

# Cities and the moral memories of their spaces

*Antoni Martí Monterde*

COMPARATIVE RESEARCH GROUP ON LITERATURE IN EUROPEAN INTELLECTUAL SPACES  
UNIVERSITAT DE VALÈNCIA

antoniartimonterde@ub.edu

ORCID: 0000-0002-8274-8551

Received: 20/10/2017

Accepted: 15/04/2018

## ABSTRACT

The aim of this paper is to present the city as a palimpsest in which moral memory—a key idea in Josep Pla's work—becomes a critical framework within which to think about the history of cities from an autobiographical point of view.

**Keywords:** Josep Pla, Joan Fuster, Vicent Andrés Estellés, Catalan Literature, Spanish post-war period.

**Corresponding author:** Antoni Martí Monterde, Universitat de Barcelona. Facultat de Filologia. Gran Via de les Corts Catalanes, 585. 08007 Barcelona.

**Suggested citation:** Martí, A. (2018). Cities and the moral memories of their spaces. *Debats. Journal on Culture, Power and Society*, 3, 165-172. DOI: <http://doi.org/10.28939/iam.debats-en.2018-13>

## FROM PLACE TO SPACE

To paraphrase Michel de Certeau (1990, p. 295), we could say cities are palimpsests,<sup>1</sup> thus, to understand the relationship between city and memory—as I am setting out to do in this essay—here we re-examine the argument of his key book. In fact, Certeau speaks of places, not cities; but we should not force his arguments too much because, incidentally, he tells us not to, in one of his reflections about cities. Like the effect that the act of uttering a word has upon it, a constitutive relationship is established between places and stories which results in *space*: the place in action, narrated, and inhabited with language; and this relationship is incessant, infinite. In fact, in a complementary and contemporary reflection to that of Certeau, Roland

Barthes adds that the city is a discourse and that in reality, this discourse is language: cities speak to their inhabitants and we speak in our cities—the cities we find ourselves in, exactly because we inhabit them, move through them, and look at them. Walking through the streets becomes the flow of the city.

However, as semiologists would also point out, the problem is bringing out these thoughts, the “language of the city”, from the merely metaphorical plane. In other words, recognising that the city is a poem, “but it is not a classical poem, a poem well focused on a theme. It is a poem whose significance unfolds and this display is what the semiology of the city should try to catch and make sing” (Barthes, 2002 [1967], p. 1,880–1,286). In order to reconcile the two formulations, one should think about how to make a palimpsest confess its song. A stratified place is

<sup>1</sup> In reality, Michel de Certeau's words were: “*Le lieu, c'est le palimpsest*” [The place is the palimpsest].

infinite, but not immobile. Perhaps the best way to do it is to think like a palimpsest, to think of yourself as a palimpsest and understand that one of the ways to get it to speak [to you] is to try to [get a] glimpse of the memories that we do not know we have.

That a place is not yet a space does not mean that it has no milestones or references. The tendency towards ‘no-place’—in the sense that Marc Augé (1992) and Manuel Delgado (1999) developed Certeau’s terms (1990). That is, resistance to becoming saturated by a place’s discourse which, because it is everyone’s, tends to be nobody’s—puts some limits on this narrative infinity of public space, which neutralises it. If the place does not flow, in other words, if it is not filled with speech, it becomes immobile, calcified, merely geometric. We will have to move it from the plane of geometric space to that of anthropological space. Diegesis prevents places from becoming just points on a map, even though, as Josep Vicent Boira has insistently explained, maps are also infinite, and are never merely two-dimensional. All geography is human geography.

Not even cataloguing streets, which is as close to a plan or a map of the city as one could get, it is limited to its formal geometries, as shown by Vicent Andrés Estellés in the poem ‘Cos mortal’ [Mortal body] from *Llibre de meravelles* [Book of Wonders] (Andrés Estellés, 1971, p. 55), we could say, almost with the detail of the Callejero de València street plans published by Bayarri (the oldest among us—or not as old—will understand me):

Si com aquell que és jutjat a mort  
AUSIÀS MARCH

Trinquet dels Cavallers, La Nau, Bailén, Comèdies,  
Barques, Trànsits, En Llop, Mar, Pasqual i Genís,  
Sant Vicent, Quart de fora, Moro Zeit, el Mercat,  
Mercé, Lope de Vega, Colom, Campaners,  
Palau, Almírrall, Xàtiva, Cabillers, Avellanes,  
Pouet de Sant Vicent, Cavallers, Sant Miquel,  
Roters, Sant Nicolau, Samaniego, Serrans,  
Rellotge Vell, Sant Jaume, Juristes, Llibertat,  
Soledat, Ballesters, Bonaire, Quart de dins,

Blanqueries, Llanterna, l’Albereda, Correus,  
Nules, Montolivet, Gil i Morte, Espartero,  
Miracle, Cordellats, Misser Mascó, Minyana,  
el Portal de Valldigna, Porxets, Soguers, Navellos,  
Querol, Reina Cristina, Mayans i Ciscar, Temple,  
Ponts de la Trinitat, del Real, de la Mar,  
d’Aragó, dels Serrans, de Sant Josep, de l’Àngel.

I l’Avenida del Doncel Luis Felipe García  
[Sanchiz.

This is not the time to make a story of street names, or their numbering as a not exactly urban control system. But it is evident that uniting places and names is never *innocent*.

In any case, to avoid deviating much from the subject, we can suffice to say that the relationship between language and place tends to establish a historical sense and an apparently *neutral* interpretation of the place’s story. The poetic, narrative, and essayistic reading of a city can counteract this neutralisation, and allow us to glimpse signs of them, sometimes superimposed or speaking over one another, in the streets. Not like an archaeologist who ‘rescues’ things, although in reality they are looking at strata; but rather, with a critical eye that, like an essayist, intersects readings and materials, intertwining one subject (personal) with the other (theme). In other words, if it is done in the archaeological sense, it is always in the Benjaminian sense of the word:

Language shows clearly that memory is not an instrument for exploring the past but [is] its theatre. It is the medium of past experience, as the ground is the medium in which dead cities lie interred. He who seeks to approach his own buried past must conduct himself like man digging. This confers the tone and bearing of genuine reminiscences. He must not be afraid to return again and again to the same matter; to scatter it as one scatters earth, to turn it over as one turns over soil. For the matter itself is only a deposit, a stratum, which yields only to the most meticulous examination what constitutes the real treasure hidden within the earth: the images,

severed from all earlier associations, that stand—like precious fragments or torsos in a collector's gallery—in the prosaic rooms of our later understanding. True, for successful excavations, a plan is needed. Yet no less indispensable is the cautious probing of the spade in the dark loam, and it is to cheat oneself of the richest prize to preserve as a record merely an inventory of one's discoveries, and not this dark joy of the place of the finding itself. Fruitless searching is as much a part of this as succeeding, and consequently remembrance must not proceed in the manner of a narrative or still less that of a report, but must, in the strictest epic and rhapsodic manner, assay its spade in ever-new places, and in the old ones delve to ever-deeper layers (???, 1991, p. 26–27).<sup>2</sup>

Walk through the city, get lost in its words and in the story of a meaning that perhaps nobody else reads, but is there.

In fact, the [city's] map resists the wind—the wind of history or that of oblivion—thanks to landmarks that, like the weight of stones on paper, prevent it from disappearing from our hands. In this palimpsest that is the city, many of the landmarks are already perfectly identifiable and already direct the story, even perhaps forcefully saturating its context. Every statue is a kind of paperweight and, in the best of cases, [the personalities] represented will only walk in this imaginary plane.

This is one of the problems of monumentalising memory, which imposes a story onto the layers of stories that is the place, and does so from History, with capital letters. Sometimes, even as a [type of] History of the present, as a way to close off significant possibilities of public spaces, or to prohibit meanings other than the one the monument imposes. I am not

implying that places of memory are in themselves, as a concept, authoritarian. In any case, as Pierre Nora has already warned, the reductionism that tended to be applied to his concepts makes them much more dynamic than the results they have given. The necessary clarity of the historical place is transformed into absoluteness; and—this should not be understood as a degradation—the places of memory became merely historical places, almost monuments by themselves, just as Nora, who coined the term *lieux de mémoire* [places of memory], had to recognise upon finishing this development (Nora, 1984–1992).<sup>3</sup> We only use this apparent monumental paradox to suggest an alternative way of relating memory and matter in public spaces.

Nevertheless, there is another memory we can speak of, which is not categorical, thorough, or even discrete, which we will call 'moral memory'. If every story is a story of space, every place is a place of memory for the animal of memories, a slow and sad animal, that walks through the streets. The moral memory of spaces is not easy to recognise at first sight, although it is capable of overcoming the forcefulness of monumentalised places. You just have to know how to read it. When we speak of moral memory, and we place it between the material and the immaterial, we must recognise that a first ambiguity arises, framed in a certain vagueness: we must consider what is material and what is immaterial in a place, and if

2 This excerpt from Walter Benjamin's *Berliner Chronik* [A Berlin Chronicle], translated from the original German into English in 1978 and published by Schocken Books, is given purely as a guide.

3 Nora himself (2011) revised the initial perspectives of his work, its generalisation—in other words, its instrumentalisation in an age of commemoration—in the final chapter of the last volume. Soon after, Paul Ricoeur strongly criticised Nora in his book *La mémoire, l'histoire, l'oubli* [Memory, history, forgetting] (2002). It is also worth mentioning Ulrich Winter and Joan Ramon Resina's conceptual review of Nora's categories and their interaction with our history, in the introduction to *Casa encantada. Lugares de la memoria en la España constitucional* [Haunted house: Places of memory in constitutional Spain] (2005). Nora himself subsequently, and more proactively, took up these issues, in 'Les lieux de mémoire, ou comment ils m'ont échappé' [Places of memory, or how they escaped me], an article published in 2008 in *L'Histoire* and collected in a book that gives an account of these proposals: *Présent, nation, mémoire* [Present, nation, memory] (2011, p. 373–418), which closes with a response to Ricoeur.

the moral memory is situated between the interstices of the material and the immaterial or, rather, arises from its intersection, the relationship between the immaterial and the material.<sup>4</sup> To complicate matters even more, in this essay I want to link this moral memory to the idea of the city, and therefore, to the most prodigious of human inventions: material specification of coexistence with the intangible and the sense this brings of belonging to a junction in space and time, a crossroads in which time passes and space changes, although we have given names to these places, we continue to call them cities.

---

## MORAL MEMORY

Perhaps it would be better if we clarify the term, explaining it by unfolding it from within, while simultaneously reflecting upon its origin. We speak of moral memory to refer to meanings that remain invisible to places, that unite us invisibly with the past, and that only language can make emerge. But also, in another sense, which we take from Josep Pla, from a much-cited page—although often in an excessively extracted way—from *El quadern gris* [The grey notebook], dated by Pla, 4 October 1918:

[The thorns we usually carry come from moments of fear we experience in life, fear of losing something, usually. Then, it seems to me, that fear is at the base of the mechanism of memory. Memory seems especially destined to keep fear alive—moments of fear that we resist digesting and eliminating. What jolts us, what makes us transition from adolescence into our definitive crystallisation, are these moments of panic that are never forgotten again. It is a force that imprints our character. It implies the appearance in ourselves of an element that keeps memory awake—and in anguished and permanent tension. When we are young, we usually have little memory—apart from scattered and interchangeable sexual ones—

although sometimes a child appears who can recite a page of a book or play the piano admirably. Moral memory—the only one that matters—is born at a certain moment in our development. The fear of losing what one has or failing to obtain what one seeks is what hurts, what moulds life. Fear arises from biological injustice, that is, the possible or actual infringement of the notion of justice that everybody, by living, has] (Pla, 1966, p.348-349).

Normally, only the last four lines are cited. But the extension to the rest of the context is what interests us now. Interestingly, this fragment is an insert from a meditation—which takes place over two days of annotations, from 3 to 4 October—about a meeting in a slightly rundown coffee house frequented by his father, Cafè Pallot in Calle Cavallers in Palafrugell (Spain). “*En surto com si hagués pres un bany a l’oceà sense límits dels detalls i de la petitesa. Com a règim diari, no ho podria pas aguantar. Reconec, però, que la petitesa de visió és una bona escola —una escola de modèstia i estoïcisme, exactament l’escola de la vida*” [I left as if I’d taken a swim in a limitless ocean of details and smallness. As a daily habit, I could not bare it. I recognise, however, that smallness of vision is a good practice—a school of modesty and stoicism, exactly the school of life] (Pla, 1966, p. 347). Indeed, the characters described by Pla as parishioners of that gathering, a description that does not include his father despite Pla mentioning him, justifies Pla’s statement that mediocrity is the colour of coffee with milk: Mr. Mascort, secretary of the City Council dispossessed of his position by an intrigue, which he recalls “*d’una manera obsessionant, microscòpica, viva*” [in an obsessive, microscopic, lively way]; Mr. Joanet Granés, “*escrivent de notaria —malgrat que la seva neboda es casà amb el notari—, les intrigues familiars li feren perdre la plaça. Valga’m la mare de Déu! Fa cinc anys que desbarra, dia i nit, sense parar, contra la vexació*” [assistant notary—despite his niece marrying the notary—family intrigues lost him his job. For the love of God! He’s been raving on for five years, day and night, without stopping, about this humiliation]. Mr. Balaguer, a man to whom the judge, substitute teacher, prosecutor, deputies, and secretary must turn when they

---

<sup>4</sup> In previous work we developed an initial outline of the concept of the moral memory of spaces (Martí, 2015).

need to write a paper, but who [still] occupies the last seat. “*Imagineu-vos la idea de la justícia que té el senyor Balaguer...!*” [Imagine Mr. Balaguer’s idea of justice...] And so on, several characters pass through, who mainly compensate for their insignificance by keeping a thorn hidden away... and the secret of what “*en definitiva, hom vol significar quan parla d’anar tirant, amb aquella —ai las!— alegria*” [in short, what one means when one talks about carrying on with—ah! —joy]. Everyone is encouraged until the gathering becomes delirious, almost manic, when it comes to demonstrating that there is no more interesting, more exciting case, than the one each guest presents.

Until it is time to mention his father: “*El meu pare es troba, en la tertúlia, més divertit que conforma. Hom el respecta perquè ha perdut diners tota la vida —perquè ha estat una víctima*” [My father doesn’t put up with these gatherings; more, he enjoys them. He is respected because he has lost money all his life—because he is a victim] (Pla, 1966, p. 351).

As we can see, Pla develops a whole theory of daily resentment, where the thorn is everything that condenses and distils the feeling of that which has been lost, but not the feeling of loss [itself]. Rather, this feeling is reflected in the figure of his father, of the victim, in which the loss becomes a condition whose compensation is impossible, which is argued in silence. Pla’s father does not talk about his *thorn*. He just *has one*.

All this was written by Josep Pla about a moment, one in the autumn of 1918, of which his generation repeatedly recall two facts: the Spanish flu epidemic and the general increase in wealth resulting from the First World War. As for the war, in the fragments of *El quadern gris* that refer to it and that specifically refer to the definition of moral memory, Pla’s annotations are a little frivolous and are linked, above all, to how certain Catalans took advantage, excessively so, of the conflict.

Regarding the flu epidemic, in an interview in *Destino* at the end of the sixties, Josep Pla stated that his writing was an effort to

[bear witness to the reality that surrounds us, to reflect the existence of the landscape around here, or wherever. Not to copy it or become a naturalist. Therefore, we must look for context, pay attention to details, their wealth, and their poetry. You already know that Mr. Ors’ category has neither a head nor tail. It is the anecdote, the detail, that counts... [...] My style, my style. As a young man I spent a huge amount of time contemplating the landscape and trying to describe it later. The year of the flu, ’18, I could sit in any corner of these fields, sheltered from the wind, and be absorbed, fascinated by the shapes, colours. You cannot imagine how intensely the landscape gulped, as close as we were to death... Well, my style is this: looking for the exact word, the exact noun, and then the adjective, to give the air this nuance, with the same accuracy] (Porcel, 1967, p. 53).

Nonetheless, if we examine [entries made in] the manuscript of *El quadern gris* after the date Pla speaks of moral memory, the first note we find about the war says: “*Mitj Europa cau. El moment es enorme. Rússia, Àustria, Alemanya. ¡Quan dolor! El sentiment em porta cap a lo que cau*” [Half of Europe has fallen. This is a huge moment. Russia, Austria, Germany. Such pain! I feel close to those who are falling] (Pla, 2004, p. 38).<sup>5</sup>

In *El quadern gris*, a book that emerged from that time of observation and lost in the imminence of death, Pla sets out the limits of his work in a single sentence: “*Si jo pogués imitar, crear un altre món, imaginaria aquest món mateix*” [If I could imitate, or create a world, I would imagine the world we have] (Pla, 1966, p. 395). Pla considers that his only hope is to describe the world that he has lived and that, as a result of this effort, the world itself would remain identical.

But there is one aspect that makes all these quotes not fit together. It is exaggerated that the definition of moral memory comes from an anodyne gathering

<sup>5</sup> We have respected the spelling used in Josep Pla’s manuscript.

frequented by his father, remembered decades later as “*un món d’una complexitat microscòpica inextricable*” [A world of intractable microscopic complexity] (Pla, 1966, p. 351)—and remember that Pla was a regular at the Ateneu Barcelonès circle when its now forgotten intellectual complexity was still strong; therefore, there he must have had a reason to underline this complexity—faced with the possibility of detaching it from one’s experience of fear, as the interview from the 1960s points out. Now, no matter how much the flu of 1918 marked that generation, compared to the war that, for four long years, had just ravaged Europe and in which a whole generation of young Europeans had disappeared, it was quite un— terrifying.

---

### MEMORY OF A SHADOW

Spaces are related to moral memories as events, arising from the inescapable feeling of being on the verge of losing what is before us—even if it is not ours—the way in which we see it, that it also participates in the exceptionality and the overflow, but above all, it is related to *disappearance*. But perhaps if we make this fear more indefinite, more abstract, we will understand it better. The point is that, if everyone has their *thorn*, do places have *thorns*? That is to say: do they have that [certain] texture that constitutes the enigma of their moral memory?

Perhaps, as Vicent Andrés Estellés said, fear makes one think... “*temies el moment del teu cant a València*” [you fear the moment you sing your song of València], for example. In short, to try to understand if places also have their *thorns* and to make [this knowledge] intelligible or, at least, legible in the midst of cities [full] of signs. Perhaps this would be better understood with some examples found on the street.

The regulars of Cafés know that the tables next to the window are usually always occupied, usually by men, such as those described by Ramón Gómez de la Serna:

[In the Cafés are the men who look like they are thinking about the past. They never write, read,

or look at the others in the Café. They always have a distant look, lost, infinite, the look of the man who remembers] (Gómez de la Serna, 1999 [1918], p. 247).

But we also know from Ramón from *Pombo*, among others, that social gathering is the soul of a Café. In this sense, few circles in our culture have been as emblematic as that of Joan Fuster, itinerant among several venues in the city of València, generally near the Estación del Norte and the University (Serra, 2012). [This gathering] could be found in the cafés next to the University in Calle La Nave, such as the SEU bar on Calle Comedias, near La Paz, where they sometimes had extended dinners at Casa Pedro (now the restaurant La Utielana). They also frequented Café Oeste and, later, the San Patricio coffee shop, which met the two aforementioned requirements, as well being next to the Dávila bookshop. At least until not long ago, the San Patricio coffee shop had two small canopies where some tables with good views were built into the windows of the mezzanine floor: from one, which faced the square, the equestrian statue of the person who the square was named after could be seen; from the other, in Calle En Llop, you could see the entrance to the passage of the Dávila bookshop, now disappeared, a key place in the formation of a whole generation, or two, of Valencian writers. Today, this cafeteria no longer exists as such—the last time I was there it had become a kind of semi-plasticised hamburger joint that, surely, would have deserved some Fusterian “*Cristo!*”; Now I do not know what the place looks like or what it sells. But when I was a student at the Universitat de València and I was walking around the blank sheets of the city trying to fill them, I spent a lot of time in that window, from which, then as now, the statue of Francesc de Vinatea was seen—I will not get into the delirious story of the withdrawal of the previous statue (tribute has not yet been paid to those at the City Council who participated in such a high-risk operation, as the former mayor Ricard Pérez Casado knows), nor the decision to put that new and disproportionate figure, in this case, of a man from Morella, right in the middle of the *battle of València* and its aftermath. It does not matter: let us not be sentimental, nor will we yearn for our youth... What

it is about is understanding that, if Joan Fuster's social gathering, at some point, stood next to that window, Fuster had no choice but to see it and—in the Camusian or Sartrean sense—feel outrage. As if pierced by a thorn.

That is, we should be aware that the Plaza's (now called the Town Hall's) thorn is a shadow that could be seen from that window; the shadow of a statue, of a series of statues, with their successive shadows. From our point of view, the important thing is to incorporate these thorns into the memory of the shadow in some way, usually through writing.

---

## PROPHETIC CORNERS

It is not an easy task. This was just an example, lost in the city of signs. Even so, we would not want to leave this attempt at an urban example without giving at least one possible definition of the moral memory of

spaces or, at least, of the kind of place in which we can expect the reemergence of the memories that we do not know we have. These are what Walter Benjamin calls 'prophetic corners':

[Just as there are plants that are said to possess the gift of making the future visible, there are places that have the same faculty. They are mostly abandoned places, like treetops leaning up against the walls, dead ends, or gardens in front of houses where nobody ever stops. In places like these, it is as if everything that is still to come has already happened] (Benjamin, 2013, p. 62).

It is evident that the Plaza del Ayuntamiento de València is neither a no-place nor an abandoned place... At least, its paperweight has improved a lot, in the midst of a bitter controversy about the Plaza's name. But we never know the form that abandonment might take. Nor where the moral memory misplaced on a map may appear before us. Or in a street.

---

## BIBLIOGRAPHIC REFERENCES

- Andrés Estellés, V. (1971). *Llibre de meravelles*. València: 3i4.
- Augé, M. (1992). *Non-lieux. Introduction à une anthropologie de la surmodernité*. Paris: Seuil.
- Delgado, M. (1999). *El animal público*. Barcelona: Anagrama.
- Barthes, R. (2002 [1967]). *Sémiologie et urbanisme*. In *Œuvres Complètes, II*. Paris: Seuil.
- Benjamin, W. (1991). *Gesammelte Schriften, VI*. Frankfurt: Suhrkamp Vg.
- Benjamin, W. (2013). *Infància a Berlín cap al 1900*. Palma: Lleonard Muntaner.
- Certeau, M. (1990). *L'invention du quotidien. I. Arts de faire*. Paris: Gallimard.
- Fuster, J. (1962). *El País Valenciano*. Barcelona: Destino.
- Gómez de la Serna, R. (1999 [1918]). *Pombo*. Madrid: Visor.
- Martí Monterde, A. (2015). *El far de Løndstrup. Assaig sobre la memòria moral dels espais*. València: PUV.
- Matas, À. (2006). *Esriptura i ciutat dels signes*. *Literatures*, 4, 61-77.
- Nora, P. (2011). *Présent, nation, mémoire*. Paris: Gallimard.
- Nora, P. (1984-1992). *Les lieux de mémoire*. Paris: Gallimard.
- Pla, J. (1966). *El quadern gris. Obra completa 1*. Barcelona: Destino.
- Pla, J. (2004). *El primer quadern gris. Dietaris 1918-1919*. Barcelona: Destino.
- Porcel, B. (1967). *Josep Pla y sus trabajos*. *Destino*, 1545, 53.
- Ricoeur, P. (2002). *La mémoire, l'histoire, l'oubli*. Paris: Seuil.
- Serra, X. (2012). *La tertúlia de Joan Fuster*. Catarroja: Afers.
- Stierle, K. (2001). *La Capitale des signes. Paris et son discours*. Paris: Éditions de la Maison des sciences de l'homme.
- Winter, U., and Resina, J. R. (2005). *Casa encantada. Lugares de la memoria en la España constitucional*. Frankfurt/Madrid: Vervuert/Iberoamericana.

## BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Antoni Martí Monterde (1968) has a doctorate in Humanities–Comparative Literature from the Universitat Pompeu Fabra and is a professor of Literature Theory and Comparative Literature at the Universitat de Barcelona and was a visiting researcher at Université Paris 8 (in 2008) and a visiting professor at Stanford University (in 2014). He directs the Comparative Literature Research Group in the European Intellectual Area and the Barcelona-Europe master's degree at the Universitat de Barcelona. In addition to several articles on Xavier de Maistre, Josep Pla, Ramón Gómez de la Serna, Eugeni d'Ors, Walter Benjamin, Victor Klemperer, Guillermo de Torre, Joan Fuster, and Claudio Magris, as an essayist he has published *J. V. Foix o la solitud de l'escriptura* [J. V. Foix or the application for writing] (1998) and *Poética del Café. Un espacio de la modernidad literaria europea* [Poetics of coffee: a space of European literary modernity] (2007). His latest books are *Un somni europeu. Història intel·lectual de la Literatura Comparada* [A European dream: Intellectual History of Comparative Literature] (2011) and *El far de Løndstrup* [The lighthouse of Løndstrup] (2015), for which he won the Càtedra Josep Lluís Blasco prize for his essay on ethics and citizenship.

