

If you want to cite this page...

Literary news about Agustí Bartra in LletrA, Catalan literature online at the Open University of Catalonia.

< <https://lletra.uoc.edu/en/author/agusti-bartra> >

## Agustí Bartra



### They Have Said ...

[...] It might also be deduced from the aforementioned stylistic coincidences that Bartra was one of the offspring of [Noucentisme](#), and that would be even more mistaken:

neither the points of coincidence with [Carner](#) (in the idiomatic sphere and in his choice of certain themes) nor the more surprising ones with a post-Noucentist poet like [Riba](#) (both of them fascinated by Homer and Greece, while Bartra also followed Riba's teachings on classical metrics) justifies this conclusion. The "Agonal" philosophy proposed by Bartra is a far cry from the playful, aristocratic classicism of Noucentism: if, in the latter, there is sceptical idealism and a metaphysical view of life, in Bartra we find Epicurean materialism and an existential stance. After all, for Noucentism, the struggle was a *Kulturkampf* while, for Bartra, the "struggle for culture" was inseparable from a commitment to the men of his times on their way to liberation. In brief, if Noucentism was Apollonian -in contrast with [Modernism](#) and [Maragall](#), who were mainly Dionysian- we find in Bartra an attempt at synthesis: simultaneous fidelity to Apollonian artistocracy and the Dionysian revolt. [...]

**Francesc Vallverdú**, "Introducció a la poesia d'Agustí Bartra" (Introduction to the Poetry of Agustí Bartra), a prologue to Agustí Bartra, *Obra poètica completa I: 1938-1972*. (Barcelona, Edicions 62, 1971)

[...] Agustí Bartra is one of those poets of a type that our literary tradition has produced only with remarkable stinginess. He is an openly romantic type of poet, bound by an inescapable tie of ethical origins to the suffering humanity of which he is a member, a type that [Joan Fuster](#) accurately dubbed *humanist*, in the most modern and least academic sense of the word. Bartra, without any kind of histrionics, felt himself brother to each and every man: of the particular man of his times. In 1955, Fuster wrote, in an especially perspicacious attempt to analyse Bartra's way of being and doing things, "This particular man -as all today's humanists know- is a man who has suffered, a suffering man, situated between hatred and fear, and he is here with and within ourselves. Bartra is at his side and, even more, feels that he is that man himself. He accepts this man's wounded condition, as do other anguished humanists with whom he shares this tragic drive". In order to substantiate the correctness of these words, one only needs to go back, for example, to the following confession of Bartra himself: "Before the war, I didn't exist as a poet. I was born with the war, in an extreme situation. My first poems came out of the tragedy that surrounded me and of which I was part." The poet Agustí Bartra emerged with the war because he was a man who was born for flames and not for games, or to use the words that Fuster borrowed from André Rousseaux, a man destined for the literature of salvation rather than for the literature of jubilation. [?]

**Miquel Desclot**, "Introducció: Una guia de lectura" (Introduction: A Guide to Reading), Prologue to Agustí Bartra, *Obra poètica completa II: 1972-1982*. (Barcelona, Edicions 62, 1983)

[...] The Bartra phenomenon in the realm of aesthetics is parallel to that, straddling Uruguay and Barcelona, of Joaquim Torres-Garcia, a splendid theoretician of art, a painter of the [Noucentist](#), movement but also of the avant-garde, who felt the need to reinvent painting as a whole.

**If you want to cite this page...**

Literary news about Agustí Bartra in LletrA, Catalan literature online at the Open University of Catalonia.

< <https://lletra.uoc.edu/en/author/agusti-bartra> >

Torres-Garcia and Bartra reinvent their expressive languages both for their country of origin and that which takes them in. Bartra's generosity towards the great country that opened its doors to him has him devoting, in a great act of love, some of his best contributions in explaining it to himself but also explaining it to the people of Mexico. [?]

**Ricard Salvat**, "Introducció" (Introduction), Prologue to Agustí Bartra, *Obres completes IV: narrativa i teatre* (Complete Works, Volume IV: Fiction and Theatre). (Barcelona, Edicions 62, 1987)

Borrowing a tragic theme of a romantic writer, Bartra has constructed what is, along with *El Comte Arnau* (Count Arnau) by [Maragall](#), the most profound and ambitious poem in all Catalan literature on the theme of redemption and true human fulfilment. In his poem, Bartra openly rejects the tradition of the excesses of egomania that we have inherited from the [Renaissance](#) and that has its highest expression in the romantic period, and presents us with the model of a man who is more respectful, more conciliatory, more reconciling, more grateful, more disposed to undertake activities for the common good, more human and more aware. He is what Bartra calls the Man of Dawn.

**Sam Abrams**, "La «Rapsòdia d'Ahab»: una divergència entre Melville i Bartra" ("Ahab's Rhapsody': A Divergence between Melville and Bartra" *Faig* N° 30 (1988))

[...] Nonetheless, the main value of these two works [*Quetzalcòatl* and *La luna muere con agua* (The Moon Dies with Water)], understood and viewed beyond their structural strengths and weaknesses, or exclusively as the object of strictly literary analysis; understood as part of the cultural contribution that a man in exile decides to bequeath to his country of adoption, lies in not having been conceived either in homage to Mexico or the Mexicans, or as a patent demonstration of the well-deserved gratitude the land and its people inspire in the writer -although the two works manifest both homage and gratitude. Their real value lies in the fact that Agustí Bartra, true to the guiding principles that marked his mission and destiny as a poet -without forcing or falsifying them and without sacrificing either his poetic credo or his vision of the world- also reveals the respect, admiration and love he feels for this country. He knew how to wait long enough, taking the time he needed to feel, now refined and assimilated, his personal experience of the contribution of all things Mexican. Otherwise, he would never have agreed or dared to incorporate them in his work.

**Esperanza Martínez**, *Agustí Bartra en México* (Agustí Bartra in Mexico). Mèxic D.F. (1989)

[...] In *Quetzalcòatl*, Bartra approaches the ancestral world of Mexican culture through the figure of the great Toltec king and priest, mixing elements of the divinity Quetzalcòatl and others of the historic figure of Quetzalcòatl: "As a poet I was interested in being a creator and not a commentator. One had to be true to this prodigious figure *from the depths*, but also endowing him with a new, throbbing immediacy by taking the tenuous threads of the golden mesh of the ancient myth and weaving them in my own way." Bartra stripped himself of his European culture so as to delve deep into the pre-Hispanic world of *Nàhuatl* poetry and construct a great poem around three basic themes: Love, Time and Death.

Along with *Nabí* (1941) by [Carner](#) and *Les elegies de Bierville* (*Bierville Elegies*) published in 1943 by [Riba](#), *Quetzalcòatl* is one of the great achievements of Catalan lyrical poetry of [exile](#) and of the twentieth century.

Without ever forsaking his Catalan identity, Agustí Bartra was the only writer in exile to break down the barriers in order to incorporate himself into the culture of the country that took him in. This is one

**If you want to cite this page...**

Literary news about Agustí Bartra in LletraA, Catalan literature online at the Open University of Catalonia.

< <https://lletra.uoc.edu/en/author/agusti-bartra> >

more proof of Bartra's belief that, for all their differences, all men are the same man.

**Sam Abrams**, "L'obra de Bartra a l'exili mexicà" (Bartra's Work in His Mexican Exile), *Diari de Barcelona* (6 January, 1990)

[...] The idea of commitment, of the social function of literature also played a major role. Nonetheless, in terms of French existentialism, Bartra's work would be closer to Camus' *L'homme révolté* than to Sartre's *La nausée*. Bartra's however, is a revolt not in the intellectual but in the poetic domain and is based on his lucid acceptance of the tragic nature of human existence and on a return to traditional mystic-symbolic conceptions. Bartra's work, then, is characterised by a committed imagination. [...]

**Joaquim Espinós**, *La imaginació compromesa. L'obra d'Agustí Bartra* (The Committed Imagination. The Work of Agustí Bartra). Alacant (1999).

Myths in the Work of Bartra

**Feliu Formosa**

In principle, the question of myths in Bartra's work is enormously suggestive because there are many factors to be considered: the sheer number of myths the poet draws on; when he does this, why and with what freedom with respect to the myth's original content and, above all, the way in which he makes them his own, and the poetic treatment he gives them. In this sense, Bartra's poetry is truly unique in our literary world, not only for the fact of his incorporating "myths" into his work in such a personal fashion, but also for the number of formal considerations this incorporation can give rise to. Despite the logical affinity presented by all Bartra's works that contain one or more myths as their basis, the variety of these myths is still surprising. I would say that the mythical material offered by Goethe's *Faust* (individual myth), on the one hand, and Wagner's *Ring of the Nibelung* (collective myth) on the other, produces very different artistic results. In Bartra's work we find this dual material, although subsequently, in its specific treatment, a series of structural, formal coincidences and concurrence of thinking arises, and this is logical given Agustí Bartra's strong personality and the fact that all this complexity is governed by the poet's inquiry into himself as he incorporates myth into a personal and collective adventure.

Poets may use an earlier "myth" that does not at first explain the community itself but that later refers to it and even ends up representing it. This is the case of *Faust*. Or they can use a "myth" that describes the collective starting out from its origins, although the poet's personal adventure and even his subjective situation comes to play a part. This is the case of Wagnerian opera.

For me, this world so full of stimuli is both difficult and dangerous. I say this because I think he straddles several disciplines ranging from psychology through to literary criticism by way of semiotics, as one might expect. And I would also say that it is well known that I am no expert in any of these disciplines. I shall try, then, to offer a personal reflection on the myths in Bartra's work, in the awareness that I shall always be touching on dangerous terrains that are full of ambiguity. In the end, however, is Bartra's text, which is a splendid example of freedom and it is this that we are left with and this that may lead to, and will lead to new studies in this domain.

Let us begin, however, with the very concept of "myth". We are faced, right from the start, with its ambiguity and its affinity with other concepts like "legend", "fable", "archetype", "tradition" et cetera. In this regard, the definitions given by the dictionaries are clearly unsatisfactory. In Fabra's dictionary

**If you want to cite this page...**

Literary news about Agustí Bartra in LletraA, Catalan literature online at the Open University of Catalonia.

< <https://lletra.uoc.edu/en/author/agusti-bartra> >

and in the *Diccionari Català-Valencià-Balear* of [Alcover-Moll](#) we read the first entry for "mite" (myth): "Fabulous tradition referring to gods, heroes, origins of a people, etc.". In the Alcover-Moll dictionary, there is a second entry that says: "Fable; false fact that is presented as true". The word "llegenda" (legend) is defined by Fabra in the following terms: "Popular account of events, frequently with a real basis but developed and transformed by tradition". In Alcover-Moll, the definition is much the same, but there is a second entry, which is equivalent to that given for "mite" (myth): "Fable, false, mendacious account that is pure invention". The second entry refers to moral "faules" (fables) in which the characters are basically animals, and a third entry reads: "A series of incidents of which the action of an epic or dramatic poem consists". This leaves the word "tradició" (tradition), which implicitly refers us to the definitions for myth and legend as the "oral transmission from parents to children of historic facts, beliefs, religious doctrines, etc.; what is transmitted orally from parents to children; custom that has endured from generation to generation".

In all these definitions there are two important factors to bear in mind for any subsequent analysis of Bartra's work:

- 1) The original character of the myth in relation with people and communities that identify with it and that try to justify their present in terms of this "mythical" past. Tradition plays an essential role here. And "legend" collaborates in this affirmation of the present through the past.
- 2) The relationship that the word "myth" has with epic and drama, but not with lyrical poetry and the chronicle. This refers us, then, to two genres that, according to Aristotle, are based on "mimesis" and "imitation" of the action, directly (theatre) or indirectly (narration).

The first point, that of the myth's content, enables us, I believe, to engage in some significant reflections, which we shall have to transfer to the function of myth in Bartra's work because of the fact that Bartra manages "myths" in his own, original way: he reassesses them, transforms them and creates them all over again. In other words, his "mimesis" adopts an aesthetic form in which the synthesis of Aristotle's genres is fundamental, beyond any kind of classification. It reminds us that he himself spoke of the incorporation of the myth into an eminently lyrical poetic creation and that he needed this new element to assure for himself continuity and greater metaphorical complexity.

But, let us return to the first field of problems raised by the word "myth" and that is also important for situating the personality of Bartra. These fabulous traditions "referring to gods, heroes, origins of a people, etc." that are born of a collective unconscious must have a function in each historical period of the people that identify with them. This gives rise to a great number of issues that are difficult to analyse. There are moments in the life of a people in which they are obliged to resort to consideration of their origins because they are undergoing a severe crisis of identity or their survival is threatened and they long for a historic past that is different from the real one. Then, these people find affirmation in facts, personalities, places and objects that are rooted in their mythical past. Hence, the political fragmentation of nineteenth-century Germany and the integrating character of the common language meant that artists frequently resorted to myths of origin (and, of course, to an earlier historical reality). This is the phenomenon that likewise occurred in Catalonia at the time of the cultural renaissance movement known as the [Renaixença](#). And it is not at all surprising to find playing a part, in both cases, the medieval origins of the nation at a time when the mythical-legendary world also contributed towards defining it. And it is well known that this affinity gave rise to phenomena such as the Catalan enthusiasm for Wagner. We might say, however, that the advantage taken of the Greek mythical world is inverted: in Germany, it was brilliantly formulated by Hölderlin with an archetypal function, while in Catalonia it came after a glorification of the medieval past. Hölderlin, whom Bartra

**If you want to cite this page...**

Literary news about Agustí Bartra in LletraA, Catalan literature online at the Open University of Catalonia.

< <https://lletra.uoc.edu/en/author/agusti-bartra> >

appreciated so much and followed so closely, represented revolutionary and liberating ideals at a time of maximum political upheaval. As we can see, the complexity of the cultural bases of Bartra's myths could give rise to prolonged reflection.

At this point, then, we are interested in crisis as the trigger for the recovery of myths that, in this case, were also archetypes. I should like to reflect a little upon this word below. For the moment, however, I must relate Bartra with this phenomenon of myth recovery at times of crisis, a phenomenon that enables us to expand the definition of the concept by saying that myths are the original symbols of the identity of a people to which they turn when this identity suffers a severe crisis. In other words, we project ourselves into a myth as a defence mechanism when our identity is in danger.

If we turn now to when and how the first myths appear in Bartra's work, we shall see that all these factors have a part to play. The experience of the Civil War, the defeat, [exile](#) in France and his stays in the Dominican Republic, Cuba and, finally, in Mexico; his experience of concentration camps and the definitive and stimulating phenomenon of the love that he found and intensely experienced in a new world while his own country was subject to one of the greatest periods of oppression, if not the greatest one of its history? All these facts, which are sufficiently well known, we can talk about in the sense of our last definition of myth. In what does the poet recognise himself? From where does he draw the stimuli that enable him to explain, interpret and transcend for the future his experience that is at once singular and parallel to that of the most constructive forces among his people, which are now repressed and thrust into a silence that is full of dangers? It is, therefore, on the basis of these unique realities that the poet gradually goes about finding the way of new affirmation through the mythical figures that explain him, that justify him and that project him towards the faraway but closer than ever collective. Bartra uses myths to shift to a third-person voice everything that he needs to say in first person. And in his use of the anecdotal nucleus of the myth, he acts with increasingly greater freedom. I refer, evidently, to all the occasions that Bartra employs the myth to create a long poem with a wide range of formal resources. Besides reviewing the mythical figures that are spread throughout Bartra's work, without excluding theatre and pure fiction, I would suggest a first classification:

The "Poema de Rut" ("Ruth's Poem" ` part three of *L'arbre de foc*) and "L'elf del Pont de Brooklyn" ("The Elf of Brooklyn Bridge" ` which closes the first part of *L'evangeli del vent*), would constitute the initial nucleus. The "Poema de Rut" takes up the biblical story, which serves as its model, although in each of the poetic units Bartra acts with the freedom given to him by the fact of bringing the myth to his own terrain and his own experience.

As for "L'elf del Pont de Brooklyn", it was a somewhat different case since Bartra did not use any mythical figure with name and archetypal value but rather confronts himself with a new world personified in a symbolic figure with whom he enters into dialogue. If I cite this poem, it is because it is a counterpoint, with great lyrical power, to the descriptive and dialogue-form elements of the "Poema de Rut". Both poems contain, however, the germ of the structural and formal solutions that Bartra will deploy in his subsequent poems.

In his thirty years of exile, Bartra wrote three works of great importance: *Màrsias i Adila* (Marsyas and Adila), *Odisseu* (Odysseus) and *Quetzalcòatl*. Needless to say, each of the three works responds to a different need and all three are perfectly complementary, expressing in a unique and inimitable manner the complex and difficult situation of the exiled poet who has discovered love (*Màrsias i Adila*), who has taken root in a new reality where he recognises himself as a man and as a creator (*Quetzalcòatl*), and who sees his exile as a long journey that must culminate in the return (*Odisseu*).



**If you want to cite this page...**

Literary news about Agustí Bartra in LletraA, Catalan literature online at the Open University of Catalonia.

< <https://lletra.uoc.edu/en/author/agusti-bartra> >

The formal treatment of each of these works is very different. We shall discuss this below.

After his return, Bartra creates four new myths, three of them dominated by the figure of Soleia, the girl with the lantern, and the fourth based on the figure of Shakespeare's Caliban. We observe at the same time that, of these four myths, two are based on characters from the autochthonous legendary world, Garí and Arnau, while the other two are based on literary characters, Ahab and Caliban. The substantial difference between this stage and that of Bartra's [exile](#) is that he brings about a total explosion in the space and time of the original myths: he displaces them from their place of origin and brings them up to date by fusing them with himself in a very clear way. At the same time he mixes them and sets them against each other. And he does this because he needs a great synthesis that will poetically explain, justify and transcend all the experiences he has lived through, so that they will serve the future and the coming generations. In Bartra's work, myths are never a justification of any group in power or of a specific dominant social group that might use them, for example, for primary nationalist ends. Bartra's myths emerge from his reflections on the man who aspires to the plenitude of his being, on the oppressed man, taking as his starting point what, for Bartra, is the maximum oppression of forcibly being removed from his natural surroundings. Bartra's myths call for solidarity with the oppressed through these "third parties" that are mythical figures. The poet can be their interpreter or might dare, with a simple change of name, to set himself up as myth. He can do this because his destiny is not uniquely his own. According to this criterion, does not our friend Pere Vives, with his real name and with others, acquire mythical consistency?

Let us imagine that the stimulus that led to the work of [Riba](#) with the Greeks and his translation of *The Odyssey* has no relation with the stimulus that led to the creation of Bartra's *Odisseu*. And this difference that might seem obvious if we are aware of the different external circumstances will not be so obvious if we limit our focus to the use of myth alone. Again, the incorporation into Catalan culture of the great Greek myths through Riba's translations undoubtedly facilitated the subsequent creations and mythical inventions by Bartra in his work *Odisseu*, which synthesises all the concerns of the poet who yearns to come back home. Ulysses-Odysseus is one of the figures that always accompanies Bartra, from the first citation towards the end of the poem "L'elf del Pont de Brooklyn" to "Fragments de dues cartes imaginàries" ("Fragments from Two Imaginary Letters"), one of the last poems of *El gall canta per tots dos* (The Cock Crows for Us Both). Another of the myths that accompanies Bartra is that of Arnau, who will eventually appear in the great poem in which he is the central figure.

There are still more myths that are born from intense concentration on the original material, which is the case of *Quetzalcòatl*, and then the treatment Bartra gives them is different. By this I mean that, within a very rich descriptive framework, there is no diversification of genres, as in the case of *Odisseu* but rather a very tight poetic structure. This is also the case of *El gos geomètric* (The Geometric Dog). On the basis of this evidence and before embarking on a more detailed examination of Bartra's myths, I should now like to turn to a final definition of "myth" that will enlarge upon Fabra's third entry for the word "fauola" (fable). We generally translate the Aristotelian term "myth" by "fable" and it designates the literary artistic fount, the mythical story that is the source of inspiration of poets. Then, following Aristotle, the word would indicate the structure of action and the unity of its elements in the drama. In other words, Bartra's myths have a dramatic nucleus, a fable, a mythical story, and action that generally serve as a skeleton for a rich unfolding of strictly lyrical resources. This is why we evidently find Bartra's myths in the great poems that have this mythical story as a background, but there is also a recurrence of symbolic elements in the physical milieu in which the mythical figures move. We might say that all his work is imbued with this. Birds, flowers, objects and certain characters like the simpleton, the scarecrow, the marionette, the giant, the angel, et cetera take on this symbolic value. [...]

**If you want to cite this page...**

Literary news about Agustí Bartra in LletraA, Catalan literature online at the Open University of Catalonia.

< <https://lletra.uoc.edu/en/author/agusti-bartra> >

Published in the review *Faig*, N° 30 (1988)

Reproduced with the author's permission.

## A selection of texts

### Text

 **WEB: Bartra's Entire Poetic Work in Digital Format**

Includes *Obra poètica completa: 1938-1972* (Complete Poetic Works: 1938 - 1982) and *Obra poètica completa: 1972-1982* (Complete Poetic Works: 1972 - 1982). In the Biblioteca del Exilio (Library of Exile).

<http://www.cervantesvirtual.com/obras/autor/2870/Bartra,%20Agust%C3%AD%20%281908-1982%29>

 **WEB: Selection of Catalan Poetry**

Reproduces three poems: "Quan de mi, finalment, sols quedaran les lletres..." (When of Me, in the End, Only Letters Shall Remain), "El nou dia" (The New Day) and "A molts llocs d'aquest món" (In Many Parts of This World).

<http://www.uoc.edu/lletra/especials/folch/bartra.htm>

 **WEB: Magisteri Teatre-Mag Poesia**

Includes poems from the books *L'arbre de foc* (Tree of Fire), *L'evangeli del vent* (Gospel of the Wind), *Poemes del retorn* (Homecoming Poems), *Els himnes* (Hymns), *Soleia* (Soleia) *L'home auroral* (The Man of Dawn) and others, along with several translations of English poems.

<http://www.mallorcaweb.com/Mag-Teatre/bartra/bartra.html>

 **WEB: "Les violetes" (The Violets) and "Les veus de la terra" (Voices of the Earth)**

Two poems from "sèrie Alfa, Fulls temporals d'art i literatura" (Alpha Series, Temporary Pages of Art and Literature).

<http://seriealfa.com/tigre/tigre1/bartra.htm>

 **WEB: On Feliu Formosa**

Prologue by Agustí Bartra in the volume of poems *Llibre dels viatges* (Book of Journeys) by Feliu Formosa.

[http://www.barcelonareview.com/33/c\\_ff3.htm](http://www.barcelonareview.com/33/c_ff3.htm)

---

## Bio-bibliography

### Biography

 **WEB: The author in the Catalan Encyclopaedia**

<http://www.grec.cat/cgi-bin/hecangcl2.pgm?&USUARI=&SESSIO=&NDCHEC=0008030&PGMORI=E>

---

### Bibliography

 **WEB: Works in the Biblioteca de Catalunya**

[http://cataleg.bnc.cat/search\\*eng/?searchtype=a&searcharg=Bartra+Agust%C3%AD+1908&sortdrop](http://cataleg.bnc.cat/search*eng/?searchtype=a&searcharg=Bartra+Agust%C3%AD+1908&sortdrop)

**If you want to cite this page...**

Literary news about Agustí Bartra in LletrA, Catalan literature online at the Open University of Catalonia.

< <https://lletra.uoc.edu/en/author/agusti-bartra> >

down=-&searchscope=13&searchscope2=13&SORT=D

 **WEB: The author in The European Library**

<http://search.theeuropeanlibrary.org/portal/en/search/%28%22creator%22+all+%22bartra+agust%C3%AD%22%29.query>

 **WEB: The author in the Congress Library (US)**

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

 **WEB: The author in the COPAC Catalogue (UK)**

<http://copac.ac.uk/search?&au=Agust%C3%AD+Bartra>

---

## Comments on the author

### Criticism

 **WEB: Agustí Bartra**

Writer's page in the space "Cataluña desde los trópicos. Las letras catalanas del exilio en México" [Catalonia from the Tropics. Catalan Literature in Exile in Mexico].

<http://lletra.uoc.edu/exili/esp/noms/abartra/index.html>

 **WEB: Bartra in exile**

lletrA page devoted to this topic.

<https://lletra.uoc.edu/ca/tema/exili/>

 **WEB: AELC Website**

Biography, publications and bibliography.

<http://www.escriptors.cat/autors/bartraa/>

 **WEB: Agustí Bartra in the City of Barcelona Literary Corpus**

Biography, links and transcription of articles on Bartra.

[http://www.ducros.cat/corpus/index.php?command=show\\_news&news\\_id=126](http://www.ducros.cat/corpus/index.php?command=show_news&news_id=126)

---

---

---