

## Introduction

### Rodoreda, Sales & Pla Three Literary Constellations



Three major works of 20<sup>th</sup>-century European literature are the novels *La plaça del Diamant* (*In Diamond Square*, Virago Press) by Mercè Rodoreda, *Incerta Glòria* (*Uncertain Glory*, MacLehose Press) by Joan Sales, and *El quadern gris* (*The Grey Notebook*, New York Review of Books) by Josep Pla. The three works have been translated into English by Peter Bush and are the main titles in a series of ten Catalan contemporary literary works to be published in the UK in 2013.

The year 2012 marks the 50th anniversary of the publication of *La plaça del Diamant* by Mercè Rodoreda (1908-1983) and the centennial of the birth of author/publisher Joan Sales (1912-1983). These two talented writers from Barcelona—both committed to the Catalan cause—were passionately dedicated to literature.

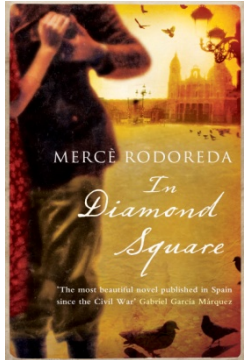
Their mutual admiration and deep respect for each other gave rise to a long-lasting friendship. In 1962, when Sales published Rodoreda's *La plaça del Diamant*, the most widely-translated Catalan literary work, Gallimard published the French translation of Joan Sales' *Incerta glòria*, the work of a lifetime. Both authors were profoundly influenced by the Spanish Civil War and by their experiences in exile.

Josep Pla was a privileged witness to the years leading up to the outbreak of World War II – Paris after the Great War; Italy and the March on Rome; Germany during the Weimar Republic, the depreciation of the mark and Hitler's rise to power; the General Strike in London; the Republic in Madrid. This allowed him to write about the events in Europe from two complementary perspectives.

This is a unique moment for Catalan literature both in the UK and the rest of the English-speaking world. The publication of these three masterworks is complemented by an excellent sampling of contemporary Catalan literature. Novels: *Lost Luggage* by Jordi Puntí (Short Books), *The Body Hunter* by Najat El Hachmi (Serpent's Tail); Noir fiction: *The Sound of One Hand Killing* by Teresa Solana (Bitter Lemon Press), *The Bad Woman* by Marc Pastor (Pushkin Press); Classics: *Dark Vales* by Raimon Casellas (Dedalus); Short Stories: *Russian Stories* by Francesc Serés (MacLehose Press); and Poetry: *Six Catalan Poets* (Arc Publications).

## *In Diamond Square* Mercè Rodoreda

### A Literary Jewel



Little Brown & co.  
March

Translated by Peter Bush

*In Diamond Square*, Rodoreda's most widely-known novel, translated into twenty-eight languages, is one of the most prolific writers in 20th-century Catalan literature and an integral part of contemporary Europe's cultural heritage.

It is a complex and somewhat ambiguous novel offering multiple interpretations; it is both a vivid document of the period in which it is set and a dense poetic work with believable characters playing out their lives in a realistic context. Through her own very evocative voice, Colometa, the heroine of this classic Catalan novel, draws us into the life of one of the most colourful

neighbourhoods of Barcelona from the 1920s through the end of the Spanish Civil War.

*"In Diamond Square is the most beautiful novel published in post-Civil War Spain"*  
- Gabriel García Márquez

Mercè Rodoreda (1908-1983)  
Born in Barcelona, she also lived in other European cities, primarily Paris and Geneva, and witnessed, first-hand, two significant events in 20<sup>th</sup>-century history: the Spanish Civil War, in Catalonia, and the Second World War, in France. Both experiences—the first resulting in a long period of exile and the second leaving a lasting mark in her life—brought added depth and maturity to her work.



*"She created a moving and universal literary landscape, inspiring us, the readers, to explore and foster freedom within ourselves, neither fearing defeat nor the shackles of tradition". –*

Mercè Ibarz, *Mercè Rodoreda. Un retrat/A Portrait-*

# *Uncertain Glory* Joan Sales

## The Great Spanish Civil War Novel



MacLehose Press  
September

“O! how this spring of love resembleth  
The uncertain glory of an April day!”  
William Shakespeare

Translated by Peter Bush

According to Juan Goytisolo, who recommended the novel *Uncertain Glory* for publication at Gallimard (1962), this work is the great novel of the Spanish Civil War not only for its careful, complex structure but also for its unique approach. Written from the viewpoint of the losing side, the novel contains no political message nor does it exalt any political party. It has withstood the test of time because of its sheer power and can be read today with the same intensity that went into its writing.

Sales’s masterpiece is a meditation on the universal themes of love, death and heroism. The

novel, set in the Spanish Civil War, is divided into four parts and is told from the perspective of the Republicans, or the losers. Joan Sales added material to later editions, thus explaining why the French translation (1962) is longer than the original Catalan version.

“*Uncertain Glory* is the best novel written in the Iberian Peninsula in the 20th century.”

Juan Goytisolo

The French edition was highly acclaimed by critics, who compared Sales to renowned authors such as **Dostoyevsky, Georges Berbanos, Graham Greene** and others. The fourth and final edition of the novel was published in 1971, but the last part, “Últimes Notícies” (Latest News), was also expanded and later became an independent section now titled *El vent de la nit* (Night Wind).

**Joan Sales** (Barcelona, 1912-1983) was a writer and publisher. He fought on the Madrid and Aragon fronts in the Spanish Civil War and went into exile in France in 1939. He moved to Mexico in 1942 and returned to Catalonia in 1948, when he became a publisher. His collection of poems *Viatge d'un moribund* (*A Dying Man's Journey*) was published in 1952, followed by his most famous novel *Incerta glòria*.



## *The Grey Notebook* Josep Pla

### A Must Read



New York Review of Books  
November

Translated by Peter Bush

Josep Pla, one of the greatest writers in the Catalan language, published *El quadern gris* in 1966. It is a diary begun in 1918 that enabled him to discover his narrative voice, and completed in 1965 when he was a well-established writer. Josep Pla imbues the landscape and his surroundings with profound meaning that goes beyond mere description. He does not simply seek the most fitting adjective to reflect what he observes but rather searches for the seed of the emotion that it inspires in him. The cultural, political, aesthetic and moral reflections that result from observing his immediate surroundings stem from a need to discover the secret they conceal, the significance of

a fleeting yet striking impression, and the meaning behind scenes from everyday life.

“Pla’s work speaks to those who appreciate his travels on foot because there is something to be admired about writers like him, and Rimbaud and Robert Walser, for example, who wore out their shoes in the process”. -Antonio Tabucchi

Pla’s opus, solely comprising prose works, is immense. Influenced by Montaigne, Pascal, Leopardi, and Stendhal, Pla offers his own brilliant testimony of his time. He was an extremely insightful journalist who traveled widely and frequently. Traveling was not an exercise in tourism for him, but rather a discovery of life, and one that he subsequently transformed into literature. A self-declared “anti-romantic,” Pla shunned affected, artificial language. Beyond being a novelist, he was a skillful and articulate storyteller. Pla’s work is his own greatest ally.

**Josep Pla** (Palafrugell, 1897-1981) He began a degree in Medicine but shortly afterwards switched to Law. Soon after finishing his studies, he began writing for newspapers. In 1920 he went to Paris as the correspondent for the *La Publicidad* newspaper, and also traveled to England, Italy, Sweden, Greece, Germany and Russia.

