



**Dibuix negre V (Black Drawing V),**  
Antoni Tàpies (2005)  
paint and pencil on paper  
23,8 x 16,5 cm

Tàpies

**Enric Pujol**

# Controversial Dalí

## *The politico-ideological controversy with the Catalan intelligentsia*

SEX, MADNESS AND POLITICS

As is self-evident, the statement that Salvador Dalí was one of the most controversial figures (in Catalonia and the world) of the 20<sup>th</sup> century does not need too much explanation. However, the great public controversy has focused, basically, upon two points: one about whether Dalí was mad or not (a debate especially acute during the artist's lifetime) and the other about his "atypical" sex life (a controversy especially intense after his death).

Neither of these aspects will be dealt with here, as there are a host of books on both subjects. As a mere indication, we ought to mention, with regard to the supposed madness, the book by Àngel Carmona *Dalí no és cap boig* (Dalí is no Madman), published in the 1960s, which, just by its very title, resolves the polemic in a quite categorical and well-reasoned way<sup>1</sup>. As to the artist's sex life, lately there have appeared different publications that

analyse the question in detail and that have been supplemented by declarations by people close to Dalí, like for example his ex-secretary Enric Sabater<sup>2</sup>. Above all we must point out two books: the one by Clifford Thurlow *Sex, Surrealism, Dalí and Me* (which includes the confessions of the gallery owner Carlos Lozano) and the biography by Ian Gibson *The Shameful Life of Salvador Dalí* (in which, in a psycho-analytical way, great importance

■ <sup>1</sup> The original version in Castilian was published by Plaza & Janés (Barcelona: 1963) and now a Catalan version is being prepared by Llibres del Segle.

<sup>2</sup> In an interview in *Avui* (31-5-1998, pp. 51-52), E. Sabater denied all trace of homosexuality in Dalí: "He wasn't. What Dalí had were other things. He practiced masturbation from a distance".

is given to a supposed —and very arguable— repressed homosexuality as the key to interpreting the life and work of Dalí<sup>3</sup>.

I wish here to deal with an aspect less studied but no less crucial when it comes to explaining the controversy that the figure and work of Dalí stirred up in the society of his day: I am referring to ideological and political reasons. Although these were widely known about during the process of Francoist liquidation, they have gradually become more and more neglected and may quite soon be reduced merely to the field of specialists if the centenary of the artist's birth ends up as a mere apology and does not serve to make a critical assessment (and naturally balanced and unbiased) of the man<sup>4</sup>. The different politico-ideological standpoints that Dalí championed throughout his life won him passionate support and criticism from outstanding intellectual figures of the time, both Catalan and from elsewhere<sup>5</sup>. Especially controversial was his figure and work in the bosom of the Catalan intelligentsia of his day, as it was the “closest” and where Dalí had lain what we might call his basic ideological foundations.

It is worth saying, as a prior question, that Dalí, despite the many politico-ideological twists and turns that he made, never renounced being Catalan (even though he made it compatible with being a “Spanish” and cosmopolitan man par excellence): he always explicitly defended the existence of a Catalan culture with its own personality and

an unequivocal universal dimension, a culture especially strong, according to Dalí, in the philosophical and artistic spheres (two of his favourite fields). Therefore one of the “mature” Dalí's basic trios of great intellectual reference points was that made up by the philosopher Francesc Pujols, the architect Antoni Gaudí and the painter Marià Fortuny (names “of reference” to which one could even add others, from quite different periods, like the painter Modest Urgell, the draughtsman Joan Junceda, the inventor Narcís Monturiol, the writer and painter Santiago Rusiñol or the mediaeval philosopher Ramon Llull). Dalí, therefore, was never a rootless man who abjured his own culture (as were, at a given moment, Eugeni d'Ors or Ferran Valls-Taberner). To review, even briefly, the total of the love and hatred that Dalí aroused in the bosom of the Catalan intelligentsia would go far beyond the limits of an article such as this (and ten more, for sure); for this reason four significant stages in Dalí's career have been chosen in order to see the game of adherences and rejections that his politico-ideological (and aesthetic) standpoint aroused among the Catalan intellectuals of the day.

### **Yellow is the colour of the avant-garde**

A first stage, corresponding to the period of his youth, is the appearance of the ‘Yellow Manifesto’ (1928), signed by Dalí, Lluís Montanyà and Sebastià Gasch. It is a very significant moment because it puts Dalí in the most daring groups of the Catalan avant-garde attitudes of the day. What sort of avant-garde was it? Daring,

■ <sup>3</sup> Published, respectively, by Planeta, 2000, and Empúries, 1998.

<sup>4</sup> The need to carry out this critical exercise has already been noted by N. Selles: “Al voltant de Dalí. D'usos, lectures i valoracions”, *Diari de Girona* (21-9-2003).

<sup>5</sup> A first approach to Dalí's relations with important figures of his time is the catalogue *Salvador Dalí. Àlbum de família*, by Montse Aguer and Fèlix Fanés, Fundació Gala-Salvador Dalí/Fundació “La Caixa”, Barcelona: 1998.

provocative, breaking with tradition, critical of the situation of the moment. We have enough examples of it in the large number of denunciations made of it. Thus, among other things denounced are “the sentimental influence of the racial common ground of Guimerà”, the “mawkish sentimentality served up by the ‘Orfeó català’”, “the complete lack of youth of our young people”, “the young people trying to repeat the old painting and the old literature”, “the absolute lack of background knowledge of the critics with respect to the art of today and the art of yesterday”, “the painters of crooked trees”, “current Catalan poetry made of the most tired Maragallian clichés”, the “psychology of the boys and girls that sing *Rosó, Rosó*”... At the end of the text, on the positive side of things, there is a list made of the “great artists of today”, among whom are mentioned Picasso, De Chirico, Brancusi, Breton, Aragon, Cocteau, Garcia Lorca... and Joan Miró<sup>6</sup>. The appearance of the manifesto made the young Dalí’s name, at the age of 24, as one of the principal points of reference of the plastic and aesthetic avant-garde of the day. Naturally, this was possible because, then already, Dalí was a solid “young hopeful” who had achieved putting on his first individual exhibition, in 1925, at the Dalmau Gallery in Barcelona (a great success with the intellectuals of the Ateneu Barcelonès), who had already published texts in such an emblematic avant-garde magazine as *L’Amic de les Arts* and who had already made personal contact with famous

painters like Picasso or Miró and with young poets like García Lorca<sup>7</sup>.

The radical nature of the young Dalí’s plastic and aesthetic proposals went hand in hand with radical ideas in the political arena. We have precise knowledge of his youthful ideas thanks to some diaries that he wrote at the beginning of the 1920s (*A Diary: 1919-1920. My Private Impressions and Memories*), but which was not published until 1994<sup>8</sup>. In these writings he shows himself to be unequivocally on the side of the Russian revolution and the struggle of the Catalan anarcho-syndicalist trade unions against the owners and against all bourgeois order. It should be said that this attitude coincided fully with that held by certain radical sectors of Catalanist republicanism in L’Empordà, then all-powerful in Figueres and the county. This mixture of political radicalism and aesthetic daring made contact with the Parisian surrealists easy, through the affinity he had with the programmatic foundations of the movement. However, the key figure that made the incorporation of Dalí into the surrealist movement possible was Joan Miró, who advised him very well and made the right introductions for him to be able to make his very own “conquest” of Paris<sup>9</sup>.

Therefore, then, in this early period of his professional career, Dalí had the support of very important names in the avant-garde intelligentsia. As well as Miró, he was backed by the entire team of the magazine *L’Amic de les Arts*: Josep Carbonell i Gener (the chief driving force

■ <sup>6</sup> Reproduced in the catalogue D. GIRALT-MIRACLE (ed.): *Avantguardes a Catalunya, 1906-1939*, Fundació Caixa de Catalunya, Barcelona: 1992, p.309.

<sup>7</sup> One of the pioneering voices when it came to pointing out the high level of appreciation that certain intellectual circles showed the young Dalí was his

sister Anna Maria. See *Noves imatges de Salvador Dalí*, Columna, Barcelona: 1988.

<sup>8</sup> Ed. 62, Barcelona: 1994

<sup>9</sup> See the letter by Miró reproduced in the catalogue *Dalí: els anys joves (1918-1930)*, Generalitat de Catalunya, Barcelona: 1995.

behind the publication), the poet Josep Vicenç Foix, and Gasch and Montanyà, with whom he had signed the “Yellow Manifesto”. The counterpoint to this support was the opposition of Eugeni d’Ors, who in 1929, in an article in *La Gazeta Literaria*, criticised the fact that Dalí had hung, in an exhibition at the Goemans Gallery in Paris, a painting with a sacred heart where it said (with an eagerness to provoke that went down really well with the surrealists) that “I sometimes spit out of pleasure on the portrait of my mother”. D’Ors’ article revealed quite sufficiently the aesthetic chasm that separated him from Dalí, but it had repercussions that went much further than the sphere of aesthetic philosophical discussion. Dalí’s father read the article and this led to the two of them breaking off relations.

### **Change of course and exile**

A second key moment in Dalí’s career took place in the mid 1930s. The great upheavals of the period (the Events of October 1934 and then the Civil War of 1936-1939) were the cause for a radical change in his political outlook, which became more and more right wing and conservative. He himself explains, in the imagined autobiography *The Secret Life of Salvador Dalí*<sup>10</sup>, this mutation due to the panic that the “real” revolutionary movement produced in him, which first manifested itself in a big way after the so-called Events of October 1934, when President Companys proclaimed the independent Catalan state after an extreme right-wing government had been set up in Madrid that seemed to be

endangering the republican regime itself. In the autobiography, Dalí tells of his flight from Barcelona to Paris before the military repression against the Catalan capital and explains that once he had arrived in the French capital he made, under the impact of that experience, the painting *Premonition of Civil War*. His distant attitude towards the Generalitat and the republican government during the civil war, his expatriation during this time and his relationship with some Francoist intellectuals (among them D’Ors himself), contributed to the cooling off of relations with the surrealists (especially with the chief inspirer of the movement, André Breton, with whom he broke off for good at the beginning of 1939) and naturally to his distancing from numerous left-wing and democratic Catalan intellectuals. However, he was still looked upon with a great deal of reticence by the Francoist intellectuals (like P. Laín Entralgo, who at the height of the war severely criticised the artist)<sup>11</sup> and it cannot be said that then, despite some declarations of a racist nature and of a fascination for Hitler, Dalí was a Nazi-sympathizer. The proof is that, after the Nazi occupation of France, the Dalís moved to the United States, where they lived a sort of “golden exile” until 1948, when they decided to return to spend long periods in Catalonia.

During this exile *The Secret Life of Salvador Dalí* was published, which made a great impact in the artistic and intellectual world of the time; an impact that was felt among the Catalan intelligentsia, both those who had supported Francoism and those who had

■ <sup>10</sup> Recently reissued and included in the first volume of his *Obra completa*, Destino/Fundació Gala-Salvador Dalí, Barcelona: 2003.

<sup>11</sup> This is how F. MIRALLES reports it: *L’època de les avantguardes, 1917-1970*, vol. VIII of *Història de l’art català*, Ed. 62, Barcelona: 1989, 3rd ed., pp. 216-217.

had to go into exile. Thus, Josep Pla (from the ranks of those initially addicted to the regime) spoke well of it; also speaking enthusiastically of it were some of the most important intellectuals in exile, like Joan Sales or Lluís Ferran de Pol, who devoted enthusiastic articles to him in the *Quaderns de l'exili*, published in Mexico<sup>12</sup>.

Sales (under the pseudonym of Masades de Segura) called Dalí the “prophet from Portlligat” and Ferran de Pol ended his article calling for a definitive edition to be made, in Catalan, of all Dalí’s writings<sup>13</sup>.

The appearance of the book and the success the artist had in the USA was even mentioned among the centres of the internal cultural resistance opposing the dictatorship, as was the case with the promoters of the semi-clandestine journal *Ariel*<sup>14</sup>; of course, there was a deep division of opinions. In issue 3-4 of *Ariel*, corresponding to the months of July and August 1946, there appeared four notes referring to Dalí, signed by Josep M. de Sucre, Alexandre Cirici i Pellicer, Joan Perucho and Daedalus (pseudonym), where you could see the different appraisal each one made of the artist, although there was an overriding tone of general reticence. The most enthusiastic was A. Cirici, who valued very positively that in the personal diary that Dalí kept in New York, called *Dalí News*, he should have included the coat of arms of Catalonia on the masthead. In another issue of the magazine, from June 1947, Salvador Espriu was extremely critical of *Secret Life*, a work he dismissed as a “llibre autocoprobiofàgic” (shit-eating autobiography) (and of course, this was no compliment).

### Return and the ostentatious acceptance of Francoism

The moment of clearest rupture between Dalí and the main body of the Catalan anti-Francoist intelligentsia took place, however, when the artist returned, with Gala, to live in his native Empordà; that is, from 1948. And this is the third moment that I shall consider. After the end of the Second World War it was thought that the victorious allies would put an end to the Franco dictatorship, as they had done with other dictatorial and Nazi-sympathizing regimes. But these expectations were not met due to the new political demands resulting from the Cold War, which broke out straight afterwards and which saw Franco considered a “lesser evil” by the self-named Western Bloc, headed by the USA. In this context of the international consolidation of Francoism, Dalí decided to return and make a determined approach to the regime, going as far as becoming one of its “official” artists.

It should come as no surprise, therefore, that Dalí, in part due to his convictions and partly through the wish to be recognised as a great artist, should then direct his actions and his work towards parameters that would make him more acceptable to the regime. 1951 was a decisive year in this sense. It was the year of his lecture “Picasso and Me”, given at the María Guerrero Theatre in Madrid (where he said “Picasso is a communist, neither am I”); and the year of the *Mystic Manifesto* and the work *Christ of Saint John of the Cross*, which gave an unequivocally religious, Catholic, feel to his work (no matter that it was a religious

■ <sup>12</sup> There is a facsimile edition of it produced by Estudis Nacionalistes, Barcelona: 1982.

<sup>13</sup> Published, respectively, in issues 17 (December

1945) and 18 (January-March 1946).

<sup>14</sup> There is also a facsimile edition of it, Proa, Barcelona: 1978.

assumption very *sui generis*, eccentric and not too credible) and placed his artistic output in forms closer to a figurativism of classicist aspiration. Thus, anti-communism, religiousness and the new forms close to “Renaissance mannerism” (as F. Miralles has called them)<sup>15</sup> were the three basic pillars that allowed him to be accepted by Francoism. Naturally, the acceptance of Dalí by the regime (or vice versa) brought down upon him the disavowal of the main body of the Anti-Franco intelligentsia. In this respect, the adverse standpoint of three key figures in the formulation of what we might call the anti-Francoist aesthetic was decisive: Joan Miró, Antoni Tàpies and Joan Brossa, who both in private and in public criticised his political stance and invalidated his aesthetic option, which they considered out of date, old fashioned, due to the new reality that had emerged in the post-war years.

During the dictatorship, the figure and work of Dalí was anathematised, then, by a very significant part of the anti-Francoist cultural front, although within this bloc there were voices who knew perfectly well how to separate the value of Dalí’s artistic contribution from the criticism of a certain political option as is the case of Àngel Carmona or Manuel Costa-Pau. Even some anti Francoist figures received Dalí’s help, as was the case with the president of the Generalitat in exile, Josep Tarradellas, whom the painter presented with a work when the politician was in dire financial straits<sup>16</sup>.

However, it must be underlined that the anti-Dalí opposition of the day did not come exclusively from the anti-Franco movement, as he was heavily criticised by Catholic sectors who did not look kindly upon his religious “conversion” and who found him irreverent (not to say blasphemous). This was the case, for example, of the journalist and writer Manuel Brunet, who, from the pages of *Destino*, considered Dalí a pornographic author and threw in his face his past as a communist-sympathizer, anti-religious and anti-Spanish. Brunet’s standpoint brought him into long arguments with the poet Carles Fages de Climent, a fervent Dalí supporter; both of them lived in Castelló d’Empúries and saw each other very often<sup>17</sup>. Not for nothing, Fages de Climent was one of the most outstanding members of the “hardcore” of Dalí’s stalwarts, made up basically by people from L’Empordà who knew the artist and his work well and who therefore, whatever their political opinions, agreed to champion Dalí’s option<sup>18</sup>. As well as Fages (who initially had supported Francoism, but later moved away), there were the historian and pharmacist Alexandre Deulofeu (who was the Republican mayor of Figueres during the war, exiled and hostile to the regime) and Jaume Miravittles (head of the famous propaganda commissariat during the war, an outstanding collaborator of the Republican government in exile, a self-confessed anti-Francoist, but also very anti-communist

■ <sup>15</sup> F. MIRALLES: *L’època de les avantguardes...*, op. cit., p. 218.

<sup>16</sup> As stated by Enric Sabater in the quoted interview.

<sup>17</sup> As explained by J. Pla: “Carles Fages de Climent. L’epigramista, el poeta, l’home. Una vaga aproximació” in *Escrits empordanesos*, vol. 38, *Obra completa*, Destino, Barcelona: 1989, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., p. 353.

<sup>18</sup> I have already taken a first look at this group, in E. Pujol: “Alexandre Deulofeu i Salvador Dalí, dos genis heterodoxos”, *Revista de Girona*, 221 (Nov-Dec 2003), pp. 32-37. As for the relationship Fages-Dalí, see also the book-catalogue *Carles Fages de Climent (1902-1968). Poètica i mítica de l’Empordà*, Ajuntament de Figueres, Figueres: 2002.

and pro-Atlantic). In this same group of Dalí stalwarts, we should include Claudi Díaz Pérez, from Figueres, an architect and “one of the most intelligent men I have ever met in my life”, according to the historian Pierre Vilar. It turns out that Díaz explained to Vilar the keys to Dalí’s world and this opened up a whole new world to the historian; a fact that Vilar still remembered nostalgically and affectionately in his memoirs *Pensar històricament*, written in the closing stages of his life<sup>19</sup>.

It is impossible to list the Dalí supporters of the day without mentioning two more names: Francesc Pujols and Josep Pla. In the case of Pujols, it was Dalí who declared himself to be an admirer of his, even though Pujols (who died in 1962) distanced himself from some of the main Dalí-esque formulations (especially those most deeply rooted in the avant-garde and provocation). Pla became, above all after Dalí broke with the surrealists, one of the firmest champions of Dalí’s aesthetic ideas especially insofar as it was a return to “realist” figuration<sup>20</sup>.

### **Civic discredit and official rehabilitation**

At the closing stages of Francoism, after the dictator’s death, the figure of Dalí was once again at the centre of a huge controversy, due to his exclusion, in 1976, from a tribute exhibition to Carles Rahola (a Girona intellectual from the Empordà shot by Franco) organised in Cadaqués by the Democratic Assembly of Artists of Girona and which later moved to the Fundació Miró in Barcelona. This episode has been studied in detail by

Narcís Selles in the book *Art, política i societat en la derogació del franquisme* (Art, Politics and Society in the Abolition of Francoism) where it is made clear that Dalí was seen by the politically engaged artists of the time as the official artist of the regime<sup>21</sup>.

And thus we come to a fourth key moment in Dalí’s career, that of the transition from dictatorship to democracy, which began still under the sign of the dispute. Three years after the controversy caused by the tribute to Carles Rahola, in summer 1979, a great controversy emerged again when the new democratic Figueres council decided to change the names of the city streets (to restore the traditional names removed during the dictatorship) and it replaced the name of the square in front of the Teatre-Museu Dalí, dedicated to the artist and Gala, with that of Plaça del Teatre (which was what it was commonly known as). The event was reported internationally and was perceived by many sectors as an unfair snub to Dalí. However, I think that the incident served to initiate a very profound rethink of the artist, especially among the sectors who had fought for democracy and Catalan autonomy, which culminated, a few years later, in an “official rehabilitation” of Dalí’s contribution, promoted by the re-established Generalitat, which decided to award him, in 1982, the Generalitat’s gold medal. Since then, there has been a growing interest in and recognition of Dalí’s contribution by Catalan society as a whole, whatever people’s ideological or political standpoint.

■ <sup>19</sup> Tres i Quatre, Valencia: 1995.

<sup>20</sup> This is the central thesis of the biography that Pla wrote of Dalí in *Obres de Museu*. There is a popular

edition of it by Dasa Edicions, Figueres: 1981.

<sup>21</sup> Llibres del Segle, Gaiques: 1999.



Still, however, there were some controversial flare-ups, like an article by Antoni Tàpies on July 10<sup>th</sup> 1983 in which he made appreciating Dalí's work and being left-wing incompatible<sup>22</sup>. However, in the long run, there was imposed a very generalised appreciation of Dalí's work, which did not in any way exclude criticism but did not deny his work all validity. An example of this more equable critical position was the lecture by Carles Muñoz Espinalt, "Pujols, an Archetype of Dalí", given in 1982 in the Teatre-Museu Dalí in Figueres, in which he distinguished perfectly between the appreciation of Dalí "the artist" and the (heavy) criticism of "the citizen", with many interesting forays into the complex personality of the genius from Figueres<sup>23</sup>. Even an intellectual "of reference" in left-wing circles like Manuel Vázquez Montalbán did not hesitate to write the libretto for Dalí's opera-poem *Être Dieu*, published in 1985.

Thus, towards the end of his life, the figure of Dalí began to shed the controversial side that it had dragged behind it until then. His death, however, saw it flare up again. The controversial will he left unleashed veritable rivers of ink and provoked a behind-the-scenes institutional confrontation between Figueres-Barcelona and Madrid which was only resolved (very unfavourably for Catalan interests and especially those of Figueres) thanks to a high-level political agreement. This, however, would need another article entirely. Controversy, then, was a constant feature throughout the life and artistic career of Dalí that did not abandon him even after his death. It was most certainly something he wished for to begin with, but in the end it took on the feel of an authentic condemnation ||

■ <sup>22</sup> "El reencuentro oficial con Dalí", *El País* (10-7-1983), p. 11

<sup>23</sup> Included in *Obra escrita*, El Llamp, Barcelona: 1987. I believe that the psychological analysis that Muñoz Espinalt makes of Dalí is very correct and opens up many avenues that have not been exploited by specialist scholars of Dalí's work.