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Joaquim Ruyra



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(Nou diccionari 62 de la literatura catalana)

Joaquim Ruyra (Girona, 1858 – Barcelona, 1939) wrote fiction and poetry, essays, plays and also translated. Born into a family of rural landowners and lawyers, Ruyra studied Law in Barcelona but never worked in the profession. From adolescence onwards he threw himself into his literary ambition in a long, conflictive process that unfolded simultaneously with the emergence of political Catalanism and the literary *Renaixença* (Renaissance) in Catalonia. Like his friend Ramon Turró, he wanted to be a writer in Spanish and for years wrote lengthy romantic dramas set in medieval times along with a number of short stories. Along with the rest of the Ruyra collection, the unpublished manuscripts of this stage of his apprenticeship are conserved in the family home in Blanes. In Spanish, Ruyra only published, and then anonymously, "El canto de la pescadora" [The Fisherwoman's Song] in Ramon Turró's *Composiciones literarias* [Literary Compositions] (1878). The marine setting that was to characterise his subsequent work makes its appearance as early as this short story.

In his university years, Ruyra often saw [Jacint Verdaguer](#), a friend of the family, and was thus an exceptional witness to the publication of the latter's *L'Atlàntida* [Atlantis]. He continued to write in Spanish although Verdaguer's influence was to be decisive in his switch of language and the literary possibilities he found in the vivid, colloquial Catalan of the people of his home town. This is manifest in his unfinished story "L'envejós" [The Envious Man], which gives expression to his doubts and contradictions. After he went back to live in Blanes and took charge of managing the family estate he was also attentive to literary life while studying the language of the local fishermen and farmers. In 1889 he married Teresa de Llinàs and began to participate actively in the Catalan nationalist group that had formed around the Blanes writer Josep Cortils i Vieta.

He became known as a writer in Catalan in the "[Jocs Florals](#)" literary competitions in Girona (1891, 1894 and 1896), Barcelona and Olot (1895) with poems of epic and romantic tone which won several awards. In 1896 he received the Extraordinary Prize of the Council of the Barcelona Jocs Florals with "Mar de llamp" [Lightning Sea], "La mirada del pobret" [The Poor Man's Gaze] and "Les senyoretetes del mar" [Young Ladies of the Sea], these being very brief stories offering a highly personal synthesis of romantic, fantastic, folklore-style and realist elements and influenced by Dante and Poe. In 1897 he published a great number of symbolist, Parnassian-style poems along with translations of Verlaine in *La Veu de Catalunya*, which gave him prominence as an innovator in versification. These new skills were then incorporated into the numerous short stories and novellas that he published in newspapers and reviews. With the collection *Marines i boscatges* [Seascapes and Woods] (1903) he became one of the key fiction writers of [Modernism](#), as [Joan Maragall](#) recognised, fashioning a model of literary prose for subsequent generations with his feel for the language and the richness of his expression.

Unanimous recognition encouraged Ruyra to engage in other literary activities, notable amongst which is his ongoing contribution to philological endeavours from his staunch support for a unitary linguistic system, first working with [L'Avenc](#) and then with the philologist Pompeu Fabra. He took part in the First International Congress of the Catalan Language (1906) and strove to recover the Blanes

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vernacular, which he incorporated in his work. As a secondary task he also gave theoretical form to his aesthetics with articles such as "El sentiment estètic en el moment de la sensació" [The Aesthetic Sense at the Moment of Sensation] (1904) and "Estètica de les imatges abstractes" [Aesthetics of Abstract Images] (1907), of clearly symbolist affiliation, or the longer, more academic piece "L'educació de la inventiva" [Education of Inventiveness] (1921-1923), this consisting of the not very convincing effort of applying Henry Poincaré's mathematical theories to literary creation. After 1918 he worked in the Philological section of the Institute of Catalan Studies (IEC) and, in 1924, he took over from [Àngel Guimerà](#).

Nonetheless, his fiction writing suffered, partly because of the changes occurring in the debates over the narrative genre in the early decades of the twentieth century but also because of the effects of a deep personal crisis brought on by a chronic bronchial ailment which became acute between 1901 and 1906, obliging him to spend periods away from Blanes in warmer climes (the Canary Islands, Malaga and Alicante) and slowly bringing him to a position of militant Christianity. In vain, Ruyra attempted the challenge of writing a novel and published three chapters of *La gent del mas Aulet* [The People of Aulet Farm] (1904), a work he never managed to finish, while also translating from French (*Contes et romans populaires* [Folktales and Stories] by Erckmann-Chatrian and Racine's

In 1920 he published *Pinya de rosa* [The End Knot], an expanded re-edition of *Marines i boscatges*. His third and last collection of stories, *Entre flames* [Among Flames] (1928), has a marked feel of the miscellany and of a work paying tribute. The publication of the book was undertaken by Josep M. Junoy and other young writers and critics such as [Tomàs Garcès](#), Josep M. Capdevila and Manuel de Montoliu, who saw in the "maestro Ruyra" an exemplary Christian writer who, after 1930, would contribute his prestige to *El matí*, the newspaper for which he wrote. Notable, too, are "Les coses benignes" [Benign Things] (1925), a refined Franciscan tale, and a number of witty, humorous pieces like "Els vint corders de Blanes" [The Twenty Ropemakers of Blanes], "El frare escalfallits" [The Bed-warmer Friar], examples of Ruyra's contribution to the Blanes weekly *El recull* in which he signed with the pseudonym "L'Avi" (The Grandfather). In this publication there also appeared a discussion group including Ruyra's friend, the writer Vicenç Coma i Soley and the illustrator Joan Junceda. This constituted a kind of literary school with Josep Roig i Raventós as its leading representative.

As a poet, Ruyra published *El País del Pler* [Land of Pleasure] (1906), *Non-non* [Lullabies] (1916), *Fulles ventisses* [Wind-borne Leaves] (1919) and *La cobla* [The Sardana Band] (1930). Here, he offers outstanding adaptations of popular songs, lullabies and songs by foreign authors. Ruyra's figure was to become legendary after the 1920s, especially after [Josep Pla](#)'s *homenot* (big man) portrait. His negligence about his appearance, a certain eccentricity and a wife who did not understand him are all aspects of his life perpetuated in the biographies, yet they are features that conceal a complex personality paralysed by the high demands he made on himself. Ruyra has been the great teacher of prose and fiction writers, from [Josep Carner](#) to [Carles Riba](#) and Josep Pla, and from [Salvador Espriu](#) to [Pere Calders](#) and [Mercè Rodoreda](#), among others.

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Bio-bibliography

Biography

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Joaquim Ruyra, a permanent member of the Institut d'Estudis Catalans (Institute of Catalan Studies).
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