of contradictions and different perspectives - "dialectical" said the reviewer in *Nouvelle Critique*, explicitly accusing him of demiurgic intervention as a narrator.

Ramon Pla i Arxé, "L'obra literària de Joan Sales", *Avui* (23/11/1983)

So what kind of novel does Sales propose and defend as a critic and publisher? It is worth pausing for a moment at this important point in order to understand, too, his intentions as a novelist. Indeed, Sales has some clearly-defined ideas of what he wants a novel to be. These ideas take off, in good part, from the ones he expresses and defends in *Quaderns de l'exili* (Notebooks from Exile). In 1969, when the second edition of *Incerta glòria* appeared in what Sales then considered the definitive version, José Cruset asked him in a interview where the novelist came from. Sales' reply was this: "I would say that, more than anything else, from the things that we have unfortunately had to live through... I have the impression that, if the lot of our generation had been a quieter... bourgeois... life, I wouldn't have written any novel." It is his existence itself and war in particular, with the tragedy it brings, along with adventure, that probably leads him to write a novel that describes precisely that. And, in an answer he gave in an interview with Busquets i Grabulosa, he stresses, "I believe that the writer must become a witness to the truth. I have attempted to do that with *Incerta glòria*. I might have written about other events, a parricide for example. But I could not have dispensed with the truth. The value of a book is in the truth it brings us." Nonetheless, when it comes to defining what the truth is, Sales and Grabulosa agree in thinking that this task is virtually impossible. So, in Sales' answers, we find two words that help us to understand his aims as a novelist and that, at the same time, have conditioned his choices as a publisher: life and truth. However, we can identify another word that is related with this: witnessing. We have already drawn attention to Sales' rejection of the fantastic novel and even of imaginative works and stories, especially in the intransigence of his early days. It was somehow excluding.

Carne Arnau, *Compromís i escriptura. Lectura d'Incerta glòria de Joan Sales* (Barcelona, Cruïlla, 2003)

Literary Self-analysis

Joan Sales

I believe, in all frankness - and also with total respect for those who are different from me - that the author is the least appropriate person to analyse his own work, unless he is narcissistic.

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When we give a work to the public, we submit ourselves to the judgement of others. One's own judgement is no longer of interest. One can't be both judge and part of it.

It won't ever bother me if they speak unfavourably of anything I might publish because from the moment I publish something I have already submitted myself to what others have to say. I must say that I am truly grateful to all the critics - Catalan, French and Spanish - who have concerned themselves with *Incerta glòria*, and maybe the French critics most of all, especially Count Ricaumont to whom I am indebted for some really valuable suggestions which I had very much in mind when I went ahead with the definitive version (that of the second Catalan edition and then the fourth).

What I do regret, because I think it is unjust, is when they say that I have not written much. They don't take into account the fact that *Incerta glòria* has nine hundred pages, that *Cartes a Màrius Torres* has seven hundred pages and that I have published an adaptation of *Tirant lo Blanc* in novel form with modern prose and another version, *Tirant lo Blanc a Grècia* (Tirant lo Blanc in Greece), in opera-buffa verse form, plus a translation of *The Brothers Karamazov* and another of *Christ Recrucified*, and both of these are very long novels, (especially Dostoyevsky's), not to mention the other translations of innumerable prologues, some of them really long (the *Notícia biogràfica* (Biographical Note) that introduces the fourth edition of the poems of *Màrius Torres* runs into seventy pages and then there are more or less the same number in my prologue to Joan Coromines' *Lleures i converses d'un filòleg* (Leisure Hours and Conversations of a Philologist), not to mention more than a couple of other cases). Add to that all the hard work of *La Història dels catalans* (The History of the Catalans) and several other things I have done, either for pleasure or obligation. But let's not go on about that so as not to seem immodest.

Those who say I am the author of just one novel don't take it sufficiently into account that *Incerta glòria* is not one novel but four: the first part is the novel of Lluís Brocà, the second of Trinitat Milmany, the third of the young Cruells and the fourth of the old Cruells. All three are obsessed by one character, Juli Soleràs and that is the link that brings the four novels together. Juli Soleràs is the real hero, or the antihero, perhaps, of *Incerta glòria*. And this is by no means a "war novel" as has sometimes been said. The war is no more than a backdrop. The war appears because there was a war going on. And the title is from Shakespeare: "the uncertain glory of an April day". All of us in this world seek a glory that the world cannot give. I have said before that I am truly grateful to all the critics who have spoken of my quadruple novel. There is one, however (whom I shall refrain from mentioning because I don't want to hurt his feelings), who baffles me. He wondered what this "glory" that is "our end" was. The best bit is that this critic was writing in the Catholic Spain of the generalissimo, RIP. What sort of Catholicism were they teaching in that Spain?

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A selection of texts

Text



WEB: Sales a EPdLP

Nota biogràfica en castellà amb un fragment dels *Quaderns de l'exili* a El Poder de la Palabra.
<http://www.epdlp.com/escritor.php?id=3188>

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WEB: Pensament, acció, literatura

Web dedicat a l'autor que conté diversos fragments de la seva obra i una àmplia selecció de crítica i enllaços. Iniciativa de Xarxa de mots.

<http://www.lletres.net/sales/>



WEB: Cartes de Joan Sales a Màrius Torres

Dues cartes manuscrites al seu amic Màrius Torres, del 1937. A la Biblioteca virtual Màrius Torres.

[http://pv2.sbd.udl.es/vllibres/webmarius/relacionat/llegat/1.3.2.%20Correspondencia%20rebuda%20per%20Marius%20Torres/1.3.2.3.\(1937\)657.html](http://pv2.sbd.udl.es/vllibres/webmarius/relacionat/llegat/1.3.2.%20Correspondencia%20rebuda%20per%20Marius%20Torres/1.3.2.3.(1937)657.html)



WEB: Cartes de Màrius Torres a Joan Sales

Sis cartes en francès de Màrius Torres a Joan Sales, del 1940. A la Biblioteca virtual Màrius Torres.

[http://pv2.sbd.udl.es/vllibres/webmarius/relacionat/llegat/1.3.1.%20Correspondencia%20enviada%20per%20marius%20Torres/1.3.1.3.\(1940\)335.html](http://pv2.sbd.udl.es/vllibres/webmarius/relacionat/llegat/1.3.1.%20Correspondencia%20enviada%20per%20marius%20Torres/1.3.1.3.(1940)335.html)



WEB: Letters from Joan Sales to Marius Torres

Two letters in manuscript form to his friend Màrius Torres, written in 1937. At the Biblioteca Virtual Màrius Torres.

[http://pv2.sbd.udl.es/vllibres/webmarius/relacionat/llegat/1.3.2.%20Correspondencia%20rebuda%20per%20Marius%20Torres/1.3.2.3.\(1937\)657.html](http://pv2.sbd.udl.es/vllibres/webmarius/relacionat/llegat/1.3.2.%20Correspondencia%20rebuda%20per%20Marius%20Torres/1.3.2.3.(1937)657.html)



WEB: Letters from Màrius Torres to Joan Sales

Six letters in French from Màrius Torres to Joan Sales, written in 1940. At the Màrius Torres Virtual Library.

[http://pv2.sbd.udl.es/vllibres/webmarius/relacionat/llegat/1.3.1.%20Correspondencia%20enviada%20per%20marius%20Torres/1.3.1.3.\(1940\)335.html](http://pv2.sbd.udl.es/vllibres/webmarius/relacionat/llegat/1.3.1.%20Correspondencia%20enviada%20per%20marius%20Torres/1.3.1.3.(1940)335.html)

Bio-bibliography

Biography



WEB: A la Hiperenciclopèdia

http://www.enciclopedia.cat/fitxa_v2.jsp?NDCHEC=0058127



WEB: A la Viquipèdia

Nota biogràfica, obra i enllaços sobre l'autor al web de l'enciclopèdia lliure.

http://ca.wikipedia.org/wiki/Joan_Sales



WEB: The author in the Catalan Encyclopaedia

<http://www.grec.cat/cgi-bin/heclangl2.pgm?&USUARI=&SESSIO=&NDCHEC=0058127&PGMORI=E>

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http://cataleg.bnc.cat/search*cat/?searchtype=a&searcharg=Sales+Joan&sortdropdown=-&searchscope=13&searchscope2=13&SORT=D



WEB: Què hi ha a les biblioteques universitàries catalanes (CCUC)

http://ccuc.cbuc.es/search*cat/a?SEARCH=Sales+Joan&sortdropdown=-&searchscope=23



WEB: Què hi ha a les biblioteques públiques

<http://argus.biblioteques.gencat.cat/iii/encore/search/C|SSales+Joan|Orightresult|U1?lang=cat&suite=pearl>



WEB: Per comprar-ne llibres

<http://www.llibres.cat/ca/detall-autor/sales-i-valles-joan>



WEB: Articles de l'autor (Traces)

<http://traces.uab.cat/search?f=author&p=Sales%20Joan&sc=1&ln=ca>



WEB: Articles sobre l'autor (Traces)

http://traces.uab.cat/search?ln=ca&p=Sales%2C+Joan&f=keyword&action_search=Cerca&c=Traces+%3A+base+de+dades+de+lengua+i+literatura+catalanes&sf=&so=d&rm=&rg=10&sc=1&of=hb



WEB: Works in the Biblioteca de Catalunya

http://cataleg.bnc.cat/search*eng/?searchtype=a&searcharg=Sales+Joan&sortdropdown=-&searchscope=13&searchscope2=13&SORT=D



WEB: The author in The European Library

<http://search.theeuropeanlibrary.org/portal/en/search/%28%22creator%22+all+%22sales+joan%22%29.query>



WEB: The author in the Congress Library (US)

<http://catalog.loc.gov/cgi-bin/Pwebrecon.cgi?DB=local&PAGE=First>



WEB: The author in the COPAC Catalogue (UK)

<http://copac.ac.uk/search?&au=Joan+Sales>

Comments on the author

Criticism



WEB: Sobre *Incerta glòria*

Pàgina de lletrA sobre aquesta novel·la de l'autor.

<http://lletra.uoc.edu/ca/obra/incerta-gloria-1956/>

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WEB: Joan Sales a l'AELC

Inclou biografia, obra, premis, transcripció d'articles, fragments de la seva obra i enllaços.
<http://www.escriptors.cat/autors/salesj/>



WEB: L'autor al Corpus Literari Ciutat de Barcelona

Biografia, obra, enllaços i transcripció d'articles sobre Sales.
http://www.ducros.biz/corpus/index.php?command=show_news&news_id=2612



WEB: L'autor a Lletres de Batalles

Biografia de Joan Sales i fragments de la seva obra en aquest web sobre literatura catalana i guerra civil.
<http://www.edu365.com/eso/muds/catala/lletresbatalles/index.htm>



WEB: Joan Sales i els Quaderns de l'exili

Pàgina amb diversos enllaços sobre l'autor i sobre la publicació de l'exili.
<http://www.oocities.com/athens/Acropolis/7864/indsal.html>



WEB: Joan Sales: pensament, acció i literatura

Una aproximació a l'escriptor amb informacions, crítiques i opinions. Al web de l'Associació Xarxa de mots.
<http://www.lletres.net/sales/>



WEB: Joan Sales on the lletrA website in Catalan

Including more resources and reading suggestions.
<http://www.uoc.edu/lletra/noms/jsales/index.html>



WEB: On *Incerta glòria* [Uncertain Glory]

lletrA page devoted to this novel by Joan Sales.
<http://www.uoc.edu/lletra/obres/incertagloria/index.html>



WEB: Joan Sales in AELC (Association of Catalan Language Writers)

Includes biography, works, prizes, interviews and links.
http://www.escriptors.cat/autors/salesj/pagina.php?id_sec=2194



WEB: Joan Sales in the City of Barcelona Literary Corpus

Biography, works, links and a transcription of articles on Sales.
http://www.ducros.biz/corpus/index.php?command=show_news&news_id=2612



WEB: Joan Sales and the Quaderns de l'exili

Page with different links concerned with the author and about the publication of his work from exile.
<http://www.oocities.com/athens/Acropolis/7864/indsal.html>

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WEB: "Quaderns de l'exili"

Edició facsímil de la revista a la Biblioteca del Exilio (Biblioteca virtual Miguel de Cervantes).
<http://www.cervantesvirtual.com/servlet/IndiceTomosNumeros?portal=21&Ref=5104>



PDF: L'actitud de quatre escriptors catalans davant la Guerra civil (1936-1939)

Sergi Font analitza les reaccions de Joan Sales, Pere Calders, Avel·lí Artís-Gener i Marià Manent en esclatar el conflicte.

<http://openaccess.uoc.edu/webapps/o2/bitstream/10609/1203/1/36216tfc.pdf>



WEB: Quaderns de l'exili

Facsimile edition of the review at the Biblioteca del Exilio (Biblioteca virtual Miguel de Cervantes).
<http://www.cervantesvirtual.com/servlet/IndiceTomosNumeros?portal=21&Ref=5104>

Comments



PDF: "Atrapats entre *Incerta glòria i Cartes a Màrius Torres*. Realitat i ficció d'una altra Guerra Civil"

Article de Francesc Canosa i Elena Yeste sobre l'escriptor. A *Trípodos*, núm. 25 (2009).
<http://www.raco.cat/index.php/Tripodos/article/view/144344/196146>



PDF: Monogràfic dedicat a l'escriptor

Amb una entrevista a Núria Folch, vídua de Joan Sales. A la revista digital *Paper de vidre*, núm. 44 (octubre 2007).

http://www.paperdevidre.net/pdf_pdv/n44.pdf



WEB: "¿Lázaro entre nosotros?"

Article de Xavier Pla a *La Vanguardia* (09/03/05).
http://www.lletres.net/sales/js_xpla.html



PDF: "Joan Sales i els criteris de traducció"

Article de Montserrat Bacardí a *Quaderns. Revista de traducció*, de la UAB (1988).
<http://www.traces.uab.es/tracesbd/quaderns/qrt0002.pdf>



PDF: "Miratge trencat"

Ressenya de *Cartes de la guerra*. Article d'Adolf Beltran a l'*Avui* (06/05/04).
<http://www.traces.uab.es/tracesbd/avui/av02530.pdf>



PDF: "El debat Joan Sales-Joan Coromines"

Comentari d'Albert Manent sobre el debat lingüístic que centra bona part de l'epistolari. A l'*Avui* (06/07/04).

<http://www.traces.uab.es/tracesbd/avui/av03171.pdf>



PDF: Joan Solà també analitza el debat

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La visió del lingüista Joan Solà sobre l'intercanvi epistolar. A l'*Avui* (30/09/04).

<http://www.traces.uab.es/tracesbd/avui/av03266.pdf>



PDF: On Joan Sales and Incerta glòria [Uncertain Glory]

Joan Sales and *Incerta glòria*, by Xavier Pla in *Transfer*, iss. 3 (2008).

http://www.llull.cat/rec_transfer/webt3/transfer03_not03.pdf



WEB: "¿Lázaro entre nosotros?"

Article by Xavier Pla in *La Vanguardia* (09/03/05).

http://www.lletres.net/sales/js_xpla.html



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Article by Montserrat Bacardí in *Quaderns. Revista de traducció*, of the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona (1988).

<http://ddd.uab.es/pub/quaderns/11385790n1p27.pdf>



PDF: "Miratge trencat"

Review of *Cartes de la guerra (Letters from the War)*. Article by Adolf Beltran in *Avui* (06/05/04).

<http://www.traces.uab.es/tracesbd/avui/av02530.pdf>



PDF: Joan Solà also analyses the debate

The opinion of the linguist Joan Solà on the exchange of letters in *Avui* (30/09/04).

<http://www.traces.uab.es/tracesbd/avui/av03323.pdf>