

The Suffering Body in Pepe Sales's Poetry¹

El cuerpo que sufre en la poesía de Pepe Sales

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ABSTRACT: The poems of Pepe Sales (Barcelona, 1954-1994) are marked by his experience as a homosexual, drug addict and AIDS sufferer. He was a key member of the Barcelona counterculture, along with Pau Riba, Pau Malvido and Genís Cano, and has gone down in history as one of the *poètes maudits* of contemporary Catalan literature. The aim of this article is to analyse the representation of pain and distress in his poems and songs, with some additional references to his paintings. To this end, I draw on the critical work of Susan Sontag, Sara Ahmed, David Le Breton and Joanna Bourke, who conceive pain in general, not as a private and personal experience, but as a cultural and historical event that creates identity and community bonds. The main strategies used by Sales to convey his pain are the scream, animalisation, weapons and wounds, as well as, especially, the scar or the religious stigma. The basic finding is that the poet's pain is not simply a testimony to the suffering of a lost generation of junkies and misfits that the official account of the transition from Francoism to democracy has stigmatised. On the contrary, it reminds us of an unfair medical, political and financial system that inflicted great suffering on them.

Key words: pain, AIDS, homosexuality, drug, poetry, counterculture.

RESUMEN: La poesía de Pepe Sales (Barcelona, 1954-1994) está marcada por su experiencia como homosexual, drogadicto y enfermo de sida. Miembro destacado de la generación de la contracultura, como también lo fueron Pau

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Riba, Pau Malvido o Genís Cano, ha pasado a la historia como uno de los «poetas malditos» de la literatura catalana contemporánea. El objetivo de este artículo es analizar la representación del dolor y del sufrimiento en sus poemas y canciones, con alguna referencia también a sus pinturas. Para ello, a partir de la obra crítica de Susan Sontag, Sara Ahmed, David Le Breton y Joanna Bourke, se adopta una concepción del dolor, no como una experiencia privada y personal, sino como un fenómeno cultural e histórico que crea identidad y lazos comunitarios. Las principales estrategias empleadas por Sales para expresar el dolor son el grito, la animalización, el arma y la herida y, especialmente, la cicatriz o el estigma religioso. La conclusión básica es que el dolor del poeta no solo da testimonio del sufrimiento de una generación perdida de drogadictos e inadaptados (que la historia oficial de la transición ha estigmatizado), sino que nos recuerda constantemente las injusticias de un sistema médico, político y económico que les causaron un enorme sufrimiento a lo largo de su vida.

Palabras clave: dolor, sida, homosexualidad, droga, poesía, contracultura.

1. THE «WASTED» VERSES OF PEPE SALES

Josep Sales Coderch, aka Pepe Sales (Barcelona, 1954-Vallclara, 1994), was a Catalan poet, singer and painter. Critics have associated him with the underground culture of the 1970s, as demonstrated by the inclusion of some of his poems in the anthology *Poesia, contracultura, Barcelona*, edited by David Castillo and Marc Valls (2016). Sales appears in this book along with a long list of names such as Jordi Carbó, Pau Maragall, Jaume Quadreny,² Zene Speer, Albert Subirats, Pere Marcilla, Mònica Maragall and Genís Cano, to name just a few. In 1984, together with Víctor Obiols, he founded the Bocanegra group in Santa Eugènia (Mallorca). Two years later, they recorded the album *Bocanegra U*, which was re-released in 2005, the same year as the collective album in honour of the author titled *Bloc de lírica dura. Homenatge a Pepe Sales*. Between 1989 and 1991 he was an artistic director of the television programme *Glasnost*, broadcast on the Catalan channel of Televisión Española. Pepe Sales became addicted to heroin at the age of seventeen and, in the summer of 1973, he was incarcerated in Barcelona's Model prison for drug possession. In the following years, he underwent several rehabilitation treatments that proved to be unsuccessful.³ Eventually, his family distanced themselves from him because of his addiction.⁴ In 1988, he left Barcelona to try to escape from drugs and spent some time in Vallclara (Conca de Barberà region), the village where his family used to spend the summer. He was diagnosed with AIDS in the early 1990s and was hospitalised several times before he died in June 1994 in Vallclara.

² Also spelled Quadreny.

³ Germán Labrador describes psychiatry as another repressive body in the Francoist state (2009: 88) and underlines the failure of the rehabilitation treatments applied in private and public clinics (2009: 118).

⁴ It seems that Sales rejected various plans aimed at rehabilitation or simply at his social reintegration; according to Labrador (2009: 130), many drug addicts decided to isolate themselves for various reasons: their «inability to redefine their life projects», their opposition to the new political system, or simply due to their strong addiction.

Pepe Sales and other generational peers make up what I have called elsewhere (Maestre, 2015) «the detritus of the Transition». By that description, I mean those marginalised young people (some of them were pro-independence or extreme left-wing militants) who were excluded from the so-called post-Franco «consensus culture» because they advocated for a radical cultural and political transformation. Faced with the consolidation of a model based on continuity or, at most, the reform of the previous Franco regime, these young people fell victim to disenchantment, a phenomenon that has become a true cultural cliché in recent history, as Teresa Vilarós (1998) and many other critics have analysed. David Castillo has portrayed this archetype of the disenchanted young man in several novels, including *El cel de l'infern* (1999) and *No miris enrere* (2002). In fact, Castillo has worked hard to recover the memory of this lost generation that succumbed to drugs during the eighties and nineties and that is associated with the underground culture of the time. According to Aleix Salvans (2018), Sales is «el poeta dels penjats» (the poet of the druggies). Moreover, along with Pau Maragall (aka Pau Malvido) and others, he was part of these «nosotros los malditos», an expression that this writer, also a heroin addict, popularised in a series of articles published in *Star* (the underground magazine of the seventies) that have been considered a kind of chronicle and portrait of the Catalan counterculture⁵. Susan Sontag, in her *Illness as Metaphor*, argues that the negligence by states in managing the AIDS pandemic in the 1980s and 1990s was not actually due to homophobia, but to the rejection by the reactionary ideological sectors of anything related to the cultural revolution of the 1960s. Their fear of AIDS was, in short, a fear of subversion; therefore, condemnation of AIDS implies a repudiation of the entire counterculture generation (Sontag, 1989: 63). Franco Berardi (2017: 33) takes a similar view, stating that the AIDS pandemic dissolved two decades of «social solidarity» and «free eroticism». In his turn, Martínez (2021: 12) claims that many social bonds and freedoms that had arisen in the seventies were wiped out by the expansion of AIDS.

Despite the attempts to rescue the output of Catalan counterculture, Pepe Sales's oeuvre is «waste» in the sense that it has remained completely outside the canon, that is, the post-Francoist Catalan cultural project designed by the conservative Catalanist party *Convergència i Unió*. The poet himself notes in one of his poems the rootlessness he suffers as a heroin addict and homosexual: «Hola pàtria eixos turons / i els seus homes buixarrons / ja en tinc plens tots dos collons / vull marxar de Catalunya [...] Jo no tinc més pàtria que els meus peus» (Hi homeland those hills / and its queer men / I'm sick of them / I want to quit Catalonia / My homeland are my feet). As well as dealing with themes related to sex, prostitution, drugs and the urban underworld, he employs poetic language that is full of prison slang (words of *Caló* or Gypsy origin), Spanish loanwords, and dysphemisms. Likewise, Sales's poems are not an example of intellectual, highbrow, academic poetry, but they capture the crudest and most sordid aspects of everyday life, in the vein of Vicent A. Estellés, one of Sales's favourite writers along with other literary references he gives in his diaries, such as gay writers Marcel Proust and William Burroughs, and artists like Lou Reed. Moreover, we discover some ironic references to canonical works in the poems that account for Sales's marginality within the Catalan cultural system: the title «Hola pàtria» is a veiled allusion to Joan Maragall's «Oda a la pàtria» («Ode to the Homeland»); «Nosaltres no som d'eixet món»⁶ («We Are Not From that World») refers to Raimon's famous song

⁵ The articles were gathered and published by Anagrama in 2004.

⁶ «Eixet» is a misspelling of «eixe», the Valencian demonstrative meaning «that».

«Diguem no» («Let's Say No»), while «La fera salvatge» quotes Ovidi Montllor's «La fera ferotge» («The Ferocious Beast»).

While it is true that Sales is outside the canon because of the topics he addressed (drugs, gay sex, religious eroticism) and his disengagement from mainstream culture, the emergence of queer activism and scholarship in Catalonia has paid attention to figures like him. At the same time, since 2000 there has been an increasing academic interest in the Catalan underground and there have been also initiatives to promote specifically Sales's work and life. In this sense, he is the subject of two documentaries: *Pepe Sales Pobres pobres que els donguin pel cul* (2007), directed by Lulú Martorell and Albert Pla, and *Morir de dia* (2012), by Laia Manresa and Sergi Dies, which narrates the heroin addiction of several of Sales's generational peers, such as the aforementioned Pau Malvido, the photographer Mercè Pastor, and Juanjo Voltas. On the other hand, in 2005, Albert Pla published *Cançons d'amor i droga*, which included Sales's thirty posthumous compositions. In Spain Pla toured countrywide with a show created by the playwright Àlex Rigola, with the collaboration of Quimi Portet, Judit Farrés, and Lulú Martorell. Moreover, since 2010, the *Festival d'Art Independent Pepe Sales* has been organised in Girona to pay homage to the author, offering a programme of literature, music, dance, magic, and other artistic activities, whose yearly celebrations are dedicated to different artists.

The work of Pepe Sales has been featured in two books to date. In 2009, LaBreu Edicions published *Sense re, sense remei*, edited by Martí Sales (the writer's nephew) and Lulú Martorell. This volume includes diaries, some letters, a sample of paintings, and poems/songs. In 2018, the Konvent in Cal Rosal (Berguedà region) dedicated an exhibition entitled *La passió segons Pepe Sales* to commemorate the twenty-fifth anniversary of his death. A year later, LaBreu Edicions re-issued the same book, but replacing the previous title by that of the exhibition. In 2018 as well, the Indian Runners label also released an album with all his songs entitled *Amor etern alt grup de risc*, which includes the musical versions of the 2009 LaBreu edition.

In his compositions, Pepe Sales expresses his marginalisation, either with irony or with regret. The social representation of AIDS in the 1980s and 1990s constructed an archetype of the infected individual that was associated with a certain marginal, criminal, depraved, and degenerate lifestyle that was equated with homosexuality, drug addiction, poverty, African origin or immigration (Llamas, 1995: 179).⁷ His Catholic parents disapproved his homosexuality; in «Si dius que no m'estimes», Sales confesses his sexual orientation to his mother, who censures it; for this reason, he tells her: «Si no m'ames / no em truquis més» (If you don't love me, don't call me anymore). When discussing homosexuality and family, AIDS activist and thinker Simon Watney foregrounds the notion of failure, arguing that «gay children are particularly vulnerable to their parents' fantasies about who they are, fantasies that invariably fail us. The gay child can hardly be expected to understand this, though feels the sense of failure» (Watney, 2000: 30). Failure is central to queer theory; actually, much queer work has been done to depathologize negative feelings such as failure, depression, melancholia, and shame. Halberstam (2011: 4) holds that, as regards women and queer people, failure means not living up to patriarchal expectations, although in general it is the result of not meeting dominant social standards. Pepe Sales may have failed to be what their Catholic parents expected him to be as a bourgeois man: to embody a middle-class productive, respectable, religious, straight masculinity.

⁷ Labrador (2009: 125) speaks of the «dehumanisation of the heroin addict, constructed as a «threatening otherness».

Sales also portrays himself as a wandering, solitary nomad who lives a purposeless life and feels excluded: «No som d'eixet món» (We don't belong to that world), he states in another poem («Eixet món»). Or as an annoying waste: «Sóc la cabra artista, / la nosa als veïns» (I am the goat artist, the nuisance for the neighbours) («Pellaire»). In fact, the word *junkie* (adapted to Catalan as «ionqui») derives from *junk*, which means *rubbish*. His addicted body is unclean: «Què hi fa un home sol a la Parada / sinó esperar amb temps la seva mort / D'un vell cos brut / a un ninxol [*sic*] dur» (What does a man do alone at the bus stop / but to wait for his death ahead of time / of an old dirty body to a hard niche). As a drug addict, he is exposed to vulnerability and precariousness, disgrace, illness, and a marginalised life: «Sóc feble i sóc himne dels penjats» (I am weak and I am the hymn of the druggies), he states in his poem «3 acords contra la sida». If, in the first poems and songs he wrote, Sales basically alludes to the withdrawal symptoms and the pain he feels as a result of his heroin addiction, in this poem composed towards the end of the 1980s, AIDS bursts in directly with all possible rawness: the poetic self is «fet pols» (shattered), «malalt d'estar tancat» (sick of being locked up), he is «dèbil» (weak), he considers himself to be a «penjat» (druggie), he is «psiquiatritzat» (psychiatrized), due to the different treatments he undergoes, and he «porto un cego que ho veig clar» (I'm so stoned).⁸ Furthermore, the verses highlight the link between marginalisation and pain, vulnerability, illness, and medicalisation. The aim of this article is, therefore, to examine the pain in the author's poems/songs as a counter-narrative to the hegemonic discourse on the transition to democracy as a model of political change predicated on modernisation. It is not a thorough reading of Sales's poetry nor an introduction, but it specifically focuses on suffering. After a brief discussion of the literary representation of illness and pain, I analyse directly how the poet expresses this experience in his work, with some additional references to his paintings.

2. HEROIN AND AIDS IN CATALAN LITERATURE

While diseases have gained «visibility» and «social prominence» in recent years, according to Jordi Larios and Montserrat Lunati (2012), in contrast, HIV/AIDS in particular is scarcely represented in Catalan literature or cinema.⁹ Despite this, there are some exceptions: Xavier Fernández's book of poems *Del roig al vermell* (1999); the novel *Tallats de lluna* (2000) by M. Antònia Oliver¹⁰; the play *Marburg* by Guillem Clua (2010); the film *Ignasi M.* by Ventura Pons (2013) and, finally, the feature film *Estiu 1993* (2017) and the short film *Después también* (2019) by Carla Simón. Rather, it is not that literature and culture, in general, had not dealt with illness and disability before; let us recall, for example, the melancholic and sickly subject represented in 19th-century literature and art as Susan Sontag (1978: 32) observes. In essence, what Larios and Lunati bring to the fore is the more «open» and «direct» newest way. Additionally, they point out that, while many of the works dealing with illness are far from the canon, there have recently been efforts to incorporate them into a more mass

⁸ This is another ironic allusion to J. V. Foix's famous surrealist poem «És quan dormo que hi veig clar».

⁹ Susan Sontag (2003: 51) also states that suffering due to natural causes (such as illness) or accidents is seldom represented in the history of art. However, the suffering caused by divine wrath or wars has a long and iconic tradition, both in the form of paintings and photographs. Consequently, political or religious violence is depicted, but not the ravages of disease or other phenomena. Yet, Sontag's essay refers to visual culture, not literature.

¹⁰ Oliver's novel was examined by Martínez Gili and Velázquez Mata in a pioneering analysis of the representation of AIDS in Catalan literature (2004).

cultural production, as demonstrated by the television series about teenagers with cancer *Polseres vermelles*, broadcast on TV3 in 2011 and 2013.

In terms of theatre, Guillem Clua (Fanlo, 2018) explains the absence of AIDS in the dramatic literature of the 1990s due to the exclusive interest in petty-bourgeois dramas and individual and abstract stories that shun collective and social concerns. As a result, the political and social commitment—necessary to explore stigmatising topics related to groups that were marginalised at that time, such as drug addicts and homosexuals—is absent. For his part, Isaias Fanlo (2019: 211) argues that the AIDS pandemic was not only a medical crisis, but also a representational one, despite the large number of people infected in the 1990s in Europe. This scholar attributes this irrelevance to several causes: on the one hand, homonormativity or the consolidation of a hegemonic LGBTIQ+ identity that conforms to the parameters of heterosexuality to integrate into society. Homonormativity is basically expressed in social «successes» such as same-sex marriage or adoption. In this conventional identity model, there is, obviously, no place for people who question binary gender or emotional relationships outside marriage, or HIV-positive individuals or those suffering from AIDS. On the other hand, Fanlo argues that the pandemic spread when democratic freedoms were not yet consolidated in Spain and the queer collective was unable to react. By contrast, in the United States, the gay liberation movement had started earlier, following the Stonewall events in 1968. In turn, Josep A. Fernández contends that the main cause of the invisibility of HIV/AIDS is due to a structural deficit in Catalan culture, which prevents from «representing itself in a complex manner» (Fernández, 2019: 230). This also echoes Brad Epps's idea (2012: 103) that these absences are the result of an exclusionary canon and ideologies of «aesthetic quality» and taste, as Pierre Bourdieu would assert. Other critiques, based on the theories of Michel Foucault, suggest that health is a socially constructed notion that divides bodies into «normal» (natural) and pathological. In a neoliberal context, health and illness have to do with the level of efficiency or functionality of an organism, i.e. its productive capacity and financial profitability (Arriola, Garín and Valdés, 2017: 147).

Likewise, Teresa Vilarós generally attributes this representational void in Hispanic culture to the concealment throughout history of the «infected body» made up of «residues», «ghosts», and «remnants» that concentrates all the excluded wastes of the «healthy» body of the Spanish nation, obsessed by the purity of blood since the 17th century: «Y en el presente de la transición, el macrotexto de la infección reaparece en el velado/desvelado tejido de la configuración del sida» (1998: 248). Therefore, HIV/AIDS is part of a wider culture related to infection. Similarly, Vilarós links the infected body to the dispossessed and, based on Michel de Certeau and his study of mysticism, also to dissidence. In short, for this author, AIDS is associated with political and cultural «infection». The figure of Pepe Sales, whom Vilarós does not cite in her essay (which only explores Spanish-language culture), would be analogous to that of other homosexual, HIV-positive or heroin-addicted authors such as Leopoldo María Panero (1948-2014), Eduardo Haro Ibars (1948-1988), Pau Malvido (1948-1994) or Pepe Espaliú (1955-1993).

As for drug addiction, there are not many examples in Catalan literature. The first work that addressed the subject was *Òpera àcid*, by Miquel Creus (1955-2019), published in 1989, in the midst of the AIDS pandemic, with a relevant testimonial value. In 1994, Sergi Belbel (1963) published a play entitled *Morir* (adapted to a film by Ventura Pons in 2000), which tells several stories; in one of them, the main character is a heroin addict. In *El cel de l'infern* (1999), David Castillo also recreates the lives of marginalised countercultural characters who succumb to heroin in the early years of the

democratic restoration. In turn, Jordi Cussà (1961-2021) published *Cavalls salvatges* (2000) and then the novel that critics consider its sequel: *Formentera lady* (2015). Although both revolve around heroin, they adopt different perspectives: whilst in the first, the protagonists die, in the second they survive. As in many other works on AIDS and drug addiction, pain and guilt surface in both novels. *Aferrada a la vida*, by Giovanna Valls, published in 2014, is the diary of her survival, in which the author chronicles her addiction and subsequent recovery. In 2015, Lluís Maria Todó published the novel *L'últim mono*, in which the narrator tells the story of his son's heroin addiction, thus representing the father's point of view and the repercussions that the problem has on family relationships. Finally, the report *Morir de dia* (2012), by Laia Manresa and Sergi Dies, can be interpreted as another attempt to recover the memory of the underground generation of the 1970s that perished due to addiction.

If we accept, as philosopher Byung Chul Han argues, that algophobia responds to a neoliberal mandate to conceal or eliminate pain as a symptom of weakness incompatible with performance, narratives of pain and illness would act as counter-discourses, reflecting the idea that art «must be able to alienate, irritate, disturb, and, yes, even to be painful. It dwells *somewhere else*. It is *at home in what it is foreign*» (author's emphasis) (2021: 17). Art and literature socialise pain, taking it out of the realm of medicine and the personal sphere. This conception of the narratives that capture pain and suffering, not only opposes the dominant discourse on happiness under a neoliberal economic regime, but also—as I highlighted above—offers an alternative vision of the model image that official history has sought to construct regarding the post-Franco transition and the new democracy.

Pepe Sales's oeuvre reflects a dissident life in every possible sense (sexual, artistic, political and social) and constitutes a clearly counter-cultural or counter-hegemonic discourse, an obvious product of the historical context in which it was created: a nascent democracy threatened by Franco's supporters, a very limited sexual freedom, drug consumption and trafficking and the powerful influence of religion on customs. The repercussions related to heroin addiction are highly prominent in Sales's verses, so that both poems and paintings powerfully reveal pain (symbolised in the scream and narrated as martyrdom), loneliness, disorientation and grief. In fact, the title of the work that compiles his entire legacy perfectly illustrates how the author conceives himself, since «passion» means both suffering and love as is usual in Catholic religion.

3. THE SCREAM IN PEPE SALES WORK: PAIN AND POETRY

Examining the emotional dimension of Pepe Sales's poems requires a direct exploration of illness and pain. The self is a tortured body that cries out both in his poems (for example, one of them is entitled «Fet un nyap» [knackered]) and his Christ paintings and self-portraits. The pain mainly derives from experiencing withdrawal syndrome; according to the *Enciclopèdia Catalana*, when it comes to heroin, the symptoms of withdrawal are bodily, as is the case with alcohol and barbiturates. In contrast, other drugs such as cocaine and cannabis produce psychological dependence. In a 1981 diary entry, Sales states: «Falta encara una hora per a medicació, que encara no sé bé perquè [*sic*] me la donen perquè exceptuant ahir tarda no he sentit cap millora en la seqüència de malestars, dolors i suors del clàssic *mono*, si bé no he tingut els espasmes del matí ni he vomitat, potser és això l'únic que calma» (It is still an hour for medication, but I don't quite know why they give it to me, because only yesterday evening I felt a mood uplift in the sequence of the typical withdrawal symptoms of

unease, pain and sweat, although I haven't had either the spasms in the morning or nausea, perhaps that's the only thing that relieves me) (2019: 95). In general, withdrawal syndrome causes various psychosomatic and mood effects such as amnesia, shivering, yawning, sleepiness, sweating, insomnia, crying and anguish, whilst the medication leaves the sufferer dazed and lethargic.

There is controversy about whether the nature of pain is an affect or a bodily sensation. In the Aristotelian tradition, it was conceived of as a distinctive form of emotion, although later, from the work of Descartes onwards, pain was defined as a sensation produced by the body. Elaine Scarry (1985) also offers a view of pain as something that cannot be shared because it is inexpressible. Consequently, she also distinguishes between corporal sensations and feelings as an affective translation of these sensations.¹¹ One of the author's most prominent and controversial ideas is that physical pain does not simply resist language, but destroys it, triggering a return to an earlier state, i.e. to the sounds and cries that a human being utters before learning to speak. Thus, to witness the moment when pain brings about a return to the pre-linguistic phase of screams and moans is to witness the destruction of language (1985: 6).

However, the anthropologist David Le Breton favours a view of pain as a reaction that is not only physiological, but much more complex, since it brings into play the affective and personal dimension of the sufferer. Le Breton distinguishes between pain and suffering, which would be the «affective meaning» that translates a bodily phenomenon into a moral fact: «Todo dolor comporta un padecimiento moral, un cuestionamiento de las relaciones entre el hombre y el mundo» (1999: 12). Therefore, although he claims that it is impossible to differentiate clearly between somatic reaction and emotional or moral reflex, in practice he does. Furthermore, he points out that pain is not a sensation or a physiological defence against an external attack, but an individual perception, a meaning related to the social and cultural fabric that creates behaviour and values: «todo dolor remite a un sufrimiento, y, por consiguiente, a un significado y a una intensidad propia del individuo en su singularidad» (1992: 21).

Fifield expresses this in similar terms when explaining that pain is not a mechanical experience with a fixed identity and content, but a complex phenomenon resulting from a series of cultural factors, experiences, cultural norms, emotion, inheritance, fatigue and expectations (2015: 129). This author cites the theory of Vilinur Ramachandran, according to which pain is an opinion about the state of health of the organism, rather than a reflexive response to an injury (2015: 124). In short, pain is not opposed to representation, nor is it only a physiological fact, but it is also a discursive, cognitive event.

Joanna Bourke also criticises Scarry's approach to pain as an ontological fallacy, as it grants entity, will or agency to the pain itself, rather than to the person who suffers it (2017: 4). Scarry «objectifies» pain, but according to Bourke, pain is rather a phenomenon that encompasses mind, body, and culture. The most significant idea from this author is that pain consists of a «type of event» that belongs to the life of a subject, that is, an activity. Pain is whatever someone identifies or recognises as such, a perspective that can be described as performative, since calling a feeling «pain» is equivalent to creating it: «the person *becomes* or *makes herself into* a person-in-pain through the process of naming» (author's emphasis) (Bourke, 2017: 5).

¹¹ In a way, the conception of pain as somatic and suffering as its emotional reflection is close to Brian Massumi's (2002) definition of affect as a physiological, pre-conscious and pre-linguistic effect, which causes reactions such as trembling, palpitations and nausea. Massumi considers that affects are autonomous and exist outside the processes of signification; therefore, they can only be experienced, but not explained.

Despite this, although pain is a subjective and private fact, the act of naming it is public. Another way of understanding the meaning of pain would be that, rather than describing *what* an individual experiences, what they do is to describe *how* they experience it. When we have a toothache, Bourke says, the pain is not really a property of the tooth, but the way we experience or perceive this part of the body. In short, «pain is not an intrinsic quality of raw sensation; it is a way of perceiving an experience. Pains are modes of perception» (2017: 8). The definition of pain as an event (that is, as an activity that an individual qualifies as such) is particularly interesting when analysing Pepe Sales's poems. Pain, from this perspective, is always an evaluative and interpersonal act and is therefore subject to power dynamics, showing social and economic inequalities, gender-related differences, for men and women have different types of ailments, as do homosexuals and transgender people. To sum up, the most recent approaches to pain from the point of view of anthropology, history or cultural criticism, as we have seen, tend to consider that pain is not a purely somatic phenomenon, but that in addition to including psychic afflictions, it is closely linked to culture and power relations.¹²

Pepe Sales uses several strategies to represent pain: screams, animalisation, weapons and wounds, and martyrdom. Screaming is the most common expression of pain, and it is not a linguistic sign. Hence, Scarry states that a scream destroys language, since the suffering body lacks the words necessary to describe what it feels. Pain nullifies the person as a thinking being and reduces it to pure corporeality, mere flesh that feels (that suffers, in this case). The scream has become a symbol of pain in art. Sales paints faces with open mouths (both self-portraits and crucified Christs), just like the famous painting by Edvard Munch (1863-1944), *The Scream*, which for some critics signals the beginning of 20th century art, marked by pain and suffering due to multiple wars, genocides, epidemics and violence of all kinds. Interestingly, Monica B. Pearl (2012: 1), in her study on the literary representation of AIDS, describes early works written on this subject as cries of anguish and despair. As for Sales's poems, the one that best represents pain and the howls it provokes is «L'udol», which reminds of Allen Ginsberg's renowned poem bearing the same title: «The Howl» (1956). In this poem, the purely physical sensation is equated with animality; in other words, the human being who is unable to express their state in words becomes an animal, or is reduced to their animal dimension, since they experience their corporeality in all its rawness. Pain, as a purely physical perception, is opposed to reason. In «L'udol», the poetic self is an owl, a night bird, since it cannot sleep and searches the stars in the firmament for an image of its dead friends, while biting his pillow, consumed by grief. Also, in «Al riu del bosc», it forms part of a «party de llops» («a party of wolves») and he understands the dog that speaks to him.¹³

The use of animal metaphor or animalisation suggests two readings. On the one hand, the notion of the drug addicted and homosexual hyperbody appears as mere carnality, since animals are edible meat, devoid of subjectivity, without intellect or sensitivity or the ability to speak; in other words, objects and not subjects. On the other hand, animal metaphors for representing the HIV-positive body emerge in the work of many artists, including Sales himself. The animal constitutes, as Jacques Derrida (2008:

¹² In fact, Sales sometimes describes pain as a somatic sensation, as in the poem «La fera salvatge», in which he says that the drug chills his bones; he also describes the spasms and contortions of his body caused by going *cold turkey*: «Quan badalles i et cargoles / i mossegues els coixins» (When you yawn and curl up / and bite the pillows) («Miseret»). On the other hand, a body bent by pain illustrates the idea that the sick body is one that loses its verticality (Anne Boyer, 2016).

¹³ «Party» is used in English by the author.

36) observes, a symbol depicting sexual otherness. If in «L'udol», the poetic self is transmuted into an owl, in «Gos blus» it is a dog, while in the poem «Pellaire» it is defined as a bird, an owl and a goat. Finally, one of his paintings depicts a bull. In addition, heroin also acquires a bestial aspect, since Sales calls it «la fera salvatge» (wild beast) in a poem with this title. In this case, the animality describes the fierceness and brutality of heroin, which causes unbearable pain to the addict, turning them into its «hostage» or prisoner.

Ultimately, the discussion about whether pain has a meaning and is purely a bodily sensation or an emotion is a manifestation of the difficulty of representing or describing it. For that reason, it is sometimes said that pain is «unspeakable». Likewise, an individual does not always openly state that he feels pain or is ill in order to avoid exposing his vulnerability to others. At times, one is not even aware of the existence of the pain, especially if it is a mental or psychological affliction such as anxiety or sadness. Accordingly, manifesting pain through language poses a challenge to the poet. Contrary to what Scarry argues, Fifield (2015: 129) considers that pain is constituted by representation, it can be represented. And yet, contradicting herself, Scarry (1985: 16) strives to explain the linguistic strategies for expressing pain or harm, which refer to weapons or wounds, whether real or imagined. The pain is the effect of the use of a weapon, which causes the appearance of a wound. In the same vein, Sara Ahmed (2004: 24) concludes that the experience of pain has to do with denial, that is, it is a force that comes from outside and with which the individual does not identify. Rather, it is something external that presses on and even pierces the subject.¹⁴ Even when there is no real external object, the individual constructs imaginary ones to shape the physical sensation he or she perceives.

As pain subverts the boundary between inside and outside, it is often represented as a wound, that is, a bruise or a cut in the skin. The wound functions as a sign that a real or imaginary object imprints on the body and that the individual perceives as not his or her own. Through pain, we become aware of our link to the surfaces, bodies, and objects that make up the places we inhabit. Weapons and wounds do not explicitly appear in Sales's poems/songs, except in the poem «Sebastian»,¹⁵ in which the poetic voice wants its body to be pierced by arrows: «Au vinga nois, vinguin sagetes a mi» (Come on, boys, shoot me with your arrows). Obviously, this is an erotically nuanced composition that displays a gay sadomasochistic imaginary, which also reveals Sales's ability to eroticise the stigmatised body, as will be discussed later. Thus, there are allusions to violence that imply the use of weapons and the resulting wounds; for example, he describes drug addiction as a war: «jo visc la guerra del verí» (I live the war of poison) («Nocturn»); in «La fera salvatge», he declares: «Etic escapant-me/d'una dona salvatge/que em dona guerra» (I'm running away from a wild woman / who is giving me a lot of trouble). He also alludes to a body full of wounds and scars, as when it is described as a wounded bird («Pellaire») or an «al·lot cicatritzat» (a boy with scars) («3 acords contra la sida»). The lesions may hint at the common AIDS symptoms, namely swelling of the lymph glands, blotches on or under the skin, pneumonia or even neurologic disorders. The wounds show the visual, straight-forward, not-metaphoric impact of illness in the bodies affected by AIDS.

¹⁴ In similar terms, Le Breton (1999: 27) states that pain alters the relationships the self has with its body, its identity and with the world. Indeed, the body becomes foreign, identity is threatened and this makes it difficult to live with others. While joy broadens the relationship of the self with the world, pain reduces it and, in fact, destroys the bond between the two.

¹⁵ Sales uses the English word «Sebastian», maybe in allusion to Derek Jarman's film, although its original title was *Sebastiane* (1976).

Wounds take us to examine the notion of stigma, which is a core concept in queer and disability studies. The current usage of this notion is figurative: Lerita M. Coleman-Brown (2013: 157) defines it, not as a property of individuals, but «a humanly constructed perception, constantly in flux and legitimizing our negative responses to human differences». Stigma is a sort of social categorization, which also implies stereotyping, devaluing and distancing from that «marked» body. In sum, it is a means of controlling certain segments of society, helping to keep the prevailing social order. Hence, stigma symbolically marks some bodies as abnormal, which again suggests the idea of not meeting social standards. Coleman-Brown (2013: 155) provides an interesting approach to stigma because she holds that stigmatized people «regain their identity through redefining normality», to accept themselves. In other words, stigmatized individuals assume their difference, thus modifying the notion of normal, just as LGBT people co-opt insult for empowerment and pride.

Pepe Sales uses both the social and the religious meaning of stigma. In a religious context, stigma stands for scar and, specifically, the bodily marks or pains resembling the wounds of the crucified Jesus and sometimes accompanying religious ecstasy. Instead of hiding his multiple stigmas (as a homosexual, drug addict, and seropositive), Sales used to wear a cross sewn on his jumper or shirt in his final years, as can be seen in some portraits. By using the cross, he recovers the primitive spirit of Christianity as the creed of the vulnerable, the misfits, the dropouts, the stigmatized it used to be under the rule of the Roman Empire until it became the major religion. Coleman-Brown (2013: 147) observes that stigma shows a property, a process, a form of social categorization, and an affective state. By wearing the cross, Sales boldly reflects several unspeakable attributes, turning shame into pride and vulnerability into power. Also, he criticizes how the government dealt with the AIDS pandemic, drug dependency, and homophobia at that time.

As discussed before, Sales uses the Christian martyrdom, which is a frequent trope in the gay subculture, to represent stigma.¹⁶ According to Richard Dyer (2002: 119), the Christian martyr and, more specifically, Saint Sebastian, provides an example of what this critic calls the archetype of the sad young homosexual. Specifically, he explains that the adoration of a suffering naked young man (often Jesus Christ or Saint Sebastian) represents the latent homosexual structure of Christianity or of the «pleasure of dying», of sadomasochism.¹⁷ Peter Fifield (2015: 121) explains that pain and suffering have played a key role throughout history in the narrative of a redemption or of a tragic downfall, and that they were not simply the product of one subject's violence against another. Indeed, the biblical account of the passion gives the author a narrative framework within which to understand and explain his experiences. Not only his addiction or illness, but also the medical and psychiatric treatment he is subjected to by the institutions. Teresa Vilarós (1998: 252) observes that, in Spain, «el sida habla a través de la epistemología de lo sagrado y lo divino, de la infección y de la locura; a través del místico, del mártir, de los rotos y desposeídos; de los muertos [...]».

¹⁶ For instance, the American writer and artist David Wojnarowicz (1954-1992), who died from AIDS as well, also used the religious iconography in his work, which fuelled bitter controversy among Catholic groups. In *Untitled (Genet)*, he makes a haunting portrait of suffering: set in a cathedral, the painting shows small figures and angels looking over them, a man with a machine gun trying to shoot them down, a man (namely the well-known gay French writer, Jean Genet) in the foreground looking at the viewer and, above all, Jesus Christ shooting up with heroin. Here, God's son symbolises the pain of all drug addicts.

¹⁷ For example, British film director Derek Jarman, who died of AIDS in 1994, published an autobiographical work, *At Your Own Risk*, subtitled *A Saint's Testament* (1992). He also filmed *Sebastian*, about this iconic saint, in 1976.

Pain is a key concept in Christianity, in which progress is not free, but there is a toll to be paid: suffering. This idea arises from the need, to a certain extent, to give meaning to pain, as the very concept of meaningless pain is unbearable. In Christianity, pain is linked to redemption and sacrifice. It is therefore a source of learning, which gives it a pedagogical dimension. Learning through pain or *pathein mathein* is a notion that was already present in classical Greece. While pain is currently feared and eliminated with drugs and medicines, in Christian culture it is seen as a positive, desired, and valued experience (Fifield, 2015: 121). However, this forced positive discourse on pain, according to which one can learn from every difficult situation faced by the individual, is a cliché, as there is no causal link between pain and learning.

Susan Sontag (2003: 115) claims that the religious view of pain, linked to sacrifice and exaltation, is totally alien to modern sensibility, which conceives of suffering as a mistake, an accident or a crime, as something that has to be «repaired» and that makes us «feel helpless». Nevertheless, gay authors have co-opted the Christian narrative of affliction to represent the feeling of being queer and, specifically, the suffering of the seropositive. Moreover, it is also interesting the idea that Sontag explains about Georges Bataille, who saw in images of people in extreme pain something more than just pain; he saw a kind of «transfiguration» (2003: 98–99). It is this «transfiguration», metamorphosis or transformation into something else that explains the homoeroticism present in Sales's paintings, which depicts a Christ with his sex unconcealed. There is also a transgressive gesture in the exaltation of the eroticism of male religious icons. Sales, who belonged to a Catholic family, subverts his own tradition by emphasising the latent sexual component of religious iconography. In general, the resignification of religious codes has to do with a more general trend in queer culture that reshape mainstream scripts, genres or languages as an act of resistance, assertiveness and empowerment (i.e. camp style and trash culture as a reaction against the elitist sense of «good taste»). In other words, queer artists and writers challenge the representation of gays and seropositives as filthy, disposable bodies in dominant culture by depicting them as holy martyrs, who were victims of religious bigotry in Roman times.

The wounded body, epitomized by Jesus Christ and constantly reproduced throughout the history of art, is related to what Ricardo Llamas (1995: 153) calls «the excessively incarnated human categories», that is, the discriminated, exploited and oppressed subjects, such as women, homosexuals and slaves. Thus, the gay man is associated exclusively with sex, while the heterosexual man personifies discipline, responsibility, morality, economics, philosophy, and politics. An individual reduced to mere carnality is susceptible to violence, discrimination, control and humiliation. Ultimately, according to Llamas (1994: 155), the disability further underlines the reduction of the homosexual to a merely corporeal condition, devoid of humanity. This body is a mere object and therefore expendable; in other words, it is a dispossession¹⁸. This idea brings us back to the concept of waste to explain the precarious lives of the HIV positive homosexual and drug addict.

The link between pain and Christian passion is clearly manifested in the poem «Cristo de les farmàcies», in which the poetic self implores the son of God to ask the pharmacist to give him the medicine he needs to alleviate the discomfort caused by detoxification. On the other hand, in another poem he ironically invokes the martyrdom

¹⁸ «Tradicionalmente, las enfermedades del amor o «venéreas» (hoy denominadas de «transmisión sexual») son uno de los signos que demuestran la realidad hipercorporal de los posibles objetos de control, violencia, discriminación y escarnio. Señalan no sólo el ejercicio inmoderado de la dimensión física, sino, sobre todo, la ausencia de la dimensión humana, espiritual, racional» (Llamas, 1994: 174).

of Saint Lawrence to describe his affliction: «Esclau d'un joc absurd / Esclau del foc i el fum / Com Sant Lorenzo / roasted in a barbacue [*sic*]...» (Slave to an absurd game / slave to fire and smoke / like Saint Lawrence / roasted in a barbecue). The narrative topic of Christian martyrdom not only allows the poet to express his experience of illness and pain, but also to accept death as an inevitable consequence of this experience, or of life in general, which the Bible defines as condemnation and sacrifice: «I és que em moro, que em moro / cada dia més malalt» (And I die and I die / more and more ill) («Moro moro»). Finally, in the poem «Sebastian», this saint symbolises the model in which the lyrical self is reflected. Specifically, this composition expresses criticism of compulsory military service, in force until 1996 in Spain. Saint Sebastian appears here as the homosexual boys who become victims of Franco's homophobic and depraved army: «Som esclaus del General i el seu vici» (We are the slaves of the General and his vice) (the General refers to Franco). Their martyrdom, in this case, lies in their sexual condition and, in addition, the obligation to do military service in an institution that enshrines a warlike and repressive masculinity.¹⁹ In addition, the poem points out at the contradictions between the homosocial, sexually charged environment of the army and the homophobic attitudes that can be seen in that very same milieu.

4. CONCLUSIONS: SOCIALISING PAIN

The literary, musical, and artistic oeuvre of Pepe Sales testimonies of the suffering of the lost generation of the transition to democracy that did not know how to, could not or was not allowed to survive.²⁰ However, the legacy of this poet, singer and painter should not only serve as a reminder of the injustice that was perpetrated against the victims of AIDS and heroin addiction, which ravaged the 1980s and 1990s, plunging them into homelessness and marginalisation. Nor can it serve only as proof of the failures of a political regime that was a continuation or reformed version of Francoism and not a radical transformation, as many young leftists advocated through political militancy or through underground culture or counterculture. Nor, from a literary point of view, is it exclusively a legacy that the post-Francoist Catalan cultural canon dismissed as too underground and marginal. On the contrary, his life and his work are also a catalyst to give pain and suffering a transformative power which promotes awareness of vulnerable and precarious lives.

Indeed, pain is not an individual or private phenomenon, but on the contrary, it is inherently collective and historical. Thus, it is not just a mere somatic reaction to a stimulus that causes suffering in the sufferer and grief and compassion in others. On the contrary, pain and suffering should be used to question the political and social context that rouses them and to promote its transformation. Sara Ahmed (2004: 29) considers that the experience of pain is not private, but binds bodies to each other. In turn, Susan Sontag (1989: 38) argues that «a heart attack is an event but it does not give someone a new identity»; however, AIDS makes the patient a member of a collective of deprived, delinquent, drug addicted or deviant individuals. Consequently, those works that narrate experiences of illness and pain or, specifically, of AIDS, are committed texts that seek not only to provide information, but also to challenge its readers. To sum up, pain, illness and suffering create bonds and build community. In this regard, Simon Watney

¹⁹ It is not only the martyrs and Jesus Christ who symbolise the pain of the HIV-positive individual; in this religious narrative framework that Sales appropriates, the figure of the mother who mourns the death of her son also appears in a poem entitled «Quando corpus morietur (cinc dos dos u)».

²⁰ Labrador (2009: 119) gives a truly shocking statistic: in the late 1990s there were more living Spaniards born in the 1940s than in the 1950s because of the AIDS epidemic and overdose deaths.

(2000: 164) noted more than twenty years ago that AIDS was already as central to gay identity as Stonewall was to those who forged the modern gay movement in the far 1970s; we should ask ourselves whether this vision remains true today, when AIDS has become a chronic condition thanks to anti-retroviral treatment.

In a disciplinary society, pain serves as an instrument of power; in other words, the violence inflicted on the other and the wounded body represents a badge of power, as illustrated by martyrdom and public executions (Han, 2021: 19). While it is true that capitalism and the consumer and media society favour a hedonistic body (as opposed to the disciplined body of other eras), no less characteristic of today's society is the pain and suffering of a multitude of subaltern subjects. There is a systemic violence that punishes vulnerable social groups such as queer people, women, racialised individuals, child labourers, and refugees. In consequence, pain is not an individual or physiological phenomena, but it has a social and political dimension. This economic and political order persecutes the vulnerable and the dissident who, like Pepe Sales, the poet of the «misfits», does not «fit» within this system.

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