



JOAN FUSTER

1922 - 1992

a European intellectual



**GENERALITAT
VALENCIANA**

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**CENT de
FUSTER**
1922 - 2022

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JOAN FUSTER: A BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH¹

In October 1979, the specialist magazine *Actualidad Económica* placed Joan Fuster among «The 100 most influential Spaniards» of the time.² The selection included Juan Carlos I and other members of the royal household, politicians, financiers, members of the military and the clergy and other prominent figures. As is often the case with these ad hoc lists, it was incomplete and somewhat capricious. However, it was very significant that the name of the essayist, one of the very few Valencians included, should appear on it. It was only four years since the death of the dictator Francisco Franco and less than one year since the enactment of the Spanish Constitution. It was, therefore, that shifting and uncertain period for the establishment, when new ways of coexistence were created in Spain, that has come to be known as the Transition. Doubtless, the supposedly significant public impact that the magazine attributed to Fuster's opinions and attitudes could only be interpreted in the context of the direct political circumstances in which they were expressed, rather than in cultural or other circumstances. To a large extent, his previous activities in the Valencian territory, undertaken during the Franco regime, were dictated by his

1 This text largely reproduces the text that appeared at the beginning of an anthology by Joan Fuster *Escritos de crítica cultural*, prepared together with Salvador Ortells (Valencia, 2022, Publicacions de la Universitat de València).

2 «The 100 Most Influential Spaniards», *Actualidad Económica*, 1,127 (27 October 1979), p. 39.

personal desire to prepare some of the foundations for that change. On the other hand, the very same transition process put an end to some of Fuster's civil projects, which caused him discontent that he did not refrain from expressing.

He humorously replied in an immediate follow-up article on his unexpected, surprising inclusion in the very select list of «The 100 Most Influential Spaniards». The text contained a self-characterisation that seems appropriate to reproduce right now to begin this sketch with his own words::

«Influential, me? And so highly influential? I can only wonder who had the generous idea of placing me among ninety-nine other gentlemen, all of them ministers, company directors, captains general, dynastic figures, bishops, etc. Thank you very much. But, poor me!, how far does my supposed «influence» actually extend? [...] In fact, I am nothing more than an intellectual concerned with the issues of the Valencian people, who is extremely shy, brazen on rare occasions, inclined to the erudite, anti-metaphysical, and anti-clerical -anti all types of clergy, and not only professional clergy- and anti-nationalist, and... Very little else [...] If the list were of the «100,000 most influential Spaniards», things would be different».³

At this remove in time, it seems clear that Fuster was partly right to downplay the dimensions and scope of his social impact. But only up to a certain point. Looking back now, with the objectivity that distance favours, it can be said that the magazine's assessment was neither inflated nor completely baseless. The writer's opinions, including, of course, his political ones, but not only these, have had a demonstrable impact on those of many other people, contributing to similar or opposing views or criteria, creating coinciding perspectives and also disagreements, sometimes portrayed by their opponents with no

3 «Qüestió d'influències», *Qué y Dónde*, 86, 5-11 Nov. 1979. Reproduced in Joan Fuster, *Notes d'un desficiós*, pub. and notes by Nel·lo Pellisser and F. Pérez Moragón, València 2017, Institució Alfons el Magnànim, p. 56. My translation.

shred of kindness and even with violence, whether verbal or material. Fuster elicited a very visible response, for or against, which allowed and still allows us to speak of his significant influence on his milieu. To corroborate this, it suffices to take a look at the list of academic works devoted to him over the last thirty years or to try to estimate the number of times his name has appeared, for better or worse, in other types of writings over the same period.

We will provide another, even older, piece of information, from 1972, to illustrate this influence. In a very different vein from the ranking in *Actualidad Económica*, seven years earlier, a report entitled «Conflicting Trends in Popular Culture»¹⁴ contained a list of some two hundred intellectuals —so it called them, although it warned there could be up to five hundred who could be listed who the Francoist bodies in charge of repression in this and other fields (the police's Political-Social Brigade, the Ministry of Information and Tourism through successive censorship services, etc.) considered dangerous for the stability of the Regime. This was 1972, let us repeat, with Franco at the head of state, Prince Juan Carlos as expectant Prince of Spain —*or in expectation of his destiny*—, Luis Carrero Blanco as Vice-President of the government and Alfredo Sánchez Bella as Minister of Information and Tourism. The Valencians selected by the watchdogs of Franco's orthodoxy and loyalty to the regime were few: the visual artists Andreu Alfaro, Josep Soler Vidal (*Monjalés*), then exiled in Colombia, Juan Genovés, Ricardo Zamorano and Rafael Solbes, the art critic Vicente Aguilera Cerni, the journalist and politician Vicent Ventura and Joan Fuster. As can be seen, this mention of our author, which in a certain sense could be considered as honourable as that of 1979, even if it was troublesome, also had a political basis.

4 Facsimile reproduction in Pere Ysàs, *Dissent and subversion. The Franco Regime's Struggle for Survival, 1960-1975*, Barcelona 2004; the reference to Fuster, on p. 246.

CULTURE AND POLITICS

In the considerations surrounding Fuster's career, both during and after his lifetime, the two orientations of his activity have always had a decisive influence: the more strictly literary and the civil. Both sustained his notoriety and brought him satisfaction and displeasure. The results of his work analysing and reflecting on cultural events, which occupied a large part of Fuster's not always easy dedication as a writer for the press, must be valued as they deserve to be. Although, at times, and from certain perspectives, the civic orientation of his dignity has obscured the literary one, which is just as valuable and deserving of attention.

This book will be published on the 100th anniversary of Joan Fuster's birth. These commemorative events can give rise to many hyperbolic interpretations, of ephemeral validity and equally transient objectives, about the real value of the work or figure to which they seek to give importance. The episodes that are often involved in what is now called *an event* can be highly comical or terribly cruel. Especially when people survive who have the right to claim to be the heirs, in one sense or another, of the person being honoured. A French poli-



tician, Anatole de Monzie (1876-1947) collected in *Les Veuves Abusives* (1937, Reed, 2011) eight cases of widows who murdered their husbands (Tolstoy, Wagner, Comte, Rousseau, etc.) after their death. In the case of Fuster, fortunately, his heirs were also the writer Josep Palàcios, the Biblioteca de Catalunya and, conditionally, Sueca, his home town, which, thanks to the generosity of the former and the latter, and in collaboration with the Generalitat Valenciana, was finally able to install with all dignity and efficiency his art collection and, what matters most, the archive, library and newspaper library which, without great economic resources but with enormous constancy and a profound sense of the value of personal and collective memory, he managed to gather and preserve. All this can now be seen in the Espai Joan Fuster, inaugurated in January 2017 by Ximo Puig, President of the Generalitat, and which occupies two adjoining modernist-style buildings, connected and adapted for cultural activities. One of them was the writer's home.

LINGUISTIC PROBLEMS AND ENVIRONMENTAL CONSTRAINTS

In the usual canon of contemporary Catalan literature that deals with literary essays, Joan Fuster undoubtedly has a particularly distinguished place, cemented by a large number of books and articles in which he displayed his intellectual acumen, his skill in handling language, the variety and richness of an ever-increasing cultural baggage as the fruit of a permanent curiosity, and a remarkable capacity for work. It is worth mentioning, however, that, due to the political circumstances affecting the Spain of his time, he had to write a good part of his texts for newspapers directly in Castilian Spanish, which constitute a very large and substantial part of his work, although some were later translated into the writer's own language to be published in volumes. And in a parallel process, sometimes other texts were based on previous annotations that the author, in order to transform them into an article, had to pass through the filter of Spanish.

And it was not just a question of language. There was also the inexorable and fateful weight of provincialism, of the lack of a cultural or even a publishing industry, with solvent means of communication, among other elements, or anyone who wanted to be a writer, and even more so a professional writer. In similar cases, these deficits are often made up for and covered up, for the sake of the gallery, by a hypertrophy of folklore and a propagandistic exaltation to the point of paroxysm of events, characters or values of the past that become a procession of totemic, sacralised figures, which can never be questioned or even reviewed in an objective or updated analysis. Much less, subjected to a hygienic exercise in humour or sarcasm. Whoever does so, and this happened to Fuster, is guilty of crimes against the homeland. If political disagreements are added to their differences of opinion on certain tribal rites, the diagnosis becomes even worse. It was one thing not to be particularly devoted to a local glory, which deserved reprimand and scorn, and another much more serious thing: to not be addicted to, or even to be explicitly opposed to, Francoism.

The methods employed to repudiate dissenters used to be and are usually very similar, although not always to the same extent, nor do they go as far as the attempt to murder them, as also happened to Fuster.

THE FIRST FORTY YEARS (1922-1962)

The future writer was born on 23 November 1922 in Sueca, the capital of the Valencian region of La Ribera Baixa. The town, which had held this title since 1899, had all the characteristics of a village, although a period of economic prosperity, due to the good prices at which rice could be sold on the international markets -and rice cultivation occupied a large part of the municipal area that bordered the Albufera lagoon and the sea- had allowed the construction of private and public buildings that were taller than the traditional houses of the area and also richer in their interior and exterior decoration. In them, some local architects applied stylistic elements with a

certain exoticism, which were related to a whimsical variety of Modernism and even Art Deco. In 1922, Sueca had about 18,000 inhabitants, but as far as demography is concerned, it was not an isolated population that only fluctuated due to births and deaths. At the end of each summer, a multitude of seasonal workers would come to harvest the rice. Some might perhaps settle there permanently, although, to an absent-minded and casual observer like myself, and in comparison with other localities of the same economic and population weight, Sueca does not seem to have undergone, even now, major changes in its character as a result of immigration.



Although he was born in a much more modest rented house, where he lived until he was seven or eight years old, Fuster is always associated with another one, where he lived after his father and mother moved into it, which they would own, on the ground floor of number 10, Carrer de Sant Josep. This was the writer's home until he died on 21 June 1992.

The literature on Fuster around this subject, especially the interviews, have recorded the function that that house would have for him as a reception place for all kinds of visitors who came to number 10, Carrer de Sant Josep, in Sueca, for friendship, for intellectual, professional or political contact, out of simple curiosity, seeking advice or an opinion, a commentary on an academic project or, especially under Franco's dictatorship but also later, to plot a more or less sane conspiracy. Without a telephone until shortly before his death, conversations there or elsewhere, together with a correspondence that has left more than twenty thousand documents, were for the writer a constant and content-rich form of interpersonal relationship.

The family came from farming stock. The first exception was his father, Juan Fuster Seguí (Sueca 1893-1966), a man of Carlist ideology from his youth, who learned the trade of carver and maker of wooden religious statuary in Valencia, and later in the town, and who combined this profession with the drawing classes he gave in private schools. His profession was closely linked to the ecclesiastical world, which in any case must not have been too distant for him, given his own ideas. Fuster's mother, María Ortells Morell (Sueca, 1894-1965), was, like his father, fervently religious.

The future writer's childhood was typical of any village boy's at this time, he spent most of the day playing in the streets and squares, when he was not at school, at church or, of course, at home. The Spanish Civil War, which began in 1936 when he was only thirteen, changed his peaceful childhood, not least because of the political and religious views of his parents and most of the family -his mother's brother and several other relatives were killed in the revolutionary upheaval. In 1938, his father was arrested and imprisoned for about eight months until the end of the conflict, perhaps because he was a member of the Socorro Blanco, a Carlist organisation that provided aid to priests and co-religionists who had to withdraw from society and were in financial difficulty because of the situation. It was a terrible period,



during which Fuster, trapped in the family home by fear and economic shortages, by widespread hunger and uncertainty regarding the future, with his studies and schooling suspended, found refuge in reading any kind of book and magazine that he could get his hands on. And, crucially, it was then that he began to write in his own language. To the extent that, in 1939, shortly after Franco's victory, he and a friend, with the

greatest ingenuity, tried to find out how to follow a course in Valencian grammar.

At the same time, his father's seniority within the local Carlist movement led to his appointment as first deputy mayor in the Sueca municipal government set up by the victors on 4 April (the occupying troops had entered five days earlier), but on 10 May he was removed from that position, along with the mayor. The writer attributed this to Juan Fuster Seguí's disagreement with the treatment given by the landowners to the agricultural workers who cultivated their land, which had been regained by the military. It is not insignificant that the carver of religious statues hid in his workshop —and probably saved from destruction— an enormous canvas with the Republic depicted in all its splendour as a symbolic matron, which had been commissioned earlier by the town council from the painter Alfredo Claros to preside over the Town Hall meeting room. The painting remained hidden and safe from the avenging fire in the Fuster-Ortells home until long after the death of the son, who could hardly have been unaware of its existence, even though the canvas was rolled up and half-covered by other objects in a rarely visited storeroom.

In that environment in 1939, Fuster was a member of the Frente de Juventudes —the youth wing of the Falange Española Tradicionalista y de las Juntas de Ofensiva Nacional Sindicalista (known as the Movimiento or FET-JONS)— and later, at the corresponding age, he joined the Falange, as a training officer in his village.

He soon abandoned this militancy that had been imposed by circumstances, and in the same way he separated from the Catholic religion he had inherited. Reading, reflection and observations of reality gradually distanced him from the ideological world for which he seemed destined, in an intimate process that must not have been easy or comfortable for him.

In 1942 he was able to enter the Universitat de València as a student, thanks to the «moment of relative economic euphoria» that his father's profession experienced in the post-war period -the writer

would later say- when there was an opportunity to fill with religious statuary the altars that had been devastated during the war. He studied Law without mishap, living in Valencia in a somewhat picturesque boarding house where the guests were subjected to an almost exclusive diet of vegetables. In Valencia browsed in old bookshops, which among other discoveries and surprises offered copies of works published prior to 1936 and not reprinted because of censorship, and he also went to the cinema or to concerts and began to relate to a relatively urban world. Like all other higher education establishments, the Universitat de València had suffered an *atrocious dismemberment*, exemplified by the assassination of its former rector and Izquierda Republicana deputy Juan Peset Aleixandre, and it was subjected to the rigours of the post-war period, with a teaching staff in which conservatism, fascism and a lack of academic rigour coexisted. However, in that period and in the subsequent one, and always in contact with the university and its surroundings —for example, with those who in 1950 started the magazine *Claustro*, which was somewhat similar to *La Hora*, in Madrid, or *Laye*, in Barcelona, all of which were related to the obligatory Sindicato Español Universitario, SEU—, he established good friendships, many of which would last for the rest of his life. At the same time, although the environment was highly unfavourable, he continued to expand his knowledge of his own language and, from there, of the literature that had been expressed in it. This is how he connected with the short-lived Valencianism of the Republic, reading its modest publications and holding a friendly dialogue with some of its youngest witnesses, who had not given up on their defeated and persecuted demands.

Apparently, while at university, he was admitted as an employee of the Caja de Ahorros y Monte de Piedad de Valencia, perhaps thanks to family influence, although there is no information to confirm that he actually entered or worked behind a desk or a teller's window. It is not currently known why he gave up this path. In view of its subsequent evolution, one cannot help but wonder: what would have happened if...? All this, however, is anecdotal. What is certain is that he

continued to devote himself mainly to his studies. There is no record that, in the meantime, he had a paid job. And, at the end of the day, considering Fuster's entire career, it was of little consequence that, after graduating in Law in 1947, he worked in a number of companies—one of them dedicated to exporting citrus fruits— or practised as a lawyer for a short time—he even had an office in the family home in his village. All of this was somewhat sporadic, because it was most likely done without great enthusiasm and, ultimately, with little or no continuity.

READING AND WRITING

In reality, what interested Fuster was literature: reading it and writing it. Perhaps he thought he could make a living out of it, even if this required a strong dose of optimism, willpower or, one might say, a spirit of sacrifice. Or it was a feeling of horror at the more realistic alternatives: law or a permanent job in some predictably grim office of one professional specialisation or another.

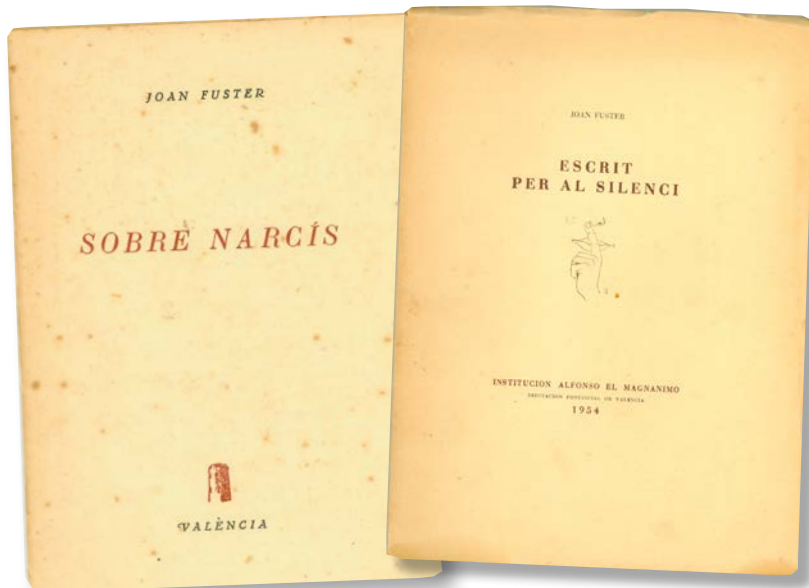
While still a student, he had begun to publish poems and articles devoted to his historical studies. It is highly significant that in 1944, at the age of twenty-two, he published a particularly informed and rigorous study of Valencian poetry during the preceding quarter of a century in the *Almanaque de Las Provincias*, the yearbook of a conservative newspaper. The young poet, who had already chosen his own language, despite the environmental pressure to use Castilian Spanish, analysed the work of those who had preceded him. There is something in this fact that can be considered revealing about Fuster's way of working, and even of thinking; a desire to position himself in the space through which he wishes to move, as if he were comparing himself or measuring himself against others. Whoever aspires to be noticed has to produce something noteworthy. It was none other than Carles Salvador, a minor Valencian author, who had become established in the 1930s, who, after becoming acquainted with Fuster's first verses, highlighted the appearance of «a poet who does not resemble any of the current Valencian poets».

Also at that time, Fuster began his adventures with the magazine *Verbo*, which he edited with his friend José Albi, launching the first issue in 1946 under the generic title of *Cuadernos Literarios* —it was printed thanks to the influential position of Albi's father in the Alicante Provincial Council— and in which Fuster, among other things, began to write literary criticism and simple book reviews. As a complement to the magazine, an *Anthology of Spanish Surrealism* was published in 1952, authored by Fuster and Albi, which Juan Manuel Bonet considers «pioneering» in the study of this movement in his seminal *Dictionary of the Avant-Garde in Spain* (1907-1936). In view of their respective poetic careers, it seems safe to assume that Fuster was more interested in surrealism than Albi.

It was a time when literary magazines that were not officially sanctioned were beginning to appear in provincial Spanish towns. Those from 1944 included *Corcel*, under the direction of Ricard Blasco in Valencia, and *Espadaña*, founded in León by Eugenio García de Nora, Victoriano Crémer and Antonio González de Lema. Then came others which, like *Verbo*, were platforms for the literary interests of those who promoted or collaborated in them. Without financial gain, they were a means for these people to feel immersed in and related to the world of culture and books that was to a large extent a world apart, connecting them with what used to be called «the republic of letters», with poetry congresses and other similar meetings, allowing them to try to escape from the surrounding provincial environment, which was often oppressive in some sense -whether morally, culturally or politically.

Also while studying at the university, he had come into contact with a local group of Valencianist writers, called Torre after the name of the publishing house founded and run by their mentors, Xavier Casp and Miquel Adlert.

Following on from the verses praised by Carles Salvador, Fuster's singularity was confirmed and unfolded with the appearance of the collections of poems *Sobre Narcís* (1948), *Ales o mans* (1949), *Terra en la boca* (1953) and *Escrit per al silenci* (1954), which the writer brought together many years later in *Set llibres de versos* (1987), together with



other collections of poems that censorship or circumstances had left unpublished at the time they were written. His *Poesia completa 1945-1987* was published in 2022.

Despite the attention he had received from some critics, Fuster voluntarily, and for reasons that he would later only half-explain, stopped writing poetry. While he continued sporadically, he was already completely changing his style and poetic language. This abandonment was the result of a radical shift in attitude and intention, which inclined him towards an anti-lyrical poetry, informed by anger or sarcasm, and with which he did not wish to continue, perhaps because, by becoming a virtually professional writer, he was moving further away from a genre that it was impossible to conceive had any prospect of a literary market.

Although it was not just this, probably. He had also given up writing fiction, after some unpublished and frustrated attempts, which he found unsatisfactory. It may be thought that he turned away from literary creation precisely because, in his inner self, he must have compared himself with authors whose work -not for nothing did he practise criticism and read endlessly- would seem to him to be beyond his ability to surpass.



Throughout his life, however, he never abandoned a genre of literature which he had cultivated brilliantly since his youth and which he was particularly fond of because of its expressive possibilities. Thus, he wrote a large number of aphorisms that reflect a sharp thinking and a sarcastic, provocative and ironic wit, capable of taking advantage of the twists and turns of language to communicate and suggest, perhaps more than to affirm.

Especially at the beginning of his career, diarism was a constant exercise for him, in notebooks in which he poured out ideas, reflections and opinions on events or readings, rather than on episodes in his daily life.

Although not being properly a literary genre, Fuster was a prolific writer of letters, which proved very useful in times of censorship, with thousands of letters to a considerable number and variety of correspondents.

IN THE NEWSPAPERS

It has already been said that Fuster did not seem very keen on being a clerk or a lawyer. An event that, in principle, might not have been of great importance in his professional life would serve to reorientate it for many years: in April 1952, *Levante*, the morning newspaper of the Movimiento in Valencia, awarded him a prize in a competition for a poem on a religious theme and subsequently opened up the possibility of publishing an article. This episode will probably seem very strange to a young person right now: a competition for a religious poem in a newspaper? and Fuster entering it, at almost thirty years old? Things were like that, then. He won the prize, accepted the invitation to continue sending originals and became a more or less regular contributor to the newspaper. And so, shortly afterwards, the doors of the evening paper *Jornada*, which also belonged to the media chain created by FET-JONS, were opened to him, an organisation that often seized property belonging to people or organisations that were supporters of the defeated Republic. The two newspapers carried Fuster's writings —under his name or under various pseudonyms— for

almost a decade, mainly or almost exclusively on cultural themes. The weekly section «Jornada de las artes y las letras», which appeared in December 1957, must have been partly his responsibility.

These and other works, already in the pages of *Verbo*, were a constant link between him and the literary life of the time in Spain. Thus, in 1954 he was part of the Catalan delegation, headed by Carles Riba, at the Third Poetry Congress, held in Santiago de Compostela. And when in 1956 Guillem Díaz Plaja, Dámaso Santos, Felipe Sordo and Juan Ramón Masoliver created the Critics' Awards that are still held today, he was immediately called to the jury, as were Josep Maria Castellet, José Luis Cano, Antoni Vilanova and other journalists, editors and teachers. The aim of the competition was to honour a work published the previous year, initially in poetry or narrative and in Spanish, although the call for entries was later extended. The first winners included Camilo J. Cela, Rafael Sánchez Ferlosio, Gabriel Celaya, Ignacio Aldecoa, Ana María Matute, José Hierro and Blas de Otero.

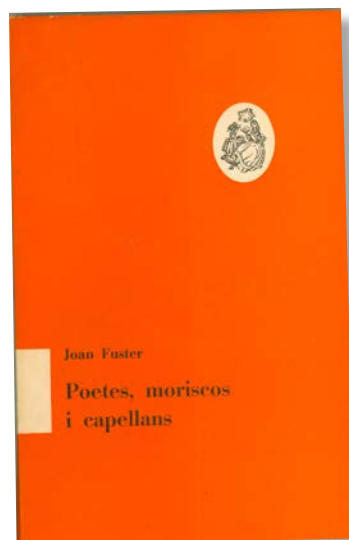
For similar reasons, and coinciding with his debut as a critic in the «Catalan Books» section of the Barcelona weekly *Destino*, he attended the 1st International Novel Colloquium in Formentor, mainly promoted by the publisher Carlos Barral and the novelist Camilo José Cela, with the participation of Robbe-Grillet, Juan y Luis Goytisolo, Italo Calvino, Jordi Petit, Mercedes Salisachs, Miguel Delibes, Carmen Martín Gaité, Michel Butor, Castellet, Celaya and José María Valverde.

In short, his prestige as a critic and essayist made him a member of numerous juries, for the Valencia Literature Prize, the Sant Jordi Prize for novels, and the Lletra d'Or Prize. As a member of the jury for the Premi d'Honor de les Lletres Catalanes, which was instituted in 1969 and which he himself received in 1975, he tried unsuccessfully to have the prize awarded to Josep Pla. He achieved better results by getting the exiled Mercè Rodoreda to publish her best-known novel, *La Plaça del Diamant* (1962), despite the fact that it did not win a prize in a competition in which Fuster was on the jury.

Incidentally, through his work in *Verbo*, which had an exchange with other magazines from which he selected texts to insert in his own, he discovered the existence of publications maintained by Catalans exiled in America since 1939. He established contact with some of them by correspondence and in 1950 he began to collaborate with newspapers such as *La Nostra Revista* and *Pont Blau*. It was a long-distance connection which, as if by a rebound effect, helped him to relate more directly to the Catalan-language literary world which, in the midst of many difficulties, was surviving in Franco-dominated Spain, with centres in Barcelona and Palma de Mallorca. He was also able to write short essays of some importance for the exile journals, without changing language, and to discuss issues that he would not have been able to address here.

In addition to the occasional articles, even if from a certain point onwards they could provide him with a regular income, Fuster's interests as a writer had turned towards essays, in two parallel directions. On the one hand, studies and analyses of Catalan literature; on the other, reflections on cultural and social events of a much broader and, it could be said, universal scope. In the first sense, his writings on the work and thought of great Valencian authors of the 15th century—the poetry of Ausiàs March, the oratory of Saint Vicent Ferrer, the sarcastic verses of Jaume Roig or the covert feminism of Sister Isabel de Villena—, published between 1954 and 1962 by the *Valencian Journal of Philology*, a publication from the Alfonso el Magnánimo Institution, a provincial cultural organisation linked to the Higher Council for Scientific Research (CSIC), have long been relevant.

The works collected under the joint title *Poetes, moriscos i capellans* (1962), later published as *Poetas, moriscos y curas* (1969) by Ciencia Nueva, of Madrid, one of those publishing houses that the Franco regime



could not tolerate as it was related to the Communist Party of Spain, also attracted his interest in his perspicacity as a reader and interpreter of Valencian sociolinguistic history. The original had benefited from a grant from the Congress for Cultural Freedom (CLC), through the Spanish delegation of the Comité d'Ecrivains et d'Editeurs pour une Entreaide Européenne, in one of the calls for proposals in which were selected, among others, Enrique Tierno Galván, Alfonso C. Comín, Esteban Pinilla de las Heras, Francesc Vallverdú, A. M. Badia i Margarit, José M. Moreno Galván, Javier Muguerza, Daniel Sueiro, José Jiménez Lozano and Luis Felipe Vivanco. It is worth recalling here, incidentally, that Fuster, in connection with the Congress for Cultural Freedom, and replacing Jaime Gil de Biedma, took part in the «Seminar on Realism and Reality in Contemporary Literature», held in Madrid in 1963. Other participants included José Luis Lopez Aranguren, Alfonso Sastre, Josep M. Castellet, Gabriel Celaya, Luis Martín Santos, Nathalie Sarraute and Mary McCarthy. Cela, faithful to his former role as a censor, was a secret informer for the Ministry of Information.⁵ Fuster's interventions in activities subsidised by the Congress for Cultural Freedom were completed by his collaboration, together with Joan Perucho, Gonzalo Torrente Ballester, José Luis Martín Santos and others, in the collective volume *El amor y el Erotismo* (1965) and the publication by the publishing house Seminarios y Ediciones, the final derivation in Spain of that adventure, of *El hombre, medida de todas las cosas* (1970), a translation of the volume *L'home, mesura de totes les coses* (1967) and the corresponding prologue by Joaquim Molas. Due to filial obligations, he was unable to attend the 2nd Catalonia-Castile Colloquium, prepared under the auspices of the Congress for Cultural Freedom and held in Toledo in November 1965, with the participation of Aranguren, Castellet, Ernest Lluch, Vicent Ventura, Rafael Lapesa, Tierno Galván, Jordi Carbonell, Joan Reventós, Maurici Serrahima, Pedro Laín Entralgo, Domingo García Sabell, Dionisio Ridruejo among others.

5 On the internal polemics of the meeting, Jordi Amat, *La Primavera de Múnich*, Barcelona 2016, pp. 306 ff.

At the same time as his interest in the cultural history of his country, Fuster had focused his critical attention on the debates on figurativism and abstraction in the plastic arts through the book *El descrèdit de la realitat* (1955), which was soon translated into Spanish as *El descrédito de la realidad* (1957), for the prestigious Seix Barral, or on other cultural debates, in *Les originalitats* (1956). This work was translated into Spanish in the small volume *Las Originalidades. Maragall and Unamuno face to face* (1964), published in the collection *Renuevos de Cruz y Raya*, which was directed by José Bergamín with the aim of following in the footsteps of the well-known magazine he edited before the war, within a publishing house founded by Arturo Soria, who had also returned from exile. The essay writings of this period are to be found in *Figures de temps* (1957), *Indagacions possibles* (1958) and *Judicis finals* (1960, Giudizi finali, 2006). The interest in the arts manifested in *El descrèdit de la realitat* was always maintained in his regular dealings with painters and sculptors and in writing articles or texts for catalogues. This relationship is the source of a remarkable collection of works, some of which are on display in the museum that bears his name.

FROM 1962, A CRUCIAL YEAR

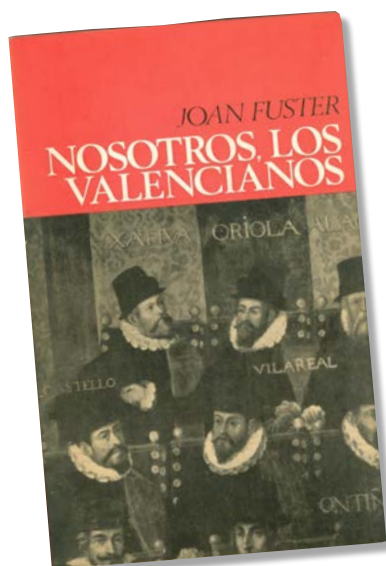
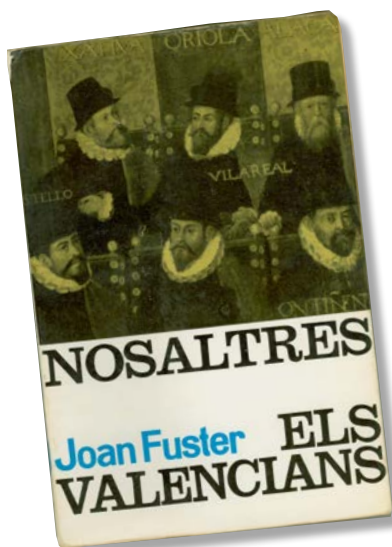
In 1962, in addition to *Poetes, moriscos i capellans*, he published *Nosaltres, els valencians*, his best-known and most debated historical essay, and *El País Valencià*, in a collection of travel guides published by the publishing house Destino between 1943 and 1977, in which titles by Pío Baroja, Josep Pla, Dolores Medio, Dionisio Ridruejo and José María Pemán, among others, appeared.

Using as an excuse some ironic or iconoclastic comments taken from *El País Valencià*, but looking towards the political positions visible in *Nosaltres, els valencians* and other writings by the author, people from the local right wing in Valencia launched a typically Francoist press campaign, without the right of reply or public defence, which, among other consequences, had the effect of suppressing his colla-

boration in Valencian newspapers until the Transition. In the background was undoubtedly the persecution by the regime of an intellectual who, like others —although not many others— and led by Ramón Menéndez Pidal, had denounced in collective writings the repression of the strikes in Asturias in 1962 and the lack of public freedoms. The bellicose Manuel Fraga Iribarne was Minister of Information and Tourism at this time, seconded by his brother-in-law, Carlos Robles Piquer. Among other consequences, the regime's censors diligently and slavishly prevented *Nosaltres, els valencians* and *El País Valenciano* from being reprinted.

Fuster thus suddenly triggered both visceral hatreds that would haunt him until after his death and admiration, whether critical or uncritical, that have continued to this very day. He became a reference in many ways. One of those influential figures we referred to at the beginning of this essay.

All this was political, of course. At the same time, Fuster continued his literary work, but from a different perspective. The campaign against





him had placed him on a higher plane. This was how his friend Josep Pla immediately saw it: in a letter written straight after the events, in February 1963. In addition to recommending patience, he told him «this wave of articles shows you have been a great success», an anti-provincial and, in short, a political success.

For all these reasons, Fuster stopped contributing to newspapers in Valencia. By 1961, he had begun to publish also in *El Correo Catalán*. He would also do so later in other newspapers in Barcelona: *El Noticiero Universal* (1967-1971), *Tele/eXpres* (1969-1977) and *La Vanguardia* (1969-1984). And Madrid such as *Informaciones* (1972-1978) and *El País* (1979-1986). He was also a regular and frequent contributor for long periods to weekly or monthly magazines, including *Destino* (1959-1979), *Por Favor* (1977-1978), *Jano* (1977-1981), *Repórter* (1977-1978) *Qué y Dónde* (1979-1984), *Serra d'Or* (1959-1983), *El Món* (1981-1983) and *El Temps* (1984-1985).

This list of newspaper titles and the years of Fuster's collaboration with them summarises a long and uninterrupted professional relationship with journalism spanning forty years. However, becoming a professional writer was a risky decision and this shaped his life. Among other reasons, because, not possessing his own money and having no other rank in the newspapers other than that of collaborator, his income would never be assured with the regularity that a fixed position in an editorial office can provide. For him, his independence always came with a clear economic risk in return, which at times was threatening.

So he had to accept commissioned literary works. Among others, travel guides, such as *Valencia* (1961), *Alicante and the Costa Blanca* (1965) or *See the Valencian Country* (1983), and even a television script, the one he made for the Spanish Television series *This is my Land* (1983), in an early stage in which he talked about other places with Miguel Delibes, Carmen Martín Gaité, Gabriel Celaya, Camilo José Cela, Carlos Barral, José Antonio Labordeta and José M. Caballero Bonald. This documentary also caused agitated attacks from the right against Fuster.

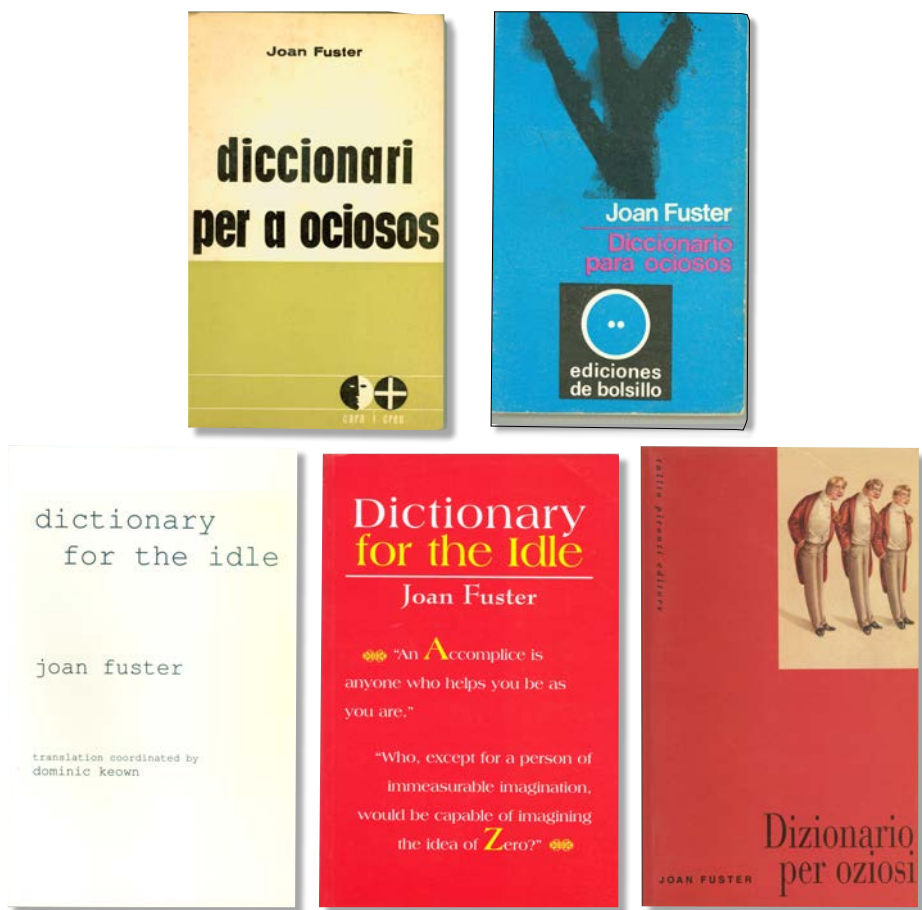
In the 1960s, he translated works by Albert Camus and other authors into Catalan, sometimes in collaboration with Josep Palàcios. After that, he wrote a large number of forewords to other people's works, which in many cases constitute first-rate studies of ancient and contemporary Catalan-language writers: Joan Salvat-Papasseit, Ramon Muntaner -for a *Spanish edition of the Crónica* (1970), published by Alianza Editorial-, Ausiàs March, Salvador Espriu, Josep Pla, Josep Carner, Vicent Andrés Estellés, Jaume Gassull and Joan Timoneda.

His interest in the sociolinguistic history of his country was reflected in *Heretgies, revoltes i sermons* (1968, partially translated in *Rebeldes y heterodoxos*, 1972), *La Decadència al País Valencià* (1976), *Llibres i problemes del Renaixement* (1989) and other titles, in which he combined erudition with a style that was very attractive to those who read

them. A case apart was *Literatura catalana contemporània* (1972, published as *Literatura catalana contemporànea* in 1975).⁶

At the same time, he continued to print essays of a more general scope or perspective, a kind of intellectual examination in which he included, as in many of his press articles, all kinds of facts, without distinction of time or geography, forming a rich picture of the world. These included: *Diccionari per a ociosos* (1964; in Spanish, *Diccionario para ociosos*, 1970, *Dictionary for the idle*, 1992 and 2006, *Dictionnaire au*

6 The initial text, in Spanish, was a commission for the General History of Hispanic Literature directed by Guillermo Díaz-Plaja and which began to be published in 1949. In the volumes that appeared, Catalan literature was dealt with by the great specialist, Jordi Rubió i Balaguer. Fuster reworked his unpublished work for the 1972 edition.



usage des oisifs, 2010), *Causar-se d'esperar* (1965), *L'home, mesura de totes les coses* (1967, translated as *El hombre, medida de todas las cosas*, 1970, which has already been mentioned), *Consells, proverbis i insolències* (1968; *Consejos, proverbios e insolencias*, 2022), *Examen de consciència* (1968), *Babels i babilònies* (1972) and *Sagitari* (1984).

In his strategy as a writer, a fundamental function in his early years was played by his almost daily notes in which he collected a succession of reflections and thoughts, even, although very occasionally, some personal experience of travels or conversations, regularly ordered by the date on which he wrote them down.

As an initiator or advisor on cultural or civil initiatives, Fuster's work was extremely intense. He was one of the main promoters of a collectively authored *Història del País Valencià*, but also of the *Estructura econòmica del País Valencià* (1970), whose direction he entrusted to the then young economist Ernest Lluch, and of the preparation of a county division published in 1970 as *Nomenclàtor geogràfic del País Valencià*, which has been generally adopted. He was the literary director of Editorial AC and advised the *Gran Enciclopèdia Catalana*, the *Gran Enciclopèdia de la Región Valenciana* and other publishing initiatives. He also participated in the preparations for the *1st Congress on the History of the Valencian Country* (1971) and directed collections dedicated to the publication of texts: *Lletra Menuda* (1971-1980), *Bibliotheca Valentina* (1972), *Bibliotheca Imago Mundi* (1974), *Documents de Cultura-Facsimil* (1973-1977), *Clàssics Albatros* (1973) and the *Biblioteca d'Autors Valencians*. He founded and directed until 1991 the magazine of studies, essays and literary creation *L'Espill*, which first appeared in 1978, but he also, always attentive to the development of local culture, promoted *Quaderns de Sueca* (1980). He was one of the vice-presidents of the *Congrés de Cultura Catalana* (1977) and honorary president of the *Segon Congrés Internacional de la Llengua Catalana* (1986).

DURING THE TRANSITION (1975...)

In combination with this activity as a writer, there was his personal activity, an undeniably political position. In terms of his evolution in this field, the series of ideological positions established by Josep Pla in a 1962 article may serve as a rough indication, according to which Fuster had been «successively: Spanishist, a well understood regionalist, Valencian regionalist, Valencian nationalist, Catalanist». This was a simplistic way of explaining a process which, apart from national affiliations, soon led Fuster to consider himself a «liberal», as he often defined himself, and, in any case, a person who stood against the prevailing Franco regime for much of his life. Once the dictatorship disappeared, he maintained that position, without major changes. Contrary to what has sometimes been claimed, Marxist thought had a relatively late and not very profound impact on Fuster, beyond his interest in the contributions of Antonio Gramsci -in short, not exactly canonical- or in historical materialism, as one of the ways of analysing social reality.

From a very young age, Fuster had felt a deep concern for the Valencian cultural, linguistic, economic and political situation, a constant interest that he himself called a «passion» and «obsession» and which is shown in much of his writings and in the activities in which he took part. Among the aspects that earned his attention, the national affiliation of the Valencian people, which for him was unequivocally Catalan, had a prominent place. He always made this choice with great dignity, but also with the awareness that his nationalism was only a sustained gesture of resistance, a democratic defensive reaction to aggressive and destructive nationalisms. During the Transition, he explained his position in statements that I have translated: «I have said it more than once: at most, I am «nationalist» to the extent that I am forced to be so, which is essential and that is enough. Because, if you look at it carefully, no one is a nationalist except in the face of

another nationalist, in deaf or corrosive belligerence, simply to avoid opprobrium or submission».⁷

All this, plus his personal and public stance, clearly in favour of a democratic regime, earned him all kinds of attacks in some newspapers -particularly vile was the one dedicated to him in 1963, already mentioned-, graffiti on the façade of his house, insults and even two bomb attacks on his home. The first, on 17 November 1978; the second, in September 1981, months after the failed coup d'état by Tejero, Armada, Milans del Bosch and others, many of whose accomplices were never tried. Nor were the perpetrators of the attacks against Fuster ever arrested or punished, as Francesc Bayarri analysed in *Matar Joan Fuster (i altres històries)* (2018). The writer Manuel Vicent dedicated an article to the criminal attempt: «To Joan Fuster, unharmed» (*El País*, 2 October 1981). It is essential to quote it at some length, because it contains a very sharp and purposeful portrait of the victim: «Joan Fuster is the most genuine case of the power of intelligence. This is how the work of a researcher, the simple work of this kind of lay and erudite monk [...] makes its way through the pages of a book, has an impact in the heads of a minority of young intellectuals and spreads through university circles, penetrates the guitars of some singers and slowly but surely jumps into the street. Joan Fuster's supporters are moved by ideas. Joan Fuster's enemies have started working with Goma 2 [explosives]».⁸

During the final years of the dictatorship and in the initial years of the democratic regime, especially those of the Transition, Fuster's civil commitment became more declared than before, in favour of the possibilities that the change of regime was expected to open up. Thus, he promoted the drafting of an *Avantprojecte d'Estatut d'Estatut del País Valencià* -published in 1976 and symbolically dated in Elx, for which reason it is popularly named after that city- and he also participated in numerous events. In journalistic collaborations and through

7 Joan Fuster, *Un país sense política*, Barcelona, 1975, p.135.

8 https://elpais.com/diario/1981/10/02/cultura/370825203_850215.html. Consulted, 15 September 2021.



some pamphlets, he expressed opinions and doubts with a particular expressive forcefulness, which was especially acid when dealing with Valencian issues, in the midst of a campaign of informative intoxication and physical violence that has been called, for the purpose of falsification, in the local sphere, The Battle of Valencia, which was nothing more than a demonstration of how the right wing knew how to ensure the prolongation of its social predominance behind the scenes of the Transition, a quick and free journey from unwavering, profitable and self-interested adherence to the dictatorship to the most unquestionable and undisputed democratic purity. It was a turbulent period full of misunderstandings, many of them persistent. From that time and related to this subject, are the writings collected in *Destinat (sobretot) a valencians* (1979), *El blau en la Senyera* (1977), *Notes d'un desficiós* (1980), *Ara o mai* (1981), *País Valencià, per què?* (1982) and *Punts de meditació* (1985).

His position, openly critical of Francoism, was not particularly favourable to the new political situation created after 1975. In those years of the change of paradigm in state and Valencian politics, he published

writings of great forcefulness and, in favour of the possibilities that were opening up for freedom of expression, of blunt clarity. He repeatedly declared that the only thing that interested him in the Constitution enacted in 1978 was the legal provision for repealing it. But there was perhaps more to it than that: like a retreat or a despondency in the face of a disappointing panorama, seeing how the powers that were usually referred to as the powers that be, largely maintained their full limiting and oppressive capacity. Hence his immediate reaction in an article on the events of 23 February 1981, or, when he had stopped contributing to newspapers, the absence of his name at the foot of articles in favour or against episodes of a certain importance, when the PSOE was then in power. I have not been able to find it in similar documents relating to the referendum on NATO membership in March 1986, for example, or the great general strike of December 1988. This could also explain his surprisingly mute presence at the sessions of the International Congress of Intellectuals and Artists held in Valencia in 1987, whose convocation he had signed along with Octavio Paz, Juan Cueto, Juan Goytisolo, Ricardo Muñoz Suay, Fernando Savater, Jorge Semprún and Manuel Vázquez Montalbán.

RETURN TO UNIVERSITY (1983)

Fuster abandoned his regular journalistic collaborations in 1985 to embark on a final period of work, which coincided, in terms of themes, with a long-standing and permanent interest in studying cultural and literary history more or less distanced from the immediate present.

After the political transition, Fuster, then in his sixties, gradually left journalism to one side and was called back to university life, because it seemed clear that the time had come to use his knowledge to educate the younger generations.

In early 1980, a draft bill on university autonomy, which was never passed, proposed that the universities themselves could appoint extraordinary professors who would be individuals who had been pre-

vented by political circumstances, in one way or another, from contributing their cultural and scientific merits to Spanish academic teaching. Fuster's name appeared in the press, along with those of Julio Caro Baroja, Juan Marichal, Manuel Sacristán, Salvador Giner, José Vidal Beneyto, Ignacio Sotelo, Carlos Castilla del Pino, Manuel Tuñón de Lara, among others.⁹

By means of this mechanism, which in the end only allowed the integration of a few well-known figures, Fuster's natural destination seemed to be the Universitat de València, where he had studied Law and where, against many obstacles, an attempt was made to create a department dedicated to Catalan Philology, which would be directed by the linguist Manuel Sanchis Guarner (Valencia 1911-1981), another victim of Francoism and its later derivations. Fuster's incorporation encountered bureaucratic obstacles and personal and political misunderstandings, however, it took place in 1983, when he joined his former university as a simple professor through ordinary procedures. It was argued that he was not a doctor, although in 1984 he was invested *honoris causa* by the Universitat de Barcelona and the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona. Fuster wrote a thesis on linguistic history and received his doctorate in 1985 in the academic branch of Catalan Philology. The following year he obtained the chair which, after his retirement and until his death, he would occupy as *emeritus*, in the corresponding department of the University of Valencia. He taught the social history of language in doctoral programmes and he applied himself to it with extreme dedication. He never spoke in public without a written script, nor did he teach without fully preparing the contents he had programmed and which he kept rigorously written down in a very detailed handwritten outline.

His last speeches before an audience took place in Valencia, in October 1981, at an event against the terrorist attack of which he himself had been the victim a few weeks earlier, and in Castelló de la Plana, in 1982, at the meeting commemorating the fiftieth anniversary of the

9 https://elpais.com/diario/1980/01/25/sociedad/317602804_850215.html. Consulted, 15 September 2021.

so-called Normes de Castelló, which had consolidated in Valencian lands the use of the orthographic guidelines of the Institut d'Estudis Catalans, and in homage to Sanchis Guarner, who had died the previous year after having suffered the unpunished persecution of the extreme right.

At the time of his death, Fuster was a member of the Institut d'Estudis Catalans, the Institució Valenciana d'Estudis i Investigacions, the Consell Valencià de Cultura, the Institut de Filologia Valenciana, the advisory board of the Biblioteca Valenciana and other institutions. For his work he was awarded several distinctions, such as the Joaquim Folguera (1953), Josep Ixart (1956), Concepció Rabell (1959 and 1962), *Per Comprendre* (1962), Premi d'Honor de les Lletres Catalanes (1975), Premi de les Lletres del País Valencià (1981) and Medalla d'Or de la Generalitat de Catalunya (1983) prizes. The Generalitat Valenciana awarded him its Alta Distinció posthumously. The day after his death, the burial procession from his home to the cemetery in Sueca was a demonstration of mourning and homage, it was attended by official representatives and several thousand people as testament to a genuine public admiration and respect.

Joan Fuster's work has remained alive to this day through reprints, translations, compilations and anthologies of his writings, but it has also been the subject of interpretations and reconsiderations in a considerable number of doctoral theses and studies, exhibitions, congresses and other initiatives devoted to assessing and analysing it.

BOOKS BY JOAN FUSTER

First editions of books and pamphlets by Joan Fuster published during his lifetime

1948

Sobre Narcís

1949

3 poemes

Ales o mans

1951

Va morir tan bella

1952

Antología del surrealismo español (amb José Albi)

1953

Terra en la boca

1954

Escrit per al silenci

La poesia catalana fins a la Renaixença

1955

El descrèdit de la realitat

Pàgines escollides de Sant Vicent Ferrer

1956

Les originalitats

Antologia de la poesia valenciana

La poesia catalana

1957

Figures de temps

El món literari de sor Isabel de Villena

1958

Indagacions possibles
Recull de contes valencians

1959

Ausiàs March. Antologia poètica
Un món per a infants

1960

Judicis finals

1961

Joan Serrallonga. Vida i mite del famós bandoler

1962

Poetes, moriscos i capellans
Qüestió de noms
Nosaltres, els valencians
El País Valenciano

1963

El bandolerisme català. II. La llegenda

1964

Raimon
Diccionari per a ociosos

1965

Causar-se d'esperar
Alicante y la Costa Blanca (ed. en castellà, alemany, francès
i anglès)

1967

Combustible per a falles L'home, mesura de totes les coses

1968

Heretgies, revoltes i sermons
Obres completes 1. Llengua, literatura, història
Consells, proverbis i insolències
Examen de consciència

1969

Abans que el sol no creme... (ed. en català i castellà)
Obres completes ii. Diari 1952-1960

1970

L'Albufera de València

1971

Obres completes III. Viatge pel País Valencià

1972

Babels i babilònies
Literatura catalana contemporània

1975

Contra Unamuno y los demás
Obres completes IV. Assaigs, 1

1976

La Decadència al País Valencià
Un país sense política

1977

Contra el Noucentisme
El blau en la senyera
Obres completes v. Literatura i llegenda

1979

Destinat (sobretot) a valencians

1980

Notes d'un desficiós

1981

Indagacions i propostes
Ara o mai

1982

País Valencià, per què?

1983

Veure el País Valencià

1985

Pamflets polítics

Sagitari

Punts de meditació (Dubtes de la «Transición»)

1987

Set llibres de versos

1989

Llibres i problemes del Renaixement

1991

Obres completes VI. Assaigs, 2





GENERALITAT
VALENCIANA



CENT de
FUSTER
1922 - 2022