

CONTEMPORARY  
CATALAN THEATRE

AN INTRODUCTION

Edited by  
David George & John London



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## Preface

The essays which make up this book are intended to give English readers some idea of the wealth of talent in contemporary Catalan theatre. Catalan drama is still virtually unknown to English-speaking audiences and, despite the presence of some Catalan performance groups at international festivals, little has been done to highlight the vibrant creative context from which they have emerged. Millions saw the opening and closing ceremonies to the 1992 Olympic Games, but few could have realized that they were observing spectacles produced by Catalan theatre companies. When language is no barrier, communication can be truly international without sacrifice of distinctive local and community features. Other examples of Catalan theatre may not appear so accessible, although, once understood, they are no less interesting. Hence the Bibliography at the end of this volume which is designed to introduce the reader more directly to several plays. The editors' desire to convey their enthusiasm elsewhere has led them down familiar paths: the writing of academic and journalistic articles, the publication of translations and the organization of a conference at Exeter College, Oxford in 1993.

An attempt to approach the subject from different angles prompted the choice of contributors to this book. Enric Gallén is a well known historian of Catalan theatre who lectures at the Pompeu Fabra University in Barcelona. Mercè Saumell also teaches, but is just as active as a theatre critic for several newspapers and magazines. Rodolf Sirera gives a playwright's perspective on the development of a phenomenon of which he was an important part.

Within the editors' general guidelines, the authors of each section have followed their own particular preferences with regard to the choice of works discussed. The treatment of several plays by Pedrolo, for example, was prompted by the availability of English translations of his work. This book does not require any knowledge of Catalan; all quotations have been translated. Difficulties of translation are pointed out in the notes. The notes (and the Further Reading section for Chapter 4) also contain bibliographical references for individual authors and companies, whereas the Bibliography contains only plays in English translation. In the main text, the titles of Catalan plays are cited first in Catalan (with an English translation, where possible, in parentheses) and subsequently referred to by their English titles. It should be clear from the context whether the dates in parentheses after play/show titles refer to the date of the completion of composition (as is mostly the case in Chapters 2 and 3) or the date of the first production (as is generally the case in Chapters 1 and 4). Castilian Spanish is referred to as such or simply as Spanish. The editors are responsible for the translations of the chapters by Enric Gallén, Rodolf Sirera and Mercè Saumell.

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## Introduction

David George & John London

The basis of contemporary Catalan theatre was laid in the mid-nineteenth century. A renewed sense of Catalan national identity, coinciding with the growth of an independent-minded liberal bourgeoisie, was reflected in the building of new theatres and other cultural and entertainment centres in Barcelona. The Liceu Theatre was transferred to its new premises in the Rambla in 1847, and the Odeon and the Olimpo were inaugurated in the 1850s. The Romea Theatre, which was to become the home of Catalan drama, was opened in 1863.

This process was part of a wider cultural renaissance known as the *Renaixença*, during which Catalan re-emerged as a literary language after three centuries of confinement to virtual patois status. Writers of the *Renaixença* tended to look back nostalgically to an idealized Middle Ages (the period in which Catalonia was a major European power), and their work is often characterized by an emphasis on localism and picturesque rural environments. Nevertheless, the part that they played in recreating a sense of Catalan nationhood was highly significant and, as in other European countries, this was bound up with the development of Romanticism. In the theatre it was manifested in the growth of historical drama (ironically, often written in Castilian Spanish rather than in Catalan) and melodrama.<sup>1</sup>

The dominant dramatist of the mid-to-late nineteenth century was Frederic Soler (1839-1895), who wrote under the pseudonym of Serafí Pitarra. He parodied Romanticism in his early plays, and, in keeping with an age which recovered aspects of an almost forgotten Catalan culture, Pitarra used popular dramatic forms such as the *sainet*, a one-act, humorous, often satirical piece traditionally performed after the main play. Although Pitarra's early work is comic, even scurrilous, his later plays are far more conservative, and lack his former sharpness and vitality.<sup>2</sup> The group of dramatists to which Pitarra belonged 'did an about-turn, and became integrated into the conservative Romanticism of the *Renaixença*'.<sup>3</sup>



Àngel Guimerà (1845-1924), arguably the most popular Catalan dramatist of all time, has a more serious tone. In powerful dramas of Catalan rural and provincial life, such as *Terra baixa* (*Marta of the Lowlands*) (1897) and *La filla del mar* (*The Daughter of the Sea*) (1900), he explores human passions within the context of small-town prejudices and social conflict. Guimerà's plays contain an element of realism, but Romanticism is still the prevailing mode.<sup>4</sup>

With the growth of *modernisme* in the late nineteenth century, writers and artists rejected what they saw as the narrow provincialism of the *Renaixença*. *Modernisme* was a diverse phenomenon, encompassing cultural personalities of widely differing interests, beliefs and styles. In general it had as its driving force a desire to be new, to absorb foreign influences while not rejecting Catalan popular culture, and to reflect (and sometimes reject) a dynamic and ever-changing society. This society was centred on Barcelona and characterized by rapid industrialization, the growth of an industrial working class, radicalism, and an increasing identification with a Catalanism which was born of a sense of frustration with Madrid and the centralized Spanish state.<sup>5</sup>

In the 1890s there was a great increase in the number of foreign plays performed, and in many ways Catalonia acted as a gateway to Spain for contemporary European dramatists like Maeterlinck, Hauptmann and Ibsen.<sup>6</sup> Santiago Rusinol (1861-1931) made a significant contribution to the diffusion of foreign drama, particularly through productions of Maeterlinck's *L'Intruse* and other plays in the *modernista* festivals at Sitges.<sup>7</sup>

The principal role in the dissemination of foreign drama in Catalonia was played by Adrià Gual (1872-1943), through his productions at the Teatre íntim.<sup>8</sup> Authors performed include Hauptmann, Ibsen, Chekhov, Shakespeare, Beaumarchais, Molière and Goldoni. Gual's own plays, like those of his *modernista* contemporaries Rusinol and Apel·les Mestres (1854-1936), reflect the 'art for art's sake' strand of *modernisme*. Plays such as Rusinol's *El jardí abandonat* (*The Abandoned Garden*) (1900) and Gual's *Nocturn: Andante morat* (*Nocturne: Andante in Purple*) (1896) reveal the influence of Symbolist drama. Their work is essentially anti-Naturalist, reflecting their view of Naturalism as too historically-based and lacking in artistic flair. On the other hand, playwrights associated with the 'social criticism' side of *modernisme* were more influenced by Zola and Ibsen than by Maeterlinck and the Symbolists. A case in point is Ignasi Iglesias (1871-1928) who, in plays such as *Els veils* (*The Old People*) (1903), reminds us of the rapidly-growing size and militancy of the Barcelona working-class at the turn of the century.

As the movement known as *noucentisme* supplanted *modernisme* in the first decade of the twentieth century, the interest in North European culture, Bohemianism and art for art's sake was replaced by an emphasis on Classicism and Mediterranean culture. *Noucentisme*'s chief theorist was Eugeni d'Ors (1882-1954), and its influence extended beyond literature into painting and sculpture. *Noucentisme* is closely associated with the development of Catalan political and cultural institutions, which have left such a deep mark on contemporary Catalonia. The best-known *noucentista* writers are poets such as Josep Carner (1884-1970) and Carles Riba (1893-1959). *Noucentistes* were much more interested in poetry and prose than in drama, so the period of *noucentista* ascendancy was generally one of decline in Catalan theatre. However, the Castilianized music-hall and revue theatres of the Barcelona Paral·lel district blossomed in the period following the First World War, as did the cinema.

*Modernistes* like Rusinol and Gual continued to write well into the twentieth century, but generally rejected *noucentisme*. In 1913 Gual founded the Escola Catalana d'Art Dramàtic (Catalan School of Dramatic Art). During the dictatorship of Primo de Rivera from 1923 to 1930, he allowed its name to be changed into Castilian as Instituto del Teatro Nacional (National Theatre Institute).<sup>9</sup> As a result, he was accused of collaboration with the dictatorship, reviled with the advent of the Second Republic in the 1930s, and removed as director of the Escola in 1934.

The Primo de Rivera dictatorship placed limitations on theatrical activity in Catalonia, although the restrictions were not in any sense so severe as those that were later to be imposed during the Franco regime. It is Josep Maria de Sagarra (1894-1961) who stands out from his contemporaries of the 1920s. As well as being an original playwright, he was a prolific translator. Sagarra's plays, several of which still retain their popularity today, are dramatic poems and often contain the folksy local colour typical of preceding generations.

Like other areas of Spanish and Catalan life, the theatre was influenced by political events of the 1930s, above all the Civil War (1936-39). Theatrical activity during the Civil War was characterized by bitter infighting between the Socialist and the Anarchist trade unions (UGT and CNT), for motives that often had little to do with the theatre.<sup>10</sup> The German director Erwin Piscator visited Barcelona in 1936. He was disappointed with what he considered to be the absence of social bite and dynamism in contemporary Catalan and Spanish drama, but chose Guimerà's *Marta of the Lowlands* as the play he would direct in Barcelona in 1937. Because of the Civil War, this project was never brought to fruition."

After Franco's troops entered Barcelona in January 1939, imprisonments and executions were accompanied by actions specifically designed to destroy the cultural identity of Catalonia. Catalan books were burnt, the Catalan press disappeared and street names were changed. This was not just a question of translation from Catalan into Spanish. It is indicative of the radical nationalization enforced on Barcelona that the 'Plaça de Catalunya' (Catalonia Square) should be changed to the 'Plaza del Ejército Español' (Square of the Spanish Army). In the early years of Francoism many Catalans were fined for using their language in public.<sup>12</sup>

Given this initial scenario of repression after the Civil War, it is relevant that Enric Gallén and Rodolf Sirera have slightly differing concerns in their descriptions of the steps towards the establishment of contemporary Catalan theatre. Whereas the theatre historian Gallén documents individual attempts at renewal (Chapter 1), Sirera the playwright underlines the overwhelming mediocrity of Catalan plays performed until the mid-1960s (Chapter 2). The pessimistic view of theatrical life held sway in critical accounts until the 1970s. One book dedicated to post-Civil War Catalan theatre included in its opening pages the statement that there was 'no really professional Catalan language theatre', since no company regularly received official subsidy. Seven years earlier, in 1966, Joaquim Molas had written: 'There is no real Catalan theatrical life.' This claim reappeared when a general informative article was published in French.<sup>13</sup>

Such assessments have not helped to transform the centralized vision propounded by traditional histories of 'Spanish theatre', where 'Spanish' means 'written in Castilian' and thus eliminates anything more than a passing mention of Catalan drama. This is a pity, particularly for those who are keen to promote the innovative qualities of theatre produced in what some Catalans now like to call 'the Spanish state'. For much of the most interesting work has come from Catalan-speaking regions. In the 1920s, Barcelona was noted as being more open to theatrical experimentation than Madrid, and there is evidence—from theatrical activity and public reactions to it—that this attitude continued after the Civil War.<sup>14</sup>

Two predominant approaches are identifiable in the written drama which emerged from the dark early years of Francoism and can still be considered worthy of attention: that of the politicized dramatists (discussed in Chapter 2) and that of the avant-garde dramatists (discussed in Chapter 3). It would be incorrect to argue that the latter did not tackle political issues or that the former did not write experimental drama. All Manuel de Pedrolo's avant-garde

plays are about the nature of freedom, and Rodolf Sirera's political *Plany en la mort d'Enric Ribera* (*Lament for the Death of Enric Ribera*) is one of the most technically original texts to have been written in Europe during the 1970s. Nonetheless, there is a discernible difference of styles between the two tendencies. Writers such as Joan Brossa form part of a tradition of avant-garde drama which originated with Futurist and Dadaist sketches, and their Catalan equivalents of the 1920s.<sup>15</sup> Later, especially in the work of Pedrolo and Sergi Belbel, there are distinct links with several motifs from the Theatre of the Absurd. In contrast, the inspirations for Josep M. Benet i Jornet and Jordi Teixidor are proletarian drama and Brecht. Their allegories, together with those of Joan Oliver, Salvador Espriu and the Sirera brothers, involve a more direct confrontation with precise events, even if these sometimes include classical myths or Biblical stories, as well as historical episodes. Moreover, if Brossa, Pedrolo and Llorenç Villalonga were equally active in other literary genres, playwrights such as Benet i Jornet, Teixidor and the Sirera brothers at first developed their writing for the stage alongside active participation in politically committed theatrical groups.

Once sufficient time had elapsed from the death of Franco in 1975, stances did not need to be so radicalized. Thus, Benet i Jornet's *Desig* (*Desire*) (1989) is experimental and highly personal, while Belbel's *Carícies* (*Caresses*) (1991) maintains the author's stylistic idiosyncrasies, but is firmly located in a social sphere of the 1990s. Of course, a politicized form of avant-garde had existed since the 1960s, in performance groups such as Els Joglars, whose style originated from acting techniques rather than written texts (Chapter 4).

Indeed, it is groups such as Els Joglars, Comediants and La Fura dels Baus which have come to represent Catalan theatre beyond Catalonia. It was acceptable for a Catalan—Marià Andreu—to design the sets for Alec Guinness's controversial *Hamlet* in 1951.<sup>16</sup> The Catalan director Lluís Pasqual is currently the head of the Odéon Theatre in Paris. But most Catalan texts still remain unstaged outside their immediate geographical context. If enough festival programmers decided to add a company performing *Timon of Athens* in Catalan to a Romanian *Midsummer Night's Dream* or a German *Julius Caesar*, attention might be drawn away from mime and fireworks to the existence of a tradition of Catalan writing for the stage. Yet internal conditions which would enable such writing to receive respectable productions have not been ideal. Enric Gallén is therefore understandably concerned to demonstrate the constant need for a National Catalan Theatre. A potential resolution of this problem came recently with the announcement that Josep Maria Flotats is to

be director of precisely such a National Theatre, the construction of which is expected to be complete by 1997.

Whatever ultimately surfaces from present projects, Catalan theatre cannot be considered in the same terms as would apply to the cultural products of linguistically defined national groupings which enjoy total political independence. The latest figures indicate that there are six and a half million Catalan-speakers and just over nine million who understand the language.<sup>17</sup> Although the total for those who have passive knowledge is more than twice the population of Norway, the areas covered in this survey include the Valencia region, the Balearic Islands, Roussillon (in France), Alguer (in Sardinia) and Andorra, as well as Catalonia itself. Apart from the pages devoted to the Sirera brothers in this volume, space does not permit consideration of Valencian theatre, in which playwrights like Manuel Molins (1946-) have further helped to forge a theatrical identity south of Barcelona.<sup>18</sup> Nor is it possible to touch in any detail on the theatre produced in other Catalan-speaking areas.<sup>19</sup>

In 1992, the approximate cut-off point for this study, television viewers around the world witnessed the spectacular opening and closing ceremonies to the Barcelona Olympic Games, staged by La Fura dels Baus and Comediants. During the course of the same year in Barcelona, a public recognition of three generations of Catalan playwrights occurred with full-scale productions of plays by Joan Brossa, Rodolf Sirera and Sergi Belbel. Other recent dramatists such as Joan Barbero, Joan Casas and Lluïsa Cunillé are now being performed. There is at the moment a degree of confidence and professionalism which opposes the negative descriptions of the 1960s. Catalan theatre has become a rich creative field, waiting to be explored by all those who are interested in contemporary drama and performance.

## Notes

1. Xavier Fàbregas sees the existence of Romantic drama in Catalonia as an 'exotic flower' in the context of industrialization and the expansion of an impoverished urban working-class (*Història del teatre català*, Catalunya Teatral: Estudis, 1 [Barcelona: Millà, 1978], p. 114). Fàbregas also provides useful information on the growth of theatres in Barcelona in the mid-nineteenth century (pp. 103-08).

2. On Pitarra, see Xavier Fàbregas, 'Frederic Soler entre la menestralia i la burgesia', in

*Aproximació a la història del teatre català modern* (Barcelona: Curial, 1972), pp. 69-94. New editions of some of Pitarra's plays have appeared recently, for example, Serafí Pitarra, *El castell dels tres dragons*, ed. by Pere Martí, Biblioteca Didàctica de la Literatura Catalana, 32 (Barcelona: Barcanova, 1993).

3. Josep M. Benet i Jornet, 'Teatre', in *Diccionari de la literatura catalana*, ed. by Joaquim Molas and Josep Massot i Muntaner, Cultura Catalana Contemporània, 9 (Barcelona: Edicions 62, 1979), pp. 693-96 (p. 695).

4. See Xavier Fàbregas, *Àngel Guimerà: Les dimensions d'un mite* (Barcelona: Edicions 62, 1971); David George, 'A Young Lad in the Arms of an Old Man: Sergi Belbel Directs Àngel Guimerà's *La filla del mar* (*The Daughter of the Sea*)', *Contemporary Theatre Review* (forthcoming).

5. A valuable English-language study of the movement is M. J. McCarthy, 'Catalan Modernism, Messianism and Nationalist Myths', *Bulletin of Hispanic Studies*, 52 (1975), 379-95.

6. See Marisa Siguàn, *La recepció de Ibsen y Hauptmann en el modernismo Catalan*, Estudiós de Literatura Espanola y Comparada, 5 (Barcelona: Promociones y Publicaciones Universitarias, 1990); Halfdan Gregersen, *Ibsen and Spain: A Study in Comparative Drama*, Harvard Studies in Romance Languages, 10 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1936; rpr. 1966 by Kraus Reprint Corporation).

7. See Xavier Fàbregas, 'Santiago Rusinol i la iconografia teatral del modernisme', in *Aproximació a la història del teatre català modern*, pp. 149-60.

8. See Carles Batlle, Isidre Bravo and Jordi Coca, *Adrià Gual: Mitja vida de modernisme* (Barcelona: Diputació de Barcelona, 1992); Enric Gallén, 'Adrià Gual', in *Història de la literatura catalana*, ed. by M. de Riquer, A. Comas and J. Molas, 11 vols (Barcelona: Ariel, 1980-88), VII (1986), 433-40.

9. See Hermann Bonnín, *Adrià Gual i l'Escola d'Art Dramàtic (1913-1923)*, Episodis de la Història, 186-187 (Barcelona: Rafael Dalmau, 1974); Hermann Bonnín, *Adrià Gual i l'Escola d'Art Dramàtic (1923-1934)*, Episodis de la Història, 206-207 (Barcelona: Rafael Dalmau, 1976).

10. On Catalan theatre during the Civil War and committed theatre during the Second Republic, see Francesc Burguet i Ardiaca, *La CNT i la política teatral a Catalunya (1936-1938)*, Monografies de Teatre, 16 (Barcelona: Institut del Teatre/Edicions 62, 1984); Jordi Coca, Enric Gallén and Anna Vazquez, *La Generalitat republicana i el teatre (1931-1939): Legislació*, Monografies de Teatre, 11 (Barcelona: Institut del Teatre/Edicions 62, 1982); Christopher H. Cobb, 'Teatre del proletariat—teatre de masses: Barcelona 1931-1934', *Els Marges*, no. 21 (January 1981), 121-28; Robert Marrast, *El teatre durant la guerra civil espanyola: Assaig d'història i documents*, Monografies de Teatre, 8 (Barcelona: Institut del Teatre/Edicions 62, 1978).

11. See Jordi Coca, Enric Gallén and Anna Vazquez, *La Generalitat republicana i el teatre*, pp. 27-31. For a comparison between Piscatorian and Catalan conceptions of the theatre, see Francisco Mundi Peret, *El teatro de la guerra civil*, Coleccion

- Ediciones y Estudiós, 1 (Barcelona: Promociones y Publicaciones Universitarias, 1987), p. 237.
12. See Josep Benet, *Catalunya sota el règim franquista: Informe sobre la persecució de la llengua i la cultura de Catalunya pel règim del General Franco (I<sup>a</sup> part)* (Barcelona: Blume, 1978), pp. 247, 296-305.
13. Jordi Arbonès, *Teatre català de posguerra*, Llibre de Butxaca, 75 (Barcelona: Pòrtic, 1973), p. 18; Joaquim Molas, *La literatura catalana de postguerra* (Barcelona: Rafael Dalmau, 1966), p. 55; Agustí Blanes, 'Le Theatre Catalan de ces vingt-cinq dernières années', trans. into French by Pierre Verdaguer, *Europe*, no. 464 (December 1967), 173-82 (p. 182). The exception to the rule is the theatre critic Xavier Fàbregas (1931-1985), who single-handedly managed to produce a large body of serious writing about Catalan theatre.
14. See Vance R. Holloway, *La crítica teatral en 'ABC': 1918-1936*, American University Studies: Series II: Romance Languages and Literature, 181 (New York: Peter Lang, 1991), pp. 111-12; John London, 'Reception and Renewal in Modern Spanish Theatre: 1939-1963', 2 vols (unpublished doctoral thesis, Oxford University, 1992), especially, I, 318, 325-26.
15. For information on Catalan Futurist-inspired theatre in 1929, see Enric Gallén, 'Estudi introductorí', in Llorenç Villalonga and others, *Sis peces de teatre breu*, ed. by Enric Gallén, El Garbell, 43 (Barcelona: Edicions 62, 1993), pp. 5<sup>A</sup>17 (p. 7).
16. See Isidre Bravo, *L'escenografia catalana* (Barcelona: Diputació de Barcelona, 1986), p. 189. Antoni Clavé was another well-known Catalan set designer who worked almost exclusively outside Spain in the post-Civil War period. Bravo's book is an illustrated guide to Catalan stage design, a rich subject which is not treated in detail in the present collection of essays.
17. *The Catalan Language Today*, ed. by M. Leprêtre, 2nd edn (Barcelona: Institut de Sociolingüística Catalana, 1992), pp. 17-19.
18. See Xavier Fàbregas, *Història del teatre català*, pp. 295-99; Biel Sansano, 'Introducció: Manuel Molins: El teatre com a totalitat', in Manuel Molins, *Ni tan alts, ni tan rics . . .*, Bromera/Teatre, 1 (Alzira: Edicions Bromera, 1989), pp. 7-20; Josep Lluís Sirera, *Passat, present i futur del teatre valencià*, Descobrim el País Valencià, 5 (Valencià: Institució Alfons El Magnànim, 1981).
19. On the Catalan theatre of the Balearic Islands, Roussillon and Alguer, see Xavier Fàbregas, *Història del teatre català*, pp. 246, 280-82, 294-95; Joan Fuster, *Literatura catalana contemporània* (Madrid: Editora Nacional, 1975), pp. 356-57.

## Chapter 1

# Catalan Theatrical Life: 1939-1993

Enric Callen

While the rest of Europe was about to enter the Second World War, the official beginning of the Franco dictatorship in April 1939 destroyed the vain hopes for Catalan theatre which had been created during the Civil War.<sup>1</sup> A number of features highlight the new situation: the total ban on professional performances of plays in the Catalan language until the end of the Second World War; as a result of this ban, the destruction of all manifestations of a genuinely popular Catalan theatre located in the Paral·lel (the Montmartre of Barcelona); the exodus and marginalization of important theatrical figures (some of whom went into permanent exile, while others engaged in non-theatrical activities in remote areas of Spain or—like Josep M. de Sagarra, Carles Soldevila and Joan Oliver—returned in the 1940s and took up the theatre again with varying degrees of success); the almost total isolation from major currents of foreign theatre; the specific prohibition of translations of foreign plays (which lasted until the late 1950s).

No public performance of a play in the Catalan language was allowed on the professional stage in Barcelona until 1946. As early as December 1939 (the first Christmas of the Francoist occupation), when faced with a request that the traditional Catalan Christmas Nativity play *Els pastors*<sup>2</sup> be performed, the Civil Governor of Barcelona cynically decreed that 'the performance should not constitute a public spectacle and should not therefore be held in premises normally used for cinema, dance or recreational activities in general, and a direct or indirect charge should not be made'. He commented that 'the said performance should possess an exclusively family-based religious character'.<sup>3</sup> The political message was clear: the Catalan language was to be confined to private and family use. Immediate access to genuine cultural and hence theatrical manifestations in Catalan would have to be clandestine. For those committed to the theatre, there was no alternative, other than to go into exile or patiently await a more favourable turn of events.



Indeed, readings and individual performances of Catalan texts took place in a restricted and almost family environment on a very precarious, non-professional basis. These texts included the translations of Shakespeare prepared by Josep M. de Sagarra (1894-1961) between 1941 and 1945 thanks to private patronage.<sup>4</sup> With the Allied victory in 1945, the Franco regime was finally forced to adopt a more liberal policy towards certain Catalan cultural activities.<sup>5</sup> Thus, the renewal of theatrical activity in Catalonia in 1946 was at first necessarily limited to the reconstruction of the pre-Civil War repertoire. On the whole, the writing of Catalan authors did not show sufficient signs of artistic renewal, with the exception of various isolated attempts by Josep M. de Sagarra—in plays such as *Lafortuna de Sílvia* (*Silvia's Fate*) (1947) and *Galatea* (1948)—to mirror the sort of moral drama that was prevalent in Europe in the late 1940s.<sup>6</sup> The publication of Salvador Espriu's important *Primera història d'Esther* (*The Story of Esther*) in 1948 was, on the other hand, an exceptional event.

At the very moment when theatre in France was beginning to be decentralised and Paolo Grassi and Giorgio Strehler were founding the Piccolo Teatro in Milan, the Catalan professional stage, following a precarious restoration, in 1949 formed a Board of Management at the Romea Theatre of Barcelona, the emblematic headquarters of Catalan theatre. Despite all this, the general artistic panorama tended to be inward-looking and provincial until 1954. Jordi Sarsanedas wrote resignedly in the journal *Ariel*: 'in the absence of an alternative, we are still prepared to see the play about the henpecked husband and the tyrannical wife, or the drama of poor but honest folk.'<sup>7</sup> Even Joan Triadú, one of the founders of *Ariel*, who had lamented Sagarra's *ritorno all'antico* following the failure of *Galatea*, recognized in a review of the first performance of *Les vinyes del Priorat* (*The Vineyards of the Priorat\**) (1950) that 'we will be satisfied if at least it does not disappoint the audience; for the old Romea Theatre is one of the few fora left to us to make a collective statement in Catalan'.<sup>9</sup> For Triadú, the theatre was a 'mass phenomenon which cannot be ignored'. It is only in this sense that one can evaluate positively the third-rate revivals of established authors like Frederic Soler, Àngel Guimerà or Santiago Rusinol, accompanied by the return to the Catalan stage of charismatic pre-Civil War actors such as the couple Pius Davi and Maria Vila. The overall impression was one of a regional culture, rural in an old-fashioned sense, supplied by commercially-oriented authors who, in the words of Joan de Malniu (the pseudonym of Antoni Ribera), 'give us the exact measure of what separates us from European culture, and therefore from Europe'.<sup>10</sup>

Critics were unanimous in recognizing the significance of this lamentable situation: Catalan theatre was living off the past. It was clearly necessary to be aware of the existence of factors which made a full return to normality very difficult: the ban on the translation of any foreign work and the limitation placed on the number of premises dedicated to Catalan theatre—at least in the sense of plays that could be performed throughout a season. This formed a contrast with the quantity of Catalan theatres where works in Castilian Spanish were regularly performed. These Spanish plays were offered by Madrid-based companies, from both the public (the so-called 'National Theatres') and the private sectors.

In the first half of the 1950s, in the face of the inability of the Board of Management of the Romea Theatre to organize a regular programme of Catalan theatre and the rejection by audiences and critics of the apparent modernization Josep M. de Sagarra had attempted, some critics went so far as to describe the position as one of 'decline'.<sup>11</sup> Despite the spectacular success in the 1954-55 season of Sagarra's *La ferida lluminosa* (*The Luminous Wound*), which is thematically similar to Graham Greene's *The Living Room* and Joaquín Calvo Sotelo's *La muralla* (*The Wall*), a start could not be made in resolving the crisis in Catalan theatre until the creation of the Agrupació Dramàtica de Barcelona (the Barcelona Dramatic Group, or ADB) in 1955, and the Escola d'Art Dramàtic Adrià Gual (Adrià Gual School of Dramatic Art, or EADAG) in 1960. Indeed, shortly after the great success of *The Luminous Wound*, there began a process of artistic sclerosis at the Romea, interrupted only by isolated attempts to organize *teatre de cambra* (chamber theatre) in imitation of what had been offered in Barcelona since the end of the Second World War by certain theatre groups working in the Spanish language.<sup>12</sup>

The terminal decline of the commercial stage at the Romea prior to the crisis of the 1960s was accentuated by the appearance of a particular actor, Joan Capri.<sup>13</sup> Discovered by the promoter and playwright Xavier Regàs, Capri joined the company in the 1957-58 season, and soon achieved great popularity through his monologues and strange versions of written works adapted to suit his histrionic personality. The journalist Néstor Lujà used the pretext of an article on Capri to deal with the extreme artistic decadence of the Romea in his column in the weekly magazine *Destino*, claiming that 'as the symbol of Catalan theatre, the Romea should not be in the hands of vulgar actors and ordinary playwrights'. He demanded

that the Romea Theatre should possess a good traditional repertoire and should perform, as well as new works [...], translations

of foreign plays, both classical and modern, of which there are fortunately an abundance. Other theatres could encourage the performance of experimental works and restore to the active Catalan theatre its former [. . .] dignity.<sup>14</sup>

The polemic was thus launched, and it occasioned the intervention of the ADB, which, through letters to the editor of *Destino* from Frederic Roda and Joan Oliver, two of ADB's leaders, placed the group firmly on Néstor Luján's side.<sup>15</sup>

There was obviously a series of problems surrounding the Catalan professional stage: the exhaustion of pre-Civil War dramatic trends; the absence of texts which could renew the theatre; and the ever-growing public preference for products which Jordi Carbonell termed 'banal comedy, [...] which even descends at times into parody [...] a sentimental drama which depends on superficial emotions and lacks real human depth'.<sup>16</sup> Indeed, the general situation had worsened by the end of the 1950s:

Today, Catalan public theatre is a capitalist enterprise without capital, and therefore it finds itself in the same situation as the small factory-owner who sells only to pay his bills; any wide-ranging or long-term programme is out of the question. And so a vicious circle is created: since the theatre is not developed, it is not profitable. The result is that our impresarios are often dramatists, authors or their friends, and the smallest upset ruins a whole season.<sup>17</sup>

### **The Agrupació Dramàtica de Barcelona**

Since the strictly private Catalan professional stage had hit rock bottom, the instability and the consequent artistic degradation that it suffered throughout the 1960s were inevitable. The real revival of Catalan theatre came from sources which were far removed from the commercial stage. On the one hand, there were dramatists who privately created models of dramatic literature that in some cases were neither published nor performed for many years. This was a type of theatre which was completely marginal to the projects of the commercial or amateur stage: Joan Brossa and Llorenç Villalonga are paradigmatic examples, as is the poet Josep Palau i Fabra. On the other hand, there was the type of theatre which arose directly from the non-professional stage, be it the ADB's incorporation of new authors such as Manuel de Pedrolo, Baltasar Porcel and Brossa himself, or the ADB's promotion of Joan Oliver and Salvador Espriu.

The ADB was formed around the respected historian and man of the theatre Ferran Soldevila. A number of middle-class intellectuals and private individuals, who were linked to the group and who, since the 1940s, had been acting as patrons of the arts, promoted it under the auspices of the Artistic Circle of Sant Lluç. The main aim of the ADB was to revive artistic and social interest so as to enable Catalan theatre to relate once more to the dominant currents of contemporary foreign theatre, as in the *modernista* period<sup>18</sup> or at certain moments during the pre-Civil War era. They wished to achieve this without having to forego a critical revision of their own tradition, which was being misrepresented by the professional stage and risked being completely forgotten. It was in this spirit that the ADB, following an unsuccessful contact with Maurice Sarrazin of the French theatre group Le Grenier de Toulouse, organized theatrical seasons until 1963, despite administrative obstacles and the limited number of times each play could be performed. In this way, the leaders of the company constructed quite a resourceful programme in terms of the selection of texts, authors and the collaboration of well-known artists (painters, stage designers, directors and performers).<sup>19</sup>

The ADB offered a variety of plays by non-Spanish authors from the sixteenth century to the contemporary period: Molière, Shakespeare, Ben Jonson, Goldoni, Mussel, Chekhov, Strindberg, Shaw, Claudel and Giraudoux. Contemporary playwrights produced included Anouilh, Rattigan, Ionesco, Durrenmatt and Brecht. What is more, in the face of the lamentable state of Catalan commercial theatre, the ADB established, with all its deficiencies and any number of changes that had to be made, a selection of Catalan plays that could be used for the preparation of the future repertoire of an as yet non-existent National Theatre: Joan Maragall's *Nausica*, Santiago Rusinol's *L'auca del senyor Esteve (Mr Stephen's Auca)*<sup>20</sup>, Josep Carner's *El ben cofat i l'altre (The Man with the Hat and the Other One)*, *El cocktail dels acusats (The Accused Men's Cocktail)* by Carles Soldevila, *Xandí* by J. Millàs-Raurell, *Silvia's Fate*, by Sagarra, and Joan Oliver's *Ball robat (Stolen Dance)*, among others. The ADB helped to discover younger Catalan playwrights, by staging such works as Salvador Espriu's *Antígona (Antigone)* and *The Story of Esther*, Joan Brossa's *Or i sal (Gold and Salt)*, Baltasar Porcel's *La simbomba fosca (The Dark Zambomba)* and *Els condemnats (The Damned)*, and three plays by Manuel de Pedrolo, *Cruma*, *Homes i no (Men and No)*, and *Tècnica de cambra (The Room)*.

The ADB also published plays in their series *Quaderns de Teatre*, edited by Joan Oliver.<sup>21</sup> Their objective was to present the most modern plays within the

arbitrary and irrational limits imposed by censorship. They chose representative plays from post-1939 world drama, and some of the most innovative Catalan drama of the post-Civil War period. The publications include Pedroló's *Men and No* (1960), Brossa's *Gold and Salt* (1963), Tennessee Williams's *The Glass Menagerie* (as *Figures de vidre*) (1959), Graham Greene's *The Living Room* (*La sala d'estar*) (1962), Ionesco's *La Cantatrice chauve* (*La cantant calba*) (1963), Wesker's *Roots* (*Les arrels*) (1963) and Brecht's *The Three-penny Opera* (*L'òpera de tres rals*) (1963).<sup>22</sup> Twenty years after the end of the Civil War, *Quaderns de Teatre* represented the first opportunity of disseminating in Catalan the work of leading figures in contemporary theatre.

By the time its activities were curtailed in 1963 for political reasons, the ADB had, as a non-professional body, unintentionally taken on the precarious functions which in other circumstances would have been fulfilled by a National Theatre, or a Dramatic Centre. In the majority of European industrialized countries, this kind of centre would be state-subsidized and part of the official establishment. This was not the case in Catalonia, and the ADB could count only on a specific sector of the Barcelona middle classes, who were to a large extent the inheritors of the politically conservative nationalist group from the pre-Civil War period.

The general picture of the theatre in Barcelona and in Catalonia at the start of the 1960s was one which was still dominated by: the presence of amateurs grouped since 1949 within FESTA (Foment de l'Espectacle Selecte i Teatre Associació, a Catholic theatre organization);<sup>23</sup> the inexorable artistic decline of the Romea Theatre; the presence of private companies which were heavily indebted to a mainly commercial Spanish theatre; a gradual but steady disappearance of theatrical activity in the Paral·lel. The Paral·lel, like other areas of the Catalan cultural scene, was infused with Spanish, non-Catalan elements in the post-1939 period. Faced with this situation, the ADB had cautiously tried to lay the basis of a theatrical renewal which, although non-professional, was genuinely Catalan.

### **The Escola d'Art Dramàtic Adrià Gual and Committed Theatre**

The renewal begun by the ADB was completed with the creation of the Escola d'Art Dramàtic Adrià Gual (EADAG), under the direction of Maria Aurèlia Capmany and Ricard Salvat.<sup>24</sup> This company was formed with a dual purpose: as a response to the outdated nature of the classes given by the official Institut del Teatre (Theatre Institute), directed by Guillem Díaz-Plaja,<sup>25</sup> and because of the perceived need to plan a new professional and aesthetic-civic

concept of theatre. One of the main aims was the creation of a school for the training of actors and directors, despite the private and officially unrecognized character of the EADAG. Although the Stanislavsky—and later the Grotowski—methods of training actors and actresses were not disdained, it was the epic method, imported by Salvat after his period in Germany, which became one of the defining features of the School and of its often non-theatrical corpus of texts, interpreted from a new perspective.<sup>26</sup> Brecht and the epic theatre allowed Salvat to give shape to his own personal style of dramatic composition to which both Catalan authors (especially Salvador Espriu) and foreign playwrights were subjected.

The appearance and initial operation of the EADAG favoured the creation and subsequent development of the so-called Independent Theatre movement, which arose as a response to contemporary amateur and commercial theatre. The Independent Theatre groups appeared throughout the 1960s and were highly idealistic in their goals. They aimed at a global renewal of the theatre by disassociating themselves from the traditional circuits, creating new audiences, re-evaluating the roles of the director, the stage designer and the actor, and, to a lesser degree, revising the Catalan repertoire.<sup>27</sup> It is impossible to separate the Independent sector's implacable opposition to established cultural structures from their concept of the theatre as an instrument of socio-political struggle. In this they were influenced by Brechtian aesthetics—and also by Expressionism—which, through the cultivation of distancing techniques, would increase audiences' awareness. Nevertheless, the Independent Theatre had to face a number of serious problems, above all the difficulty of reaching a broad sector of the public and of thereby moving away from marginalized ghettos towards a genuinely professional status. This 'professionalization' was achieved by only a few groups.

Another source of theatrical renewal, in addition to that provided by the ADB, the EADAG and the Independent sector, was the creation of the Josep M. de Sagarra Prize in 1963. Together with other similar, but on the whole short-lived ventures, the Sagarra prize acted as a genuine platform for young dramatists who had not had their work published, and were usually linked to the Independent sector.<sup>28</sup> The first Sagarra prize was awarded to Josep M. Benet i Jornet for *Una vella, coneguda olor* (*An Old, Familiar Smell*), a play which was the forerunner of the text-based theatre of later years. What is more, Benet, as a pupil of the EADAG, felt himself to be close to the Independent Theatre. In the 1964 production of *An Old, Familiar Smell*, professional actors from the commercial sector played alongside actors from the EADAG.

If one were to offer an artistic evaluation of those plays that received the Sagarra prize, one would have to point to their diversity, as well as to the lack of an established aesthetic line. Benet's realism, influenced initially by Spanish and North-American sources, coincided in its presentation of social issues with the work which received the 1964 Sagarra prize, Joan Soler i Antich's *Aquí no ha passat res* (*Nothing's Happened Here*). Soler i Antich's play resolves the conflict of its protagonist in an existential mode, reminiscent of Sartre. There is a contrast between the plays by Benet i Jornet and Soler i Antich, the winners of the first two Sagarra prizes, and the text which won the 1965 prize, Josep Maria Mufioz Pujol's *Antigona* (*Antigone*), which follows Anouilh and Espriu, but is also Sartrian.

After 1965, the ascendancy of Brecht and epic theatre was confirmed in Catalonia. Clear evidence of this is provided by three events: the appearance of a volume of *Teatre* (*Plays*) by Baltasar Porcel—above all *Història d'una guerra* (*Story of a War*), which was performed by the Teatre Experimental Català (Catalan Experimental Theatre) in 1966; the first performances of *Ronda de mort a Sinera* (*Death Around Sinera*) by Salvador Espriu and Ricard Salvat; and the performance by the EADAG of Maria Aurèlia Capmany's *Vent de garbí i una mica de por* (*South-West Wind and a Little Bit of Fear*).<sup>29</sup> The Sagarra prize reflects the dominance of Brecht: it was awarded in 1967 to Alexandre Ballester's *Dins un gruix de vellut* (*In the Thickness of Velvet*), and in 1968 to Jordi Teixidor's *El retaule del flautista* (*The Legend of the Piper*). The Expressionism of the 1966 prizewinner, Jaume Melendres's *Defensa índia de rei* (*Indian Defence of the King*), is not too far removed from the Brechtian line. Benet i Jornet's development as a dramatist was also marked by the dominant Brechtianism. He departed decisively from the realism of *Fantasia per a un auxiliar administratiu* (*Fantasy for an Administrative Assistant*) (1964), with his trilogy based on the myth of Drudània, written from 1965 to 1969.

It should be noted that the renewal of the theatre which was undertaken by the aforementioned authors—and by other candidates for the prizes—was aimed only at limited sectors of society, namely

intellectuals, members of liberal professions, and a high percentage of students. This audience expects and demands a committed theatre that takes the denunciation of society to the limits permitted by censorship. Thus, the audience's approval or rejection always depends on this criterion.<sup>30</sup>

On the one hand, the new theatre lacked access to a wide audience, and on the other, it had a non-professional basis, with no more than three performances per production, and very little training for those involved. Hence it offered a feeble image, very different to that of a whole range of European theatres of the 1960s.

In fact, the first appearance of the Independent Theatre on the commercial circuit came in the form of the EADAG, under the direction of Ricard Salvat. Between 1966 and 1970 he organized three seasons at the Romea, and included prestigious actors and actresses from the commercial sector, such as Núria Espert. The presence of these professionals seems to have provoked a certain amount of tension in the EADAG, since some of its members believed that it was going beyond its assigned role. The success of the first two years (1966-68), with such plays as *Death Around Sinera* by Espriu and Salvat, Rusinol's *Mr Stephen's Auca*, Espriu's *The Story of Esther* and Brecht's *The Good Woman of Setzuan*, led to uneasiness and a lack of enthusiasm when Peter Handke's *Offending the Audience* and Brecht's *A Man's a Man* were included in the programme alongside Llorenç Villalonga's *Mort de dama* (*Death of a Woman*).<sup>31</sup> In the same period elsewhere, new approaches to theatre and theatrical research were being adopted. Examples are George Devine's work at the Royal Court, the founding and subsequent development of the Royal National Theatre in 1963, and the process of decentralization in French theatre, which was reactivated during the 1960s.

### **The Final Years of the Franco Regime**

Around 1968 the renewal of Catalan theatre was showing clear and unequivocal signs of petering out. The symptoms included the absence of sustained coverage in the mass media, the lack of a regular specialist theatrical publication,<sup>32</sup> and of a properly organized collection of Catalan and foreign titles to continue the direction established by the ADB's *Quaderns de Teatre* series. What is more, the jury who presented the 1968 Sagarra prize bemoaned the fact that none of the previous winners had seen their plays performed within the regular repertory of an established company, and had received no support from individuals or Catalan cultural organizations.<sup>33</sup> The Independent Theatre was entering a period of crisis, following the failed experiments of the *Off-Barcelona* project (the Barcelona fringe) at the Casino de l'Aliança in the city's Poble Nou district in 1968. In addition, the lack of cohesion and feasibility in the Independent Theatre groups led to a couple of years of operational crisis.<sup>34</sup> The crisis in the Independent sector coincided with the inauguration



in 1969 of the Capsa Theatre, headed by the actor Pau Garsaball, which until 1976 became the real platform for the launching of groups such as Els Joglars which had been linked to the Independent Theatre, but had turned professional in the early 1970s.<sup>35</sup> Disregarding the Romea and the ineffectual, official Teatre Nacional de Barcelona (National Theatre of Barcelona),<sup>36</sup> the Capsa was the only, if still inadequate, forum for Catalan authors. However, they were not all successful there: the triumph of Teixidor's *The Legend of the Piper* contrasts with the critical rejection of Benet i Jornet's *Berenàveu a les fosques* (*You Were Having Tea in the Dark*) in the spring of 1973.

From the ashes of 1968 there had begun a new period in which people were prepared to question the most committed values of the 1960s. As far as the theatre was concerned, new manifestations were appearing all over Europe in response to Artaud's theories or to the phenomenon of collective creation.<sup>37</sup> Nevertheless, some Catalan plays premiered in the early 1970s still possessed the progressive spirit of the 1960s. Two instances are Teixidor's *The Legend of the Piper*, and a work written by Maria Aurèlia Capmany in collaboration with Xavier Romeu, *Preguntes i respostes sobre la vida i la mort de Francesc Layret, advocat dels obrers de Catalunya* (*Questions and Answers on the Life and Death of Francesc Layret, Lawyer of the Workers of Catalonia*).<sup>^</sup> *Questions and Answers* is one of the best examples of documentary theatre, and was inspired by Peter Brook's staging of Rolf Hochhuth's *The Representative*. It was published in Paris and later performed clandestinely in various locations in Barcelona and the rest of Catalonia. Between 1971 and 1973 we still find texts which are identified with the Brechtian formula or Expressionist techniques: Jaume Melendres's *Meridians i paral·lels* (*Meridians and Parallels*), or Ramon Gomis's *La petita història d'un home qualsevol* (*The Little History of Anyman*). There are even examples of anti-theatre, in Jordi Bergonó's *Por* (*Fear*), which won the last Sagarra prize in 1973, and *Els mites de Bagot* (*The Myths of Bagot*) (1968), by Xavier Romeu, which cultivated techniques from the so-called Theatre of the Absurd with the aim of describing a rebellion at the heart of an authoritarian society.

A new development was the appearance in 1970 of *El Galliner* (1970), a collection dedicated to the publication of work by new Catalan dramatists.<sup>39</sup> The creation and subsequent development of *El Galliner* coincided with a gradual but irreversible decline of a certain vision of Independent Theatre. For the critical situation of the Independent Theatre was inextricably bound up with the historical realism movement of the early 1960s which had fostered and used it. A veiled reaction against the values of the 1960s had just begun.

Imagination was taking over from reason, and certain suppositions would soon be attacked: above all, those linked with realism, Brecht and epic theatre. In truth, if Benet, Teixidor and Melendres were still able to have their plays performed in the early 1970s, it was as an isolated phenomenon. In contrast, in 1972-73, certain critics enthusiastically hailed the appearance of a new author, Rodolf Sirera, particularly in connection with the City of Granollers Prize in 1971 for his *Plany en la mort d'Enric Ribera* (*Lament for the Death of Enric Ribera*). This play shows an important formal break with the epic theatre of the 1960s. Theatre critics were burying the 1960s inheritance and looking to new directions, such as the first volume of Joan Brossa's *Poesia escènica* (*Scenic Poetry*) published in 1973,<sup>40</sup> or to certain collective productions—in the manner of Ariane Mnouchkine's Theatre du Soleil—like *La setmana tràgica* (*The Tragic Week*) (1975), under the direction of Lluís Pasqual and Guillem-Jordi Graells, performed by the Escola de Teatre de l'Orfeó de Sants, a young non-professional group.<sup>41</sup>

During the final years of the Franco regime there occurred a further stage in the colonization by Madrid of Catalan theatre, especially by groups from the Independent sector, while their Catalan counterparts were gradually dismembered.<sup>42</sup> There was a lack of effective support from the Romea Theatre and the Castilian Teatro Nacional de Barcelona for those Catalan playwrights who continued writing, but could not expect their plays to be produced properly. The most important productions in Catalan were by a non text-based group, Els Joglars, with the revival of several of their works at the Capsa in 1974: *Eljoe* (*The Game*), *Cruel ubris* and *Mary d'Ous* (*Egg Mary*), and the first performance in Granollers of *Alias Serrallonga*. Those playwrights who had emerged from the 1960s found themselves in the same position as at the beginning: without the explicit support of their predecessors—Joan Oliver, Maria Aurèlia Capmany and Manuel de Pedrolo—and without the possibility of turning professional. Some of them abandoned the theatre apparently forever. Such examples include: Joan Soler i Antich, Alexandre Ballester, Baltasar Porcel, Jaume Melendres and Xavier Romeu.

### **The Emergence of Resident Companies after the End of Francoism**

The transition which followed the death of General Franco on 20 November 1975 finally opened up new horizons in both political and cultural spheres. In the theatre, the changes soon became evident. The publication in 1976 of the collection of interviews in Antoni Bartomeus's *Els autors de teatre català: Testimoni d'una marginació* (*Catalan Playwrights: Evidence of a Marginalization*),

with a lucid prologue by Joan-Anton Benach, offered food for thought on the virtual break-up of the Independent Theatre, closely linked to the sidelining of playwrights.<sup>43</sup> This marginalization also reflected the change of artistic direction which the Independent groups had taken, one which emphasized the importance of the role of the director at the expense of the author, as well as developing physical movement and collective creation.

The crisis in the Independent Theatre around 1970 meant that groups had to consider taking what was for them the difficult route of turning professional. This was a path that a collective like Els Joglars had already followed, and, with time, others would do the same. In fact, the disintegration of the Independent Theatre, coupled with the decreased importance of text-based theatre, favoured the development and subsequent dominance of non-textual theatre until well into the 1980s.

On the other hand, the start of a new political era meant the steady growth of an institutionalized theatre, subsidized by the new democratic political institutions at various levels: state, autonomous community (i.e. Catalonia), province (the Diputacions) and town council. The concept of institutionalizing the theatre began to take root among certain members of the theatrical profession, who longed to put behind them the previous era of deprivation. They wished to move to the sort of institutionalization which would leave artistic management in the hands of professionals, while at the same time highlighting the public service aspect of theatre. The result was that the *Assemblea d'Actors i Directors* (Standing Conference of Actors and Directors), formed in 1975, and very closely bound up with the transition that the country was going through, unsuccessfully demanded in February 1976 the creation of a Barcelona Municipal Theatre and a Theatre of Catalonia. At the same time, the *Assemblea* laid the groundwork for a parliamentary bill on theatre, a process to which the *Institut del Teatre* also contributed in a separate initiative.

Under pressure to respond to the new social and political environment, Barcelona City Council finally decided to charge the *Assemblea d'Actors i Directors* with the task of organizing a popular theatre festival at the Grec Theatre in the summer of 1976, a project which received broad public support.<sup>44</sup> However, when it was proposed that the *Assemblea d'Actors i Directors* should join with the *Assemblea de Catalunya* (Standing Conference of Catalonia), a broad democratic socio-political movement with activists drawn from different social classes, members of the *Assemblea d'Actors i Directors* who were close to the Anarchists left the association. The breakaway group formed the *Assemblea de Treballadors de l'Espectacle* (Standing Conference

of Theatre Workers), and, following a spectacular production of *Don Juan Tenorio* at the Mercat del Born in November 1976,<sup>45</sup> concentrated their activities at the Saló Diana between 1977 and 1979.

It was also towards the end of 1976 that the Teatre Lliure ('Free Theatre') was founded. It was a cooperative formed by a group of professionals from various collectives in the Independent Theatre sector.<sup>46</sup> Initially under the direction of Pere Planella, Lluís Pasqual and Fabià Puigserver, the new premises in the Gràcia district of Barcelona developed from the outset along the lines of the Piccolo Teatro in Milan, without abandoning the ADB model of an international repertoire combined with a much more limited presence of contemporary Catalan drama. They have performed Catalan versions of plays by Molière (*Le Misanthrope*, 1982), Shakespeare (*As You Like It*, 1983, *Timon of Athens*, 1991), Marlowe (*Edward II*, 1978), filtered through Brecht's version, Goldoni (*Una delle ultima sere di carnovale*, 1985), Beaumarchais (*Le Manage de Figaro*, 1989), Strindberg (*Miss Julie*, 1985), Chekhov (*The Three Sisters*, 1979), Brecht (*The Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny*, 1977, *The Good Woman of Setzuan*, 1988), Genet (*Le Balcon*, 1980), O'Neill (*Mourning Becomes Electro*, 1991), Botho Strauss (*The Park*, 1992), Yukio Mishima (*Madame de Sade*, 1986), Brian Friel (*Dancing at Lughnasa*, 1993), and Bernard-Marie Koltès (*Roberto Zucco*, 1993).

The Catalan presence is limited to *Camí de nit (Night Road)* (1976), written and directed by Lluís Pasqual; Espriu's *Story of Esther* (1982), co-produced with the Centre Dramàtic de la Generalitat, with whom they also produced Santiago Rusinol's *L'hèroe (The Hero)* in 1983; Guimerà, *Terra baixa (Marta of the Lowlands)* (1990); Joan Oliver, *El 30 d'abril (30th April)* (1987); Josep M. Benet i Jornet, *El manuscrit d'AU Bei (AU Bei's Manuscript)* (1988) and *Ai, carai! (Well I'm Blowed!)* (1989); Guillem-Jordi Graells, *Titànic 92* (1988); and Ramon Gomis's *Capvespre al jardí (Evening in the Garden)* (1990).

The Fundació Teatre Lliure—Teatre Públic de Barcelona (Teatre Lliure Foundation—Public Theatre of Barcelona) was created during the 1987-88 season, with the aim of furthering the objectives of the Lliure. In addition to Catalan and Spanish public institutions, internationally-known Catalan figures such as Montserrat Caballé, Antoni Tàpies and Núria Espert are members of this new Foundation in a private capacity. In January 1989 the City Council of Barcelona gave the Teatre Lliure its own building, the Palau d'Agricultura (Agriculture Palace), which is situated next to the Flower Market. This was intended to allow the Lliure collective, which has since 1988 had an active Associació d'Espectadors (equivalent to a Friends of the Lliure group), to

carry out a broader development of its activities in the more or less immediate future. The Teatre Lliure is also an active member of the Union of European Theatres which Giorgio Strehler founded in Paris in 1989. One year later, Lluís Pasqual, head of the Centro Dramàtico Nacional (National Theatre Centre in Madrid) between 1983 and 1989, was named director of the Odéon Theatre of Paris, a position in which he was confirmed in 1993.<sup>47</sup>

If the Lliure is today broadly accepted within Catalan society, it is because, among other things, it has been able to create its own distinctive trademark, in which text and spectacle are blended in an excellent example of contemporary Art Theatre. The late Fabià Puigserver (1938-1991) was undoubtedly the man who lent cohesion to the group, as well as acting as the undisputed teacher and guide of contemporary Catalan stage design.<sup>48</sup>

However, it was not until 1981 that Catalan theatre really became cemented on a solid institutional base, when the Culture Department of the Generalitat de Catalunya leased the premises of the Romea Theatre and decided to convert it into what is now the Centre Dramàtic de la Generalitat (Theatre Centre of the Generalitat, or CDG). Following a brief period under the management of Xavier Fàbregas, Hermann Bonnín, who had reorganized the Institut del Teatre in 1970,<sup>49</sup> was named as director of the CDG in January 1982. This body was formed as a theatre production centre with its own artistic direction, came under the jurisdiction of the Direcció General de Teatre, Música i Cinematografia (General Office of Theatre, Music and Film) and was funded by the Entitat Autònoma d'Organització d'Espectacles i Festes (Autonomous Entity for the Organization of Spectacles and Festivals) of the Generalitat, an autonomous body with a separate budget from that of the Culture Department. At the outset, Bonnín established several objectives, aiming to incorporate diverse theatrical trends within the first—and at that moment the only—institutional theatre in Catalonia. These objectives may be summed up as follows: to create a national and international repertoire; to encourage the writing of new works and the rediscovery of the avant-garde through the Teatre Obert (Open Theatre); to collaborate through co-productions with initiatives from established groups and theatres, both public and private; to offer to a wider audience some of the more contemporary productions within the International Theatre/Xavier Regàs Memorial Cycle, in memory of the Latin Theatre Cycle that Regàs had organized at the Romea between 1958 and 1969.

Bonnin's time at the CDG (1982-88) may be divided into two periods.<sup>50</sup> The first (1982-85) constitutes the real phase of expansion, in which the Centre produced texts from the national tradition which had been seldom or

badly performed by professional groups since 1939: *Batalla de reines* (*Battle of Queens*) (1984), by Frederic Soler; Àngel Guimerà's *Maria Rosa* (1983); and Josep M. de Sagarra's *El cafè de la Marina* (*Cafe Marina*) (1983). Only one post-1939 play was produced, Joan Brossa's *La pregunta perduda o el corral del lleó* (*The Lost Question or The Lion's Enclosure*), which was performed as part of the International Theatre Congress in Barcelona in 1985. Above all, non-Spanish works were performed: Ibsen's *Peer Gynt* (1983); Brecht's *Threepenny Opera* (1984); and Cocteau's *L'Aigle à deux tetes* (1985). As far as co-productions were concerned, in addition to those with the Lliure, special reference should be made to Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, with the Núria Espert Company, directed by Jorge Lavelli in 1983. Bonnin also invited the following companies: Els Joglars; the Comédie Française, which performed Molière's *Dom Juan* at the Liceu in 1982; and the Royal Shakespeare Company, which put on *Much Ado About Nothing* at the Tivoli Theatre in 1984. As in the early years of the Teatre Lliure, Catalan text-based theatre was relegated to a minor position, included within the Teatre Obert, a 'forum open to contemporary creation and experimentation', inspired by French models, and performed at various venues in Barcelona. Highlights were the first performances of *Brossàrium* (a compendium of Joan Brossa's works) (1982); Serra i Fontelles's *Deixeu-me ser mariner* (*Let Me Be a Sailor*) (1983); and Benet i Jornet's *La desaparició de Wendy* (*The Disappearance of Wendy*) (1985).

When in the 1985-86 season Bonnin changed the direction of the CDG, it—in theory—began to function according to a specific model of a National Theatre as a production unit, based just as much on the creation as on the dissemination of theatrical works. It had a public video library, a publications service (*Documents del Centre Dramàtic* and *Textos del Centre Dramàtic*), a computerized archive of productions, and a commendable policy of individual and group subscriptions. During Bonnin's final three seasons, following the abandonment of the Romea Fringe at the Teatre Obert, the CDG returned to its old premises, while waiting in vain for a second theatre for the Centre. In practice, the programming criteria were very similar to those of previous seasons. As for foreign theatre, the Centre produced texts by Schnitzler, Pirandello, Claudel and Duras. Catalan drama was limited to Sagarra's *La filla del Carmesí* (*Carmesí's Daughter*) (1987) and Quim Monzó's *El tango de Don Joan* (*Don Juan's Tango*) (1986), directed by Jerome Savary.

The appointment of Domènec Reixach as director of the CDG in 1988 signified a conscious decision to opt for contemporary Catalan drama, through new productions and the periodic awarding of grants aimed at promoting

playwriting. Reixach has restored dignity to writers of earlier decades, by ensuring that their plays have been performed under excellent artistic conditions: Jordi-Pere Cerdà's *Quatre dones i el sol* (*Four Ladies and the Sun*) (1990); Josep M. Muñoz Pujol's *Alfons Quan* (*Alfonso IV*) (1990); Josep M. Benet i Jornet's *Desig* (*Desire*) (1991); and Rodolf Sirera's *Indian Summer* (1991), as a co-production. He has provided opportunities for younger or unknown writers: *Elsa Schneider* (1989), *Tàlem* (*The Marriage Bed*) (1990) and *Carícies* (*Caresses*) (1992), all by Sergi Belbel; Francesc Pereira's *Infimitats* (*Base Deeds*) (1991); and Joan Casas's *Nus* (*Naked*) (1993). Finally, the CDG has incorporated into its programming authors from other literary genres, such as Manuel Vazquez Montalbàn, Eduard Mendoza, Montserrat Roig and Narcís Comadira.

In connection with the 1992 Olympic games, the CDG organized a highly successful programme of what it called 'classical Catalan theatre', with Sagarra's *L'hostal de la Glòria* (*Gloria's Inn*); *El desengany* (*Disillusionment*), a baroque piece by Francesc Fontanella never previously performed; Guimerà's *La filla del mar* (*The Daughter of the Sea*); Carles Soldevila's *Civilitzats, tanmateix* (*Civilized, Nonetheless*); and monologues from Víctor Català's *La infanticida* (*The Infanticide*) and Santiago Rusinol's *Feminista* (*Feminist*).<sup>51</sup>

In fact, the CDG is now following a line which a National Theatre could easily adopt,<sup>52</sup> especially since the Josep Maria Flotats Company, which was also subsidized by the Generalitat, and had its headquarters at the Poliorama Theatre from 1985 until 1994, was unable to establish the basis of a solid, coherent national theatrical policy. Flotats, in *Un projecte per al Teatre Nacional* (*A Project for the National Theatre*) (1989), insisted on favouring international drama, to the detriment of that of Catalonia.<sup>53</sup> Despite this, under pressure from the new direction taken by the Lliure and the CDG, Flotats did try in his last few seasons at the Poliorama to show an interest in Catalan theatre, in performances of such works as *Ara que els ametllers ja estan batuts* (*Now that the Almonds Have Been Shaken from Their Trees*) (1990), based on a selection of texts by Josep Pla; Flotats's own version of the Sirera brothers' *Cavalls de mar* (*Sea Horses*) (1992); and Rodolf Sirera's *El verí del teatre* (*The Audition*) (1993). The very small degree of attention which Flotats has devoted to Catalan drama contrasts with the quantity of foreign drama he has promoted. Examples include Wedekind, *Spring Awakening* (1986); Rostand, *Cyrano de Bergerac* (1985); Molière, *Le Misanthrope* (1989); Musset, *Lorenzaccio* (1988); Nathalie Sarraute, *Pour un oui ou pour un non* (1986); and Sam Shepard, *True West* (1990).



Josep Maria Flotats in *Ara que els ametllers ja estan batuts* (*Now that the Almonds Have Been Shaken from Their Trees*), at the Poliorama Theatre, Barcelona, 1990.

### Success Stories of the 1980s

Since the second half of the 1980s, Catalan theatre has shown signs of an extraordinary vitality and diversity over a broad range of activities.<sup>54</sup> Several factors are at work here. In the first place, there is the by now well established hegemony of non-text based theatre. The second factor is the considerable qualitative change brought to text-based drama by a combination of respected private and public institutions in Catalonia. The so-called 'return to the text', which most countries underwent during the 1980s, has produced such original results as those derived from the close collaboration between Robert Wilson and Heiner Muller, or between Patrice Chéreau and Bernard-Marie Koltès.

The year 1986 can probably be considered the date of the recovery of text-based drama in Catalonia. In November of that year, the Institut del Teatre and the Centre Dramàtic d'Osona (Theatre Centre of Osona) organized a conference on the topic: *La dramaturgia catalana actual: Autors i directors* (*Contemporary Catalan Theatre: Authors and Directors*). Prompted by this conference, the playwright Jordi Teixidor published an article (in Spanish) in the daily national newspaper *El País* entitled '(Una generación sin teatro?)' ('A Generation



without Theatre?'), in which he spoke openly about the marginalization of Catalan playwrights in the face of the ongoing institutionalization of the theatre. Teixidor insisted on a series of commonplace elements: the futility of text-based drama, the difficulties faced by playwrights trying to have their work performed in unambiguously professional conditions, since 'when they are performed, it is in an almost clandestine fashion and with derisory resources', or the danger of mediocrity resulting from production techniques which it had not been possible to develop normally during the Franco regime.<sup>55</sup>

Nine years after Teixidor's cry from the heart, it is undoubtedly true that the Teatre Lliure and the CDG have decided to give an increasingly greater place in their repertoire to productions of contemporary drama. This criterion has been followed by other private and public bodies and has made it possible to stage authors who were promoted in the 1960s and 1970s, such as Josep M. Muñoz Pujol, Jordi Teixidor, Josep M. Benet i Jornet and Ramon Gomis. The death of Salvador Espriu in 1985, of Joan Oliver in 1986 and of Manuel de Pedrolo in 1990, allied to the virtual inactivity of Joan Brossa as a 'theatrical poet', has meant that it is the new playwrights and those who were promoted in the 1960s and 1970s whose work is most performed. During the 1980s, there was a tendency for these younger playwrights to undertake a critical revision and substantial modification of the forms, techniques and themes of the past, when they were writing under the influence of Brecht and epic theatre. The 1980s have also allowed the development of a dramatic literature infused with new values. Of these new dramatists, it is Sergi Belbel whose work best demonstrates the influence of recent tradition, although his professional, ideological and aesthetic orientation was initially different from that of his predecessors.

The third factor influencing the vitality and diversity of contemporary Catalan theatre has been the strengthening of the role played by theatres run or supported by public bodies. As well as the CDG, the sense of public mission is important for the Teatre Lliure and the Josep Maria Flotats Company. While the inauguration of the National Theatre of Catalonia is yet to come, it should be mentioned that the Diputació of Barcelona set up the Theatre Centres of Osona and El Vallès in 1986. In 1985, the Barcelona City Council officially opened the former Mercat de les Flors (Flower Market), with the aim both of showing the best of experimental theatre and promoting contemporary dance in Catalonia.

The fourth factor is the development of a commercial theatre in Catalan, which has led to the recovery of the mythical pre-Civil War theatre in the Paral·lel. In the 1986-87 season, a producer of commercial theatre by the

name of Anexa, together with the groups El Tricicle and Dagoll-Dagom, set up Tres x 3 S.A. (Three x 3, pic), a joint company based at the Victòria Theatre, where non-textual performances by El Tricicle have alternated with revues or musical comedies by Dagoll-Dagom, including *The Mikado* (1986), *Mar i cel (Sea and Sky)* (1988), based on Àngel Guimerà's play of that name, and *Flor de nit (Night Flower)* (1992), based on a text by Manuel Vazquez Montalbàn.

The revival of a genuinely Catalan commercial theatre has not been paralleled by a similar revival of conventional Castilian Spanish theatre in Barcelona. The few examples there have been taken place at the Goya Theatre, while the Villarroel Theatre, Teixidors-Teatreneu or SAT (Sant Andreu Theatre) have favoured less conventional forms of commercial productions, with a predominance of works in Catalan.

The fifth and final point concerns the important role played by the Sala Beckett, which was created in 1988 by José Sanchis Sinisterra in order to accommodate the experiments of Teatre Fronterizo (Frontier Theatre), founded in 1977, but also to promote text-based theatre workshops as a place where young talent could be developed effectively. The appearance of so-called 'small-format' theatres like the Malic Theatre, Tantarantana Theatre and Artenbrut, as well as the reorganization of the Tàrrrega Theatre Festival as a market for alternative projects, indicate the rich variety of theatre on offer in Catalonia at the end of 1993.<sup>56</sup>

### The Future

If 1939 was in many ways zero hour for Catalan culture, Catalan theatre (both text-based and non-textual) has, since the 1980s, experienced one of the richest periods in its history. Catalonia still lacks the sort of genuine theatre policy coordinated by public bodies that exists in most European countries. Nevertheless, the Teatre Lliure, the CDG and the Josep Maria Flotats Company have taken part in specific European theatrical fora, encouraging a more active exchange between professionals. The aforementioned groups and others still have only limited access—once language barriers have been broken down—to foreign theatres. Such access is fully enjoyed by groups linked to non-textual theatre such as Els Joglars, Comediants and La Fura dels Baus.

The integration or participation of the Teatre Lliure and the CDG in international (generally European) organizations could permit a theatre policy which would favour contacts and artistic exchanges, at least within the framework of the EU. Such a policy would also promote and disseminate the most

representative contemporary Catalan plays in Europe. It would probably favour the development by Catalan public and private bodies of their principal role, which is to stage both foreign and Catalan drama.

Catalan theatre inevitably continues to have to bear the burden of a series of deficiencies that weigh heavily on its shoulders. These include the great gap between foreign schools of acting and their Catalan counterparts which lack a solid tradition; the minor importance that is still given to Catalan stage design; and the lack of competent theatrical publications to keep Catalans regularly in touch with what is going on in foreign theatre.<sup>57</sup> If Catalan theatre is to continue its expansion into the next century, it needs to achieve a balance, a genuinely shared public recognition of both text-based and non-textual theatre within a framework of an active, continually-developing theatrical reality.

### Notes

1. See Robert Marrast, *El teatre durant la guerra civil espanyola: Assaig d'història i documents*, Monografies de Teatre, 8 (Barcelona: Institut del Teatre/Edicions 62, 1978); Jordi Coca, Enric Gallén and Anna Vazquez, *La Generalitat republicana i el teatre (1931-1939)*, Monografies de Teatre, 11 (Barcelona: Institut del Teatre/Edicions 62, 1982).

2. A popular Nativity piece, adapted to suit the needs of individual communities, which is still performed during the Christmas period in Catalonia, *Els pastorets* depicts the clash between the forces of good and evil, represented on the one side by the shepherds (the *pastorets*), Christ and the angels, and on the other by the devils. Although it is essentially religious in character, it also possesses humour.

3. *La Vanguardia Espanola*, 31 December 1939, p. 3, reproduced in Josep Benet, *Catalunya sota el règim franquista: Informe sobre la persecució de la llengua i la cultura de Catalunya pel règim del General Franco (I<sup>a</sup> part)* (Barcelona: Blume, 1978), pp. 376-77. The decree is, of course, written in Castilian Spanish.

4. See Enric Gallén, *El teatre a la ciutat de Barcelona durant el règim franquista*, Monografies de Teatre, 19 (Barcelona: Institut del Teatre/Edicions 62, 1985), pp. 115-20. On the publication of the translations in seven volumes between 1945 and 1953, see Joan Samsó Llenas, 'La cultura catalana: Entre la clandestinitat i la represa pública' (unpublished doctoral thesis, Universitat de Barcelona, 1976), I, 361-68.

5. See Bartolomé Barba, *Dos años al frente del gobierno civil de Barcelona y varios ensayos*, 2nd edn (Madrid: Javier Morata, 1948), pp. 28-29.

6. See Enric Gallén, *El teatre a la ciutat de Barcelona*, pp. 138-52; 'La represa de Josep M. de Sagarra (1946-54)', in *Homenatge a Antoni Comas* (Barcelona: Universitat de Barcelona, Facultat de Filologia, 1985), pp. 133<sup>^</sup>4-9. For Sagarra's contribution to Catalan theatre in general, see the illustrated *Josep Maria de Sagarra, home de teatre: 1894-1994*, ed. by Enric Gallén and Miquel M. Gibert (Barcelona: Centre Dramàtic de La Generalitat de Catalunya, 1994).

7. Jordi Sarsanedas, 'Teatre català al Romea', *Ariel*, supplement no. 2 (September 1948), 7.
8. A district to the south of Barcelona.
9. Joan Triadú, '*Les vinyes del Priorat*', *Ariel*, no. 22 (February 1951), 43<sup>^</sup>5 (p. 46).
10. Joan de Malniu, 'Perills que assetgen la nostra cultura', *Occident*, nos. 2-3 (June-July 1949), 66-71 (p. 68).
11. Fèlix Bohigas, 'El ocaso del teatro Catalan', *Momento*, no. 108 (9 April 1953), 26; M., 'El ocaso del teatro Catalan', *Laye*, no. 10 (December 1950), 14.
12. Enric Gallén, *El teatre a la ciutat de Barcelona*, pp. 188-245. See also Enric Gallén, 'Entre la supervivència i la institucionalització', in *Romea, 125 anys* (Barcelona: Generalitat de Catalunya, Departament de Cultura, 1989), pp. 101-05.
13. On the work of this actor see Josep M. Poblet, *Joan Capri*, Biografies Populars, 7 (Barcelona: Alcides, 1964); Joan Oliver, 'Els monòlegs de Joan Capri', in *Tros de paper*, Cinc d'Oros, 2 (Barcelona: Ariel, 1970), pp. 131-32; Josep Pla, 'Joan Capri', in *Homenots: Quarta sèrie, Obres completes* (Barcelona: Destino, 1975), XXIX, 437-79.
14. Néstor, 'Al doblar la esquina: El teatre Catalan', *Destino*, 6 June 1959, p. 25.
15. 'Cartas al director', *Destino*, 13 June 1959, p. 3. Nestor's position, reaffirmed in another article, 'La crítica y el insulto', *Destino*, 20 June 1959, p. 25, generated a fruitful polemic in the magazine. See, for example, the articles by Josep M. de Sagarra in the new section 'Antepalco': 'Sobre teatro', 20 June 1959, p. 33; 'Todavía el teatro', 27 June 1959, p. 15; 'Teatro protegido', 4 July 1959, p. 13. See also the article by Xavier Regàs, 'El problema del teatro Catalan', 11 July 1959, p. 43.
16. Jordi Carbonell, 'El teatre d'ahir, d'avui i de demà', in *El llibre de tothom* (Barcelona: Alcides, 1963), p. 120.
17. Carbonell, 'El teatre d'ahir', p. 120.
18. The contribution of *modernisme* to the development of Catalan theatre is discussed in the Introduction.
19. See Jordi Coca, *L'Agrupació Dramàtica de Barcelona: Intent de teatre nacional català (1955-1963)*, Monografies de Teatre, 9 (Barcelona: Institut del Teatre/Edicions 62, 1978).
20. An *auca* is a collection of drawings, accompanied by short, often satirical verse, which tells the life story of the fictional character in question.
21. See Joaquim Molas, 'Els "Quaderns de Teatre" de l'Agrupació Dramàtica de Barcelona', *Serra d'Or*, 3, no. 1 (January 1961), 22-23.
22. The dates given in parentheses are the dates of the appearance of the Catalan translations.
23. See Enric Gallén, *El teatre a la ciutat de Barcelona*, pp. 154-58.
24. See Xavier Fàbregas, 'Tres notes sobre l'Escola d'Art Dramàtic Adrià Gual', *Serra d'Or*, 18, no. 203 (15 August 1976), 541<sup>^</sup>6.
25. See Guillem-Jordi Graells, *L'Institut del Teatre: 1913-1988: Història gràfica* (Barcelona: Institut del Teatre, Diputació de Barcelona, 1990), especially pp. 83-131.

26. See Salvat's own appraisal in Ricard Salvat, 'Concreció de la nova objectivitat: el realisme èpic', in *El teatre contemporani: 2/ El Teatre és una ètica?—De Ionesco a Brecht*, Llibres a l'Abast, 40 (Barcelona: Edicions 62, 1966), pp. 79-145; Javier Orduna, *El teatre alemany contemporani a l'estat espanyol fins el 1975*, Monografies de Teatre, 25 (Barcelona: Institut del Teatre, 1988), pp. 136-2.
27. See Gonçal Pérez D'Olaguer, *Teatre independent a Catalunya*, trans. by Maria Luïsa Coromines, Quaderns de Cultura, 62 (Barcelona: Bruguera, 1970); Xavier Fàbregas, 'Deu anys de teatre independent', *Serra d'Or*, 14, no. 159 (15 December 1972), 817-35, reproduced in *Teatre en viu (1969-1972)*, Monografies de Teatre, 23 (Barcelona: Institut del Teatre/Edicions 62, 1987), pp. 209-18.
28. See Joan Castells, 'Els premis de teatre (1963-1973)', *Els Marges*, no. 4 (May 1975), 106-16.
29. See Jordi Carbonell, 'Teatre èpic', *Serra d'Or*, 7, no. 11 (November 1965), 835-39; Joaquim Molas, 'Pròleg', in Baltasar Porcel, *Teatre*, Col·lecció Europa de Literatura, 2 (Palma de Mallorca: Daedalus, 1965), pp. 7-25.
30. Xavier Fàbregas, 'El teatre català de 1965 a 1967', *El Pont*, no. 31 (May 1969), 45.
31. See Ricard Salvat, *Els meus muntatges teatrals*, L'Escorpí, 31 (Barcelona: Edicions 62, 1971), especially pp. 9-20.
32. Prior to 1975, one could mention *Scena* (1949-68), linked to the FESTA group, which ran to 168 issues, *La Carreta* (1961-66) (18 issues), and *Yorick* (1965-74) (64 issues). The year 1957 saw the first appearance of *Estudiós Escénicos*, the organ of the Institut del Teatre (Theatre Institute): the name was changed from the Castilian Spanish *Estudiós Escénicos* to the Catalan *Estudis Escènics* from number 22 in March 1983.
33. E. X., 'Paraules sobre el darrer ple dels premis', *Serra d'Or*, 11, no. 112 (15 January 1969), 27-34 (p. 32).
34. See 'Deu notes pragmàtiques' and 'Professionalitat i oportunitisme', in Feliu Formosa, *Per una acció teatral*, L'Escorpí, 28 (Barcelona: Edicions 62, 1971), pp. 77-84.
35. For details of a questionnaire distributed to the spectators of the Capsa Theatre in February 1974, see Jaume Melendres, 'El "test" del CAPSA', *Primer Acto*, no. 171 (July-August 1974), 83-88. For a critical appraisal of the Capsa Theatre, see Joan-Anton Benach, 'Pròleg', in Enric Gallén, *El teatre a la ciutat de Barcelona*, pp. 5-17.
36. Its name is in Castilian Spanish. See Gonzalo Pérez de Olaguer, *TNB: Història d'una imposició*, Col·lecció Estudis, 4 (Barcelona: Institut del Teatre, 1990).
37. On 'total theatre' and collective creation see David Bradby, *Modern French Drama: 1940-1990*, 2nd edn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp. 116-226; David Jeffery, 'Towards *creation collective*', in *European Theatre 1960-1990: Cross-Cultural Perspectives*, ed. by Ralph Yarrow (London: Routledge, 1992), pp. 11-44.
38. On Capmany's theatrical activities see the articles by Joan-Anton Benach, Josep Anton Codina, Josep Montanyès and Ricard Salvat in *Maria Aurèlia Capmany i Farnés (1918-1991)*, Gent de la Casa Gran, 6 (Barcelona: Ajuntament de Barcelona, 1992), pp. 129-206.

39. See J. M. Benet i Jornet, 'Cent volums d'*El Galliner*', in Àngel Guimerà, *La filla del mar*, Els Llibres de l'Escorpi: Teatre/El Galliner, 100 (Barcelona: Edicions 62, 1987), pp. 5-11.
40. See Alex Broch, 'El teatre de Joan Brossa: De l'al·lucinació a la imatge', *Canigó*, 20 April 1974, p. 12; Xavier Fàbregas, Introduction to *Poesia escènica*, 6 vols (Barcelona: Edicions 62, 1973-83), I (1973), 5-52.
41. See Xavier Fàbregas, '*La setmana tràgica*, del document a la reflexió', *Serra d'Or*, 17, no. 185 (15 February 1975), 122-24, reproduced in *Teatre en viu (1969-1972)*, pp. 165-68; Joaquim Vila i Folch, 'Grups: Escola de Teatre de l'Orfeó de Sants', *Avui*, 29 October 1976, p. 31.
42. See Xavier Fàbregas, 'Particularitats de la nova temporada teatral', *Canigó*, 23 December 1972, p. 11.
43. Antoni Bartomeus, *Els autors de teatre català: Testimoni d'una marginació*, La Mata de Jonc, 6 (Barcelona: Curial, 1976).
44. See Antoni Bartomeus, *Grec-76: Al servei del poble*, Petit Avenç, 1 (Barcelona: Avance, 1976); *Grec: 1929-1986* (Barcelona: Ajuntament de Barcelona, 1987), pp. 81-107.
45. See *Mercat del Born: 'Don Juan Tenorio': Anàlisi d'una autogestió per l'A.D.T.E.* (Barcelona: Assembla de Treballadors de l'Espectacle—Iniciativa» Editoriales, n.d.).
46. See *El Teatre Lliure cumple diez anos*, Cuadernos *El Publico*, 10 (Madrid: Centro de Documentación Teatral, 1986); *Teatre Lliure: 1976-1987* (Barcelona: Teatre Lliure/Publicacions de l'Institut del Teatre, 1987).
47. See Ytak, *Lluís Pasqual: Camí de teatre*, Col. Escena (Barcelona: Alter Pirene, 1993); Patrícia Gabancho, *La creació del món: Catorze directors expliquen el seu teatre*. Monografies de Teatre, 24 (Barcelona: Institut del Teatre, 1988), pp. 241-61.
48. Isidre Bravo, *L'escenografia catalana* (Barcelona: Diputació de Barcelona, 1986), p. 279. See also Patrícia Gabancho, *La creació del món*, pp. 305-22; *Fabià Puigserver: Hombre de teatro*, ed. by Guillem-Jordi Graells and Juan Antonio Hormigón, Sèrie: Teoria y Práctica del Teatro, 6 (Madrid: Publicaciones de la Asociación de Directores de Escena de España, 1993). The last reference contains many illustrations of Puigserver's designs.
49. Guillem-Jordi Graells, *L'Institut del Teatre*, pp. 133-73.
50. See Enric Gallén, 'Entre la supervivència i la institucionalització', in *Romea, 125 anys*, pp. 95-119; and *1981-1991—CDG 10 anys* (Barcelona: CDG, Institut del Teatre, Diputació de Barcelona, 1991).
51. See *Cicle de teatre clàssic català: Temporada 1991-1992* (Barcelona: Generalitat de Catalunya, Departament de Cultura, 1992).
52. See the articles by Joan de Sagarra, 'El futur del Centre Dramàtic', and Enric Gallén, 'Un programa nacional', *Quadern, El País*, 21 March 1991, p. 6.
53. See Josep Maria Flotats, *Un projecte per al Teatre Nacional* (Barcelona: Edicions de la Revista de Catalunya, 1, 1989).
54. See the dossier 'Intervenció pública i oferta teatral a Catalunya', in *Cultura*, October 1990, pp. 27-50; the section 'El teatre de Barcelona, avui', in *Barcelona:*

*Metròpolis Mediterrànea*, 17 (1990), 65-128; 'Dossier: Dramatúrgia catalana actual', in *Pausa*, nos. 9-10 (September-December 1991), 23-91.

55. Jordi Teixidor, '^Una generación sin teatro?', *El País*, 13 November 1986, p. 35.

56. See 'Dossier: Petit format', *Pausa*, no. 13 (March 1993), 13^9.

57. Two journals should be mentioned: *Pausa* (founded in 1989), publishes articles on theatre, is linked to the Sala Beckett and co-published by the Institut del Teatre and the Diputació of Barcelona; *Escena* deals with contemporary issues and, following its initial period in 1989-90 when nine numbers were published, reappeared in September 1993 as a bimonthly magazine.

## Chapter 2

### Drama and Society

**Rodolf Sirera**

(with a supplement on Josep Lluís & Rodolf Sirera by John London)

Contrary to a widely-held view, the Francoist victory did not in the medium term signify a radical change in Catalan theatre. Instead, several of its minority trends and authors simply disappeared. In some instances, this disappearance occurred in a quite literal sense, either through death or, as was the case with many writers, through exile. At the same time, the more conservative, innocuous and commercially-oriented features of pre-Civil War theatre were consolidated, unhindered except by the limits imposed by the Franco regime as far as religious, family and sexual matters were concerned. This is due in part to the fact that even at the height of the Civil War, when Republican Spain was immersed in an unsuccessful attempt to carry out a proletarian revolution, an openly political theatre was never fully developed. There are a few very isolated exceptions that are valid as historical documents, but far less interesting from a strictly theatrical perspective. In fact, the theatre of the Civil War—the type performed by collectivized companies controlled by trade unions—was not radically different from that of the pre-Civil War period, nor from the majority of theatre which continued to be offered after the War, once the use of the language was again authorized.

Hence, one should not forget that most of the Catalan plays which were performed for nearly two decades after 1946 were essentially commercial, populist, melodramatic or, at the very best, isolated attempts to recover a form of high comedy from a stylistic point of view. Innovation was pushed to one side. This can be explained only partially by the political repression and problems of censorship which were undoubtedly severe. More fundamental causes were that Catalan audiences had no respect for the theatre and that those who controlled the production and promotion of plays lacked ambition. They were politically very moderate or conservative, in Josep Maria Benet i Jornet's words, 'bungling shopkeepers who, in the end, demonstrated that they did not even



possess business sense'.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, no generation of realist dramatists emerged in Catalonia, in contrast with contemporary Castilian theatre, where dramatists of the stature of Antonio Buero Vallejo (1916-) and Alfonso Sastre (1926-) were leaders in the genre.

It is hardly surprising, therefore, that the most interesting theatre of the 1940s and 1950s was precisely the sort which turned its back on the frail infrastructure of the professional Catalan stage, but which was always in the shadow of contemporary Castilian theatre. It developed out of *marginal* schemes which were civic or cultural rather than strictly theatrical; in other words, they were unconnected with contemporary professional practices. Several obstacles were placed in the way of the performance of these marginal works, and many of them never even appeared in print. This initially was a theatre written by authors who were not primarily dramatists, or who, attracted by the investigation of form, felt themselves to be automatically excluded from the limited and strictly conservative theatrical market of the period. Because of this, they felt able to 'disregard their immediate surroundings and embark on adventures of a certain scope',<sup>2</sup> which only later came to be properly appreciated. In addition, it should also be remembered that this was a type of theatre which, because of the political nature of its texts, had very little chance of obtaining the official authorization necessary for performance.

Whereas some dramatists remained in the realm of minority theatre, others directly confronted the commercial stage. The result was a new kind of drama which came to terms with the socio-political reality of the period.

### Joan Oliver

The dramatic career of Joan Oliver (1899-1986) is important for an understanding of the development of Catalan theatre in the post-Civil War period. He was simultaneously a playwright and a poet, writing poems under the pseudonym of Pere Quart. Unlike other playwrights of his generation, Oliver always tried to write drama that might be called normal, or, in Xavier Fàbregas's words, 'capable of fitting into the established moulds of the mechanics of the theatre—a manager, a company of professional actors, a regular season and a broad-based and established audience',<sup>3</sup> similar to the situation that prevailed in Catalonia in the decades preceding the Civil War. However, he was prevented from achieving his goal by an often unexpected set of circumstances, both before and after 1936.

Oliver's early plays were elegant, sarcastic, and necessarily guided by the rules of the *piece bien faite*. *Allò que tal vegada s'esdevingué* (*What Might*

*Have Happened*) (1930), a 'bourgeois' comedy whose main characters are Adam, Eve and other figures from Genesis, stands out from this early group because of its amusing religious iconoclasm. Despite this, it did not find a niche in Catalan drama of the 1930s. Nonetheless, the author did not hesitate to accept the new situation in which the Catalan theatre found itself at the outbreak of the Civil War. Thus, in the middle of the War, in 1938, Oliver wrote what is undoubtedly the most important Catalan political play of the conflict, *La fam* (*Hunger*).

*Hunger* is Oliver's only political work, with the exception of an earlier text, *El 30 d'abril* (*30th April*), which was written between 1934 and 1936. This earlier play is a whimsical comedy, or a 'historico-burlesque accident' as the author calls it, and was not performed or published until the appearance of the *Complete Works*. It starts from the assumption that an independent Catalonia has existed ever since the Middle Ages, and its plot concerns the preparations for the invasion of the Balearic Islands by the imaginary Catalan King James VIII following the conquest of Valencia and Roussillon.<sup>4</sup> For Xavier Fàbregas, who sees the play as a parable, *30th April* demonstrates how 'the weakness of a capitalist, expansionist society prevents the social transformation of Catalonia even more effectively than the foreign power [Spain]', and how 'the frustrated longing for national fulfilment can hide the deception of reactionary elements'.<sup>5</sup> Fàbregas was undoubtedly influenced in his comments by the mood of social radicalism which was prevalent in Spanish intellectual circles of the 1960s and 1970s, and with hindsight it is difficult to sustain such views. For, while the play's content might have provoked a degree of scandal when it was written and more especially in the post-Civil War years, the political message is diluted by a series of situations which are more suited to the music-hall than the serious stage. It is these situations which control the development of the play, and not even the structure, which is full of ramifications, manages to bind the disparate elements into a coherent whole. It should be emphasized that traditional Catalanism does not appear in a positive light: the King, who should symbolize a spirit of national affirmation, takes Castilian (i.e. Spanish) classes because

JAUME [*speaks in Castilian Spanish*] ... I want to embark on a crusade to purify my language. The steady and considerable flow of immigrants from Spain has corrupted . . .

CÉSPEDES (*corrects him*) Corrupted.

JAUME . . . has corrupted our spoken language, and in some

social sectors, especially in the middling class . . .

CÉSPEDES (*corrects him*) Middle class . . .

JAUME Yes . . . the ravages are very notable. My ancestors did not deal with the problem and I love . . . , er want<sup>6</sup> to make up for the neglect. . . That is why I intend to make the teaching of Spanish obligatory, and I am providing the example for people to follow. Dear . . . , er because<sup>7</sup> the best way to decastilianize Catalan is to have an in-depth knowledge of both languages.<sup>8</sup>

The invasion of Mallorca is about to fail as the King has won first prize in the lottery and forgets his obligations, amidst the machinations of his two mistresses and advisors, and an exotic Oriental spy, Xamuka Xepé, in the service of the highest bidder. In the end, the King is successful in both war and love, in the shape of the (female) Councillor of War, whose surname is the same as that of Antonio Maura, the leader of the Spanish Conservative Party during the early years of this century and his son Miguel, who attempted to create a democratic Right during the Republic.<sup>9</sup>

*Hunger* was first performed in 1938 and won the Teatre Català de la Comèdia Prize in the same year. This play was clearly influenced by the events of May 1937, when, during four days of great tension and violence, groups of Anarchists and Members of the POUM (Workers' Party of Marxist Unity) fought against the forces of the Republican Government and the Communists.<sup>10</sup> The POUM, which did not belong to the Communist International and was accused by the latter of being Trotskyist, was practically neutralized during this conflict."

Oliver does not abandon conventional dramatic structures in *Hunger*, but rather modifies them for his own uses. The traditional three acts of contemporary commercial theatre are replaced by six 'episodes', although the work is still referred to as a 'comèdia',<sup>12</sup> a description that is hardly appropriate in the circumstances. It centres on the ideological conflict between two stereotypical characters. On the one hand there is Samsó, who personifies strength, instinct, individualism, spontaneity and impetuous bravery, but also uncomradely egotism, an inability to plan for the future, and unreliability. On the other side of the equation is Nel, who symbolizes reason, natural goodness, a sense of collective commitment, and thought, but also a surfeit of analysis, a lack of physical bravery and an indecisiveness which can paralyse him and make him unable to act at critical moments. This confrontation takes place at the heart of a revolution, which Samsó, with his blind and spontaneous valour,

brings to a triumphal conclusion, but which he is incapable of managing afterwards, because he cannot stand organization or discipline. At the end of the play, Samsó returns to his life of freedom, as outsider or *clochard*, incapable of stirring himself for anything except his basic instinct—hunger. Nonetheless, he refuses to be manipulated by the careerists who are preparing the counter-revolution. Although the work may appear not to be set in a specific time and place, there are obvious references to the tense and violent struggles between Anarchists and Communists, which characterized the Republican side during the Civil War. *Hunger* is theatrically gripping, despite the sketchiness and artificiality of some of the situations and characters—in particular Lupa, Nel's partner who later becomes Samsó's mistress and is eventually saved from disillusionment and humiliation by the love which her first partner has continued to feel for her. In Benet i Jornet's words, the play represents 'a genuine attempt at renewal', which, 'if it had been possible to continue, could have subsequently been completed'.<sup>13</sup>

The defeat of the Republic forced Oliver into exile, along with so many intellectuals. He was not to return until 1948. He took up the theatre again at the end of the 1950s, when he attempted, with little success, to write traditional plays of the 'well-made' variety. Of the three plays included in *Tres comèdies (Three Plays)* (1957),<sup>14</sup> *Primera representació (First Performance)*, *Ball robat (Stolen Dance)*—one of Oliver's best plays—and *Una drecera (A Short Cut)*, only the last title was ever performed commercially (at the Romea Theatre in 1961). *A Short Cut* was a deliberate attempt by the author to write 'a box-office success', along the lines of the 'religious melodramas of the period',<sup>15</sup> and was performed under the title *La gran pietat (Great Piety)*. However, it was not the popular success that Oliver had hoped, and, as a result, he subsequently limited himself to translations and to short plays. One of his translations, a free adaptation of Shaw's *Pygmalion* (1957), has become a classic of its kind.<sup>16</sup> His short plays met with some success within the Independent Theatre sector. It is significant that artists working within this sector found Oliver's major works at the very least just as distant from their own preoccupations, if not completely at odds with them.

### Salvador Espriu

On 26 January 1939, Francoist troops entered Barcelona. A few weeks later, in early March, the poet Salvador Espriu (1913-1985) wrote *Antígona (Antigone)*, the first of his relatively small collection of dramatic works. In 1936 he had translated Llorenç Villalonga's *Fedra (Phaedra)* (originally written

in Castilian) into Catalan; years later, Espriu was to create his own version of the classical myth in the shape of *Una altra Fedra, si us plau* (*Another Phaedra, Please*), which he wrote for the actress Núria Espert in 1977. Apart from these plays, Espriu's dramatic output is limited to a couple of texts for poetry and music shows; to the dramatic works produced by the director Ricard Salvat and based mainly on narrative texts by Espriu, under the title of *Ronda de mort a Sinera* (*Death Around Sinera*) (1965); and the work which represents the high point of his drama, *Primera història d'Esther* (*The Story of Esther*), the original version of which was completed in 1948, and which is unanimously considered by critics to be 'one of Espriu's most brilliant texts, and indeed one of the most brilliant plays in the whole of Catalan drama'.<sup>17</sup> *The Story of Esther* was first performed by the Agrupació Dramàtica de Barcelona in 1957, and again in 1965 by the Escola d'Art Dramàtic Adrià Gual, directed by Ricard Salvat. This second production was extremely well received, and was one of two Espriu works produced by Salvat in that year, the other being *Death Around Sinera*. Both productions were subsequently performed at important European theatre festivals, in Paris, Nancy and Venice.

Esriu's *Antigone* is a bitter reflection on the Civil War. Eteocles and Polynices, sons of Oedipus and brothers of Antigone and Ismene, have been killed fighting for their father's throne, which is subsequently occupied by their uncle, Creon. One of the brothers, Eteocles, is judged to have acted justly, while the other, Polynices, is considered unworthy, and on Creon's orders his remains are not buried: 'the power that has emerged from a harsh combat does not want embers stirring beneath the ashes. Cruel laws must be passed to keep the lips of the vanquished man silent.'<sup>18</sup> As we all know, Antigone did not obey her uncle: faced with a choice between the laws of man and her own conscience, she chose the latter, although it meant that she would die. Her death is also a sacrifice of atonement, so that the curse on Thebes may be lifted. Antigone's sacrifice may be seen as a parallel with Espriu's own self-imposed 'civil death'. After the beginning of the Civil War he lived the life of a recluse

which was on the one hand the necessary abandonment of his individual projects, but on the other implied an absolute rejection of the new situation. This was to be understood in later years as a political and ethical demonstration of a kind of protest and a lack of conformity.<sup>19</sup>

A new character was introduced into the 1963 version of the play, which, with minor revisions, appeared in the *Complete Works*. He is the Lucid Counsellor,

and in some ways he conveys the author's views on the unjust death of Antigone. In the following speech, he recommends that silence be maintained:

because lucidity, which leaves the action intact together with its unintelligible complications, immediately irritates everyone, even the most lucid. And because, if everything is weighed up, perhaps my words do represent a threat, not to me as speaker but to you as listener.

(p. 59)

Espru's fascination with the classical world, as illustrated in *Antigone*, is also evident in his narrative prose, written mainly before the Civil War. The classical cycle is completed by further references in *The Story of Esther* which are brought together in a daring synthesis. On the one hand is Biblical culture, in particular the Old Testament, from which he takes the image of the Jews as a humiliated, persecuted and imprisoned people, just like the Catalans in the post-Civil War period. On the other hand are symbolic worlds, created by the author from memories and from characters of the Arenys de Mar (which he calls Sinera) of his childhood,<sup>20</sup> and of the Barcelona (which he calls Lavinia) of his adult life, both of which are integrated into the land of Konilòsia, a mythical version of Catalonia. Espru had developed this world in his narrative texts, especially in the collection entitled *Ariadna al laberint grotesc* (*Ariadne in the Grotesque Labyrinth*) (1935). In this collection we find all the 'schematic and grotesque, anti-psychological, dehumanized' characters<sup>21</sup> which, with the exception of *Antigone*, shape the author's dramatic universe.

Consistent with this idea is the fact that, in *The Story of Esther*, the Biblical Shushan is occasionally transformed into Sinera, some of whose characters play an important role. (Examples are the Most High, the blind man, Snow White and her female assistant.) Thanks to the way in which Esther manipulates her husband (the King of Persia), the Jewish people, 'a people marginalized within a state governed by totalitarian methods', manage to save themselves from the machinations orchestrated against them by Prime Minister Hainan. As a result, the Jews 'for once manage to hold the reins of power. However, once they are in power, they behave no more wisely than those who usually exercise it',<sup>22</sup> In the play, Espru refers to 'the monotonous series of conflicts and assassinations, excesses and infamies, because in Persia and all over the world a cruel idiocy has always enslaved man and made his history a nightmare of dark and barren pain',<sup>23</sup>

*The Story of Esther* is presented aesthetically as a puppet farce, in a fashion which recalls Valle-Inclan's *esperpentos*.<sup>24</sup> There are many parallels between the *esperpentos* and *The Story of Esther*, not least in the rich and complex vocabulary which was hitherto unknown in Catalan theatre. Critics have pointed out resemblances to the late plays of Valle-Inclan, and similar comparisons could be made between Espriu and Brecht, although, curiously, Espriu confesses that he was not familiar with Brecht's work when he wrote *The Story of Esther*.<sup>25</sup>\* The puppet convention facilitates the transference of characters from the Biblical world (which is ultimately a *literary* world) to the *invented* world of Sinera, and helps to create a large number of varied cross-references which act as an element of *alienation*. However, in contrast to Brecht, the world in which these characters move is almost exclusively a verbal one, and does not possess any narrative function if we except the speeches of the Most High. It is a world where the characters can enjoy the pleasure of discourse, while formalizing its rules quite consciously in the process. One could even claim that the characters exist only to be able to express themselves through the spoken word.

*The Story of Esther* is an almost unique play, an isolated example with no clear predecessors or successors, be it within Espriu's own sparse dramatic output or in any of the Catalan playwrights who have followed him. It is the result of a poet's fascination with the aesthetic and moral possibilities of drama. It was written at a precise moment in its author's literary development, and was in tune with his intellectual commitment to the time and to the country in which he lived. As a result, it is virtually impossible to reproduce outside this context and these circumstances the difficult balance which the play achieves in a masterly way using such a variety of linguistic registers. *The Story of Esther* is one of the most emblematic, surprising Catalan plays of the post-Civil War period and one of the great monuments within the whole of Catalan literature.

The world of classical mythology and the ever-present background of Sinera are also found in Espriu's final dramatic experiment, *Another Phaedra, Please* (1977), and, in Ricard Salvat's adaptations for the theatre of Espriu's non-theatrical work: *Gent de Sinera (Sinera People)* (1963), and *Death Around Sinera* (1965), of which the former was a first draft.<sup>26</sup> Salvat's interpretations incorporate new elements and offer new perspectives on the original literary material. They are the result of his particular interests and training as a director.

### Josep Maria Benet i Jornet

At the same time as Ricard Salvat was putting on his adaptations of texts by Espriu, the first plays of Josep Maria Benet i Jornet (1940-) were being premiered. Benet has justly been described as the most important Catalan playwright of the last thirty-five years, and his work highlights the generation gap that developed in post-Civil War Catalan drama. It has already been stressed that, political restrictions and censorship apart, in the 1940s and the 1950s, the most innocuous and conservative formulae of pre-Civil War Catalan drama were repeated ad infinitum, and that the most interesting texts were those which were written beyond the boundaries of professional theatre. This disconnection was deepened in the 1960s and the 1970s, with the appearance of a new generation of writers and theatrical practitioners—from the so-called Independent Theatre—whose origins and aims were very different to those of the preceding generation. Theatre was now linked to social commitment and to a clear desire to confront the Franco regime. Much of this drama is a product of a specific place and period of history and in general it has not survived the passage of time particularly well.<sup>27</sup> Benet i Jornet's plays have endured better than those of any other playwright. This is undoubtedly due to the fact that the author has always tried to transcend the limitations of the specific socio-political situation into which he was born, and to write plays that could be equally valid in any period and within any set of circumstances.

Benet i Jornet first became known in 1963, when he won the Josep M. de Sagarra Theatre Prize, for *Una vella, coneguda olor* (*An Old, Familiar Smell*), which presents the hopeless life of the lower classes in post-Civil War Catalonia. The play had the same importance for Catalan drama as Antonio Buero Vallejo's *Historia de una escalem* (*Story of a Stairway*) (1949) did for its Castilian Spanish counterpart.<sup>28</sup> Benet's early works alternate between a realist and a more symbolic mode. The realist plays contain a blend of elements from three different sources: Spanish dramatists of the 1950s and early 1960s (such as Antonio Buero Vallejo and Lauro Olmo), North-American playwrights (such as O'Neill, Williams and Miller), and traditional Catalan theatre. A case in point is *Fantasia per a un auxiliar administratiu* (*Fantasy for an Administrative Assistant*) (1964).

The plays of the symbolic mode are characterized by the influence of Brecht, the best example being the *Drudània* trilogy, comprising *Cançons perdudes* (*Drudània*) (*Lost Songs [Drudània]*) (1966), *Marc i Jofre o els alquimistes de la fortuna* (*Marc and Jofre or the Alchemists of Fortune*) (1968), and *La nau* (*The Ship*) (1969). *Drudània* is an imaginary country,



enclosed 'within a state of a region of that name, between Greece and Albania, facing the sea, neither too rich nor too poor',<sup>29</sup> It is a symbol of Catalonia which at that moment was beginning to struggle openly to recover its own identity. Although the three plays belong to the same cycle, they are quite different stylistically, and there is in fact only a limited connection between them. In the last of the three, *The Ship*, *Drudània* is reduced to a mere literary allusion, and has no link with the action of the play.

*Lost Songs* presents not only a conflict between stultifying tradition and progress, which symbolizes access to the modern world, but also the class struggle, and the exploitation of the weak by the powerful. It is an unmistakably political play, still basically realist, but with some symbolist features, such as the portrayal of the half-crazed beggar woman *La Draps*, who is a direct result of *Espriu's* influence. Techniques from epic theatre are present in *Marc and Jofre*, including the introduction of adventure-novel themes, a common feature of Benet's subsequent plays. The play develops on different time levels: a twentieth-century researcher writes a novel about a character from the past, *Marc*. *Marc* is a poet, an intellectual full of doubts, a coward, and, in the end, a collaborator with the oppressor; but history has converted him into a popular hero. *The Ship* takes 'as its point of departure a typical science fiction story [...] the spaceship that travels through the centuries and whose occupants [...] forget where they are'.<sup>30</sup> In *Marc and Jofre*, and more particularly in *The Ship*, there are themes which recur frequently in Benet's later plays: doubt, indecision, cowardice, punishment, atonement, the commitment of the individual to society, and childhood as a place of escape.

The two strands of Benet's early work—realism and the influence of epic theatre—are combined in *Berenàveu a les fosques (You Were Having Tea in the Dark)* (1971), his most ambitious play at that point in his career, written with the declared aim of coming to terms with the post-Civil War period. According to Joan-Lluís Marfany,

the recreation of the same petit bourgeois settings as in his early work is presented to us here using Brechtian distancing and with the aid of typical techniques [...]. The counterbalancing of these historical scenes, which are realist in nature, with recited scenes corresponding to the present time, indicates continuity and the link between the past of the immediate post-Civil War years and the situation in the 1960s. The same technique allows the very precise descriptive details of the former to lose their localist flavour and acquire historical realism.<sup>31</sup>

Nevertheless, the first professional production of the play in 1973 was a complete failure. This was due in no small measure to reviewers, who generally had little sympathy with Benet's aims and shortsightedly criticized the play for possessing what has been called 'the now obsolete formula of Spanish realist theatre of the 1950s'.<sup>32</sup> The failure caused Benet to interrupt the lengthy gestation of the first important work of his mature period—*Revolta de bruixes (Witches'Revolt)* (1975)—in order to write *La desaparició de Wendy (The Disappearance of Wendy)* (1973). A work of special significance in Benet's career, this play is a beautiful love song to the theatre, in which he cites childhood memories, readings, films and characters from popular mythology. These were all devices which he had already sketched in earlier texts written for audiences of children and young people, but which, in *The Disappearance of Wendy*, appear in a clearly adult context.

The failure of *You Were Having Tea in the Dark* should not be viewed as an isolated event, but needs to be seen in the context of the changes in sensibility which were occurring in the theatre all over the Iberian Peninsula. As the Independent Theatre movement was being consolidated, a growing emphasis was placed on the collective creation of plays rather than on literary works by single authors, with the resulting reaction against the written text, and the placing of greater stress on staging. These changes led many playwrights of Benet's generation into a cul-de-sac. It is not surprising, therefore, that in the 1970s, a key period in the evolution of his work, Benet should write not only children's theatre, but also scripts and adaptations of plays for television. He did not give up working on more serious texts, but found difficulty in having them performed in Catalonia.

Paradoxically, Benet had his first great success with public and critics alike outside Catalonia, when *Witches' Revolt* was performed in Castilian at the Centro Dramàtico Nacional in Madrid in 1980. It is a complex play, with a completely closed spatial/temporal structure, where real and theatrical time overlap. The play deals with a group of cleaning ladies who work the night shift at a factory. Each tells her own private story, with its symbolic significance, and together they are locked in a conflict which seems to be a labour dispute. The death of a man, the nightwatchman, who acts as a *deus ex machina*, precipitates the denouement: the triumph of collective unconsciousness, irrationality, the magical escape at the heart of the group in the face of reason, commitment and the free will of the individual. The conclusion seems pessimistic: the world, despite the preachings of the social realist school, cannot be changed, a fact which produces a tragic bewilderment in the intelligent individual.

*Witches'Revolt* is the first major text of Benet's second period. This is a period in which the author synthesized earlier methods and rethought his theatrical style, without abandoning realist formulae, overlaid with distancing techniques.

*Quan la ràdio parlava de Franco* (*When the Radio Spoke of Franco*) (1979) was based on a collaborative venture with the novelist Terenci Moix which never got beyond the design stage and could be described as a period work, depicting very special historical circumstances. With a prologue and epilogue located in 1975, the year of Franco's death, the play contains ten scenes covering the period 1947-1966 and tells the story of characters who struggle to turn their impossible dreams into reality, trapped as they are in a working-class district. *When the Radio Spoke of Franco* has much in common with Benet's early work. It is permeated with the scepticism and the disillusionment regarding the socio-political evolution of Spain which at the time caused many nationalist and left-wing fellow-travellers to have serious doubts about the true extent of the reforms that had already taken place. In some ways, *When the Radio Spoke of Franco* is one of the last texts of that political theatre which was so prevalent during the final years of the Franco regime and the transition to democracy. After *When the Radio Spoke of Franco*, Benet abandoned the characters and settings of his childhood, namely the post-Civil War period. In this sense, it is highly revealing that the final words of the play should be:

For better or for worse, things are different, and the people I knew will not return with the death of Franco. It's too late. It doesn't matter. I shall try to forget them and speak of something else, because it's high time to speak of other things. [. . .]  
So let's speak of other things.<sup>33</sup>

*Descripció d'un paisatge* (*Description of a Landscape*) (1978), written at the same time as *When the Radio Spoke of Franco*, has no stage directions. This is the meaning of the title: it is the word that creates and *describes* the landscape. The work is based on a modern version of the myth of Hecuba, and in it Benet develops the themes of vengeance, loyalty to one's principles and cowardice. But it also contains some very specific instances of scepticism about the transformation of society and political structures—the impossibility of keeping one's hands clean when one attains power—which reflect the sentiments of a sector of Spanish intellectual opinion during the early years of the new democracy. The play is set in a contemporary Arab country. Zahira and Kàtila, the daughters of Dr Munàdil, return from exile. Munàdil was an

opponent of the emir and was killed when the revolution was crushed. With the passage of time, the dictatorship has softened its ferocious image, and can indulge in such apparently magnanimous gestures as permitting the daughters to return from exile. But the main purpose of this is to allow revenge to be exacted on Bassir, whose cowardice cost the life of the son of his mistress, Zahira. The revenge—the death of Bassir's son and the blinding of Bassir himself—is carried out under the watchful gaze of the Civil Servant, who at the same time acts as witness and master of ceremonies. (There are clear links here with Espriu's Lucid Counsellor.)

The last important text of Benet's second period, *El manuscrit d'Alí Bei* (*Alí Bei's Manuscript*) (1984), also marks his reconciliation with the Teatre Lliure. At the time he was writing *Description of a Landscape*, Benet was leading a group of dramatists who were involved in a bitter row with the management of the Lliure and with other theatre directors, accusing them of ignoring contemporary Catalan playwrights. The first performance of *Ah'Bei's Manuscript* in March 1988 was a great public success, and received almost unanimous praise from those same critics who until relatively recently had shown little enthusiasm for Benet and other authors of his generation. Aesthetic taste was changing; modern audiences—together with the institutionalized theatres which were the fruits of self-government and democracy—supported a return to written texts. Moreover, the generation of authors who preceded Benet was dying. All these factors, together with the belatedly-recognized quality of his theatre, made the premiere of *Alí Bei's Manuscript* a particularly important moment in Benet's career.

The message of the play is that it is impossible not only to change the world, but also to escape from it: we are merely prisoners. Benet uses an old theatrical device, namely that of the text within the text. However, he takes the device beyond the limits established in *Marc and Joffre*. The story written by He/the playwright/the patient in a hospital in the present tells of Alí Bei, the pseudonym of the Catalan mercenary Domènec Badia, who acted as a spy for the Spanish Prime Minister Manuel Godoy on a trip to the Orient in 1805. But the narrative is seen through the eyes of He/the tubercular man—a childhood friend of AH Bei—while the Absolutist troops were besieging Barcelona in 1823 at the end of the Constitutional Triennium.<sup>34</sup> All three characters are, of course, played by the same actor.<sup>35</sup>

With *Alí Bei's Manuscript*, Benet's reputation was firmly established. *Ai, carai!* (*Well I'm Blowed!*) (1988), which was also performed with great success by the Teatre Lliure, provides the link with the most recent period of Benet's

work. An apparently entertaining comic piece, *Well I'm Slowed!* reflects Benet's disillusionment with post-Francoist Spain, and in it he confronts those members of his generation who have entered the corridors of power.

*Desig (Desire)* (1989), first performed in 1991, obtained the Catalan Literature National Prize. Unanimously considered as marking the beginning of a new period in Benet's drama, *Desire* is closely linked with his previous work, despite the appearance of a break. One can also detect parallels (rather than influences) which reveal the nature of Benet's current concerns: for Sergi Belbel, *Desire* recalls Pinter in its plot, Mamet in its dialogue, Koltès in some of its images, and Beckett in its soliloquies.<sup>36</sup> Its form is austere, with four unnamed characters, two men and two women, who speak, meet, separate, utter monologues, and move in an undefined space, remote from everything and everyone: a country house, a road, a car which refuses to move, and a bar. The action constantly switches to the past or is projected beyond its limits



Àngels Poch and Imma Colomer in Josep Maria Benet i Jornet's *Desig (Desire)*, at the Romea Theatre, Barcelona, 1991.

towards the undefined territory of desire. All four characters try in vain to relate to each other through their apparently trivial words which betray them, for in the end words are 'forms of *communication-aggression* which have their complement in a vehicle such as the telephone, a *deadly weapon* which transmits words and silences'.<sup>37</sup> Perhaps these characters belong to different levels of reality; perhaps everything is reduced to a hallucination which engenders this confusion between the real and the imagined spaces and times of the various characters. The play does not provide us with any more information, and the inexplicable tale of mystery which develops is really no more than the symbolic expression of the clash between desire and reality, the lack of simultaneity between people's needs and what is emotionally available. As with all the characters in Benet's best works, we are interested in the impossibility of attaining the unattainable, the longed-for Atlantis, or put more simply, happiness.

### Jordi Teixidor

The great success of *El retaule del flautista* (*The Legend of the Piper*) (1968) which ran for more than a year after its full-scale premiere in 1971, and the seemingly inexhaustible succession of new editions of the text, have made it the most representative play of the 1970s, and one of the plays which was most frequently performed by the Independent groups of the time, both in Castilian and in Catalan. It could even be said that to a certain extent this premature success has marked—perhaps in a negative sense—the promising career of its author, Jordi Teixidor (1939-).

However, *The Legend of the Piper* was not Teixidor's first play. His dramatic works are closely bound up with the committed theatrical activity of the 1960s and early 1970s. He was writing from an unambiguously left-wing position, primarily through the Popular Theatre Group El Camaleó, in which he and fellow playwright Jaume Melendres (1941-) were the driving forces. Among the various adaptations and period plays of those years are *L'auca del senyor Llovet* (*Mr Llovet's Auca*) (1969),<sup>38</sup> which is still unpublished. It was premiered by El Camaleó, and received its first professional performance in 1972 at the Poliorama Theatre. The management of the Poliorama undoubtedly wished to cash in on the success of *The Legend of the Piper*, but this was not repeated. *Mr Llovet's Auca* introduces us to the world of the small businessman who is caught between great economic structures and the unrest of the workers, who do not see him as the father he says he is, but as the boss he really is, in other words a class enemy to be combated.

*The Legend of the Piper*, inspired by the Pied Piper of Hamelin story, was influenced by Brecht's political and aesthetic views. In Xavier Fàbregas's words, it 'amply achieved what its author set out to do: to denounce the corruption of public life, the pact between the Church and the military establishment, and the ineffectiveness of the hesitant civilian authorities which submit to the will of the most powerful groups in society'.<sup>39</sup> The play contains a prologue and ten scenes, each one bearing its own title, which acts as a kind of synopsis of what will take place in the scene. For instance, Scene 1 is indicated as 'Scene One, in which the citizens are shown pleading for the Town Council's help—and how much help they got', while Scene 6 is announced as 'Scene Six, in which the rat extermination monopoly evolves a plan to frustrate its competitor'. From time to time the action is interrupted by songs which, in a totally Brechtian manner, 'serve to enliven the spectacle and to break up the action with reflections by the actor or the character and also to prompt the audience to think'.<sup>40</sup> Examples of the titles of the songs are: 'The Song of Going through Regular Channels', 'The Gospel Song of Passive Resistance', and 'The Song of the Businessmen'.

The plot is simple and direct: in the city of Pimburg a sudden invasion of rats endangers the local government. Although the Reverend Grundig preaches resignation and justifies the invasion as divine punishment, pressure from the wheat and textile traders forces the mayor to find expeditious solutions. In the middle of the crisis a mysterious Piper appears, offering his services to put an end to the plague. However, in contrast to what happens in the story of the Pied Piper of Hamelin, the offer is rejected, since it goes against the economic interests of the makers of rat-traps and poison. The Piper is imprisoned and accused of being a sorcerer. The populace protests, riots break out, and the army is called to re-establish law and order. When the mayor is forced to free the Piper so that he can rid the town of the rats, the latter refuses the money and flees. The play ends with the dealings of the traders who, in the face of the crisis, look only to their own personal gain. The female narrator, before the curtain finally falls, urges the populace on:

Fellow Citizens, if we show them holes, they plug them up; if we demand cures, they give us tranquilizers. One way or another, we always get sat on.<sup>41</sup> We've got to find more efficient solutions.<sup>42</sup>

Teixidor's development as a dramatist was determined to a large extent by the great success of *The Legend of the Piper*. For a long time it seemed that

he was destined to be the author of a single play, for none of his subsequent drama had anything like the same success with audiences or critics. Nonetheless, he continued writing within what one might call the epic tradition during the period of political transition. *La jungla sentimental (The Sentimental Jungle)* (1973) centres on the world of capitalism and big business, and has what its author has called

a dual origin: the performances of *Mr Llovet's Auca* and, I'm not afraid to admit it, Dürrenmatt's *Frank V*. A performance of *Frank V* by El Globus of Terrassa and the production of Bertold Brecht's *The Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny* at the Liceu Theatre in Barcelona had made me aware of the extent to which a certain kind of Expressionism can illustrate the brutal contradictions of our society.<sup>43</sup>

*Dispara, Flanagan! (Shoot, Flanagan!)* (1974) is an amusing parody in which 'there are without doubt clichés from Westerns, but the central theme is the present-day class struggle, with all its different shades of meaning',<sup>44</sup> Teixidor's overtly political period ended with *Rebombori 2 (Disturbance 2)* (1977), a period piece which is a rewriting of an earlier work with El Camaleó (1971). It is a dramatization of the events of 1789 in Barcelona known as the 'Rebomboris del Pa' ('Bread Disturbances'), which were caused by the increase in the price of bread, and which have many points of contact with the events which sparked the French Revolution in Paris.

By the 1980s, an important element of Catalan theatrical activity was in the hands of institutions, but at the same time Teixidor's theatrical career had slowed down considerably. He had produced the occasional television script, won the odd prize and written a few plays which border on the parody of established genres. Then, in 1988, *Residuals* led to what Jaume Melendres has called the birth of the New Jordi Teixidor, to distinguish him from the Old Jordi Teixidor, the author of *The Legend of the Piper*. According to Melendres, the New Jordi Teixidor begins 'his journey with surprising freedom and linguistic skill. [...] The characters' language moves away from that of reason and direct verisimilitude and becomes less reasonable and more erratic, freer and more purified, thus taking on an impressive poetic dimension',<sup>45</sup>

*Residuals* is constructed by two monologues, which may or may not intersect, as the individual director sees fit. The monologues are spoken by characters at the end of their lives, Mr and Mrs V, and the play is reminiscent of certain French and German plays of recent years. Both characters are condemned



to put up with each other, even to put up with the piece of history that it has been their lot to live through, and above all to be the relentless witnesses to each other's decline (which is, in the end, a mirror of their own decline). *Residuals* distances itself from the political didacticism and the direct language which characterized a major part of Teixidor's early work. However, there has not been an obvious follow-up to this experiment. His latest play, *El pati (The Yard)* (1990), is set in the Paris Commune. While it subordinates the political struggle to the existential and verbal conflict of its two female characters, Thérèse, the mistress, and Clo, her servant, the play moves in uncharted waters. It is difficult to foresee how attractive this style will prove to be.

### Josep Lluís & Rodolf Sirera

If any account of the theatre industry in 1960s Barcelona stresses the considerable difficulties playwrights experienced in having quality Catalan texts produced under normal conditions, the situation was even worse in Valencia. It was not just that the region had a highly reduced theatrical life compared to that of Barcelona. Faced by the almost total absence of serious drama written in the Valencian dialect of Catalan, the local language had long since been consigned to the role of creating a distinctly regional, folkloric theatre.<sup>46</sup> The reasons for this are not simply explained by the smaller theatrical infrastructure of Valencia or the limited financial means available. They also have to do with the status of Catalan in the Valencia region.<sup>47</sup> For the kind of Castilian/Catalan bilingualism in Catalonia did not exist among the Valencian bourgeoisie which was largely Spanish-speaking. Moreover, the use of Spanish became a class weapon, employed to distinguish those with aristocratic aspirations from 'the people'.<sup>48</sup>

This background accounts for Rodolf Sirera's (1948-) first steps in the theatre, when he collaborated on productions in Spanish in the late 1960s, sometimes adapting plays from the Spanish Golden Age, and acting as well as writing material. From the outset, he took a committed political stance during the last years of Francoism. Sirera later affirmed that his involvement in theatre was 'the result of a certain political attitude at a particular moment'. When this attitude developed into a concern for the 'national reality' of the Valencia region, Catalan became the stage language.<sup>49</sup> The most coherent contribution to Valencian anti-Francoist theatre was offered by the group *El Rogle* of which Rodolf Sirera was a founding member.<sup>50</sup> It was with this company that Sirera produced his first significant text, *La pau (retorna a Atenes) (Peace [returns to Athens])* (1973).<sup>51</sup>

Along with Teixidor's *The Legend of the Piper*, *Peace* is one of the most popular examples of Brechtian drama to have been written in Catalan. As well as being very loosely based on Aristophanes's *Peace*, Sirera's text incorporates writing by his brother, Josep Lluís (1954-) and Samuel Bosc. The play maintains the original idea of Trygaeus's journey on a beetle to salvage 'peace' from the gods, but converts this concept into a satire against modern militarism. So many people profit from imperialist, colonial wars in a developed capitalist economy, that it is almost inevitable such wars should continue. Indeed, the twist in Sirera's play is that Trygaeus fails by the end, and war, not peace, triumphs most conclusively.

With voiced subtitles for each scene, satirical songs and the projection of slides, a Brechtian style and message are integral to the work. But a somewhat unBrechtian tone saves *Peace* from lapsing into an earnestly edifying strain. After his son has died, Trygaeus addresses the gods, and declaims: 'By my vineyards and olive trees put in danger! ...' The dead son gets up and chastises his father: 'Your son's just died and the first thing you think about is your vineyards . . .!' Trygaeus then hits his son with a cudgel—so that he falls down (dead) again—and continues pleading to the gods for peace, incorporating his son's death into the speech.<sup>52</sup> A barrage of anachronisms lighten the tone further and are also politically relevant. Characters listen to 'Radio Athens' and use telephones. The soldiers wear modern uniforms. Prostitutes are members of the deliciously onomatopoeiac UPA (Union of Prostitutes of Athens). There is music from a North-American electoral congress. The arms manufacturers talk of producing 'Made in Greece' products and entering the European market (much as Spain was attempting to do at the time). It was doubtless such allusions that led to Rodolf Sirera having his passport confiscated following one performance.

The satirical targets were more precise in *Homenatge a Florentí Montfort* (*Homage to Florentí Montfort*) (1971), El Rogle's next major production, co-authored by Rodolf and Josep Lluís.<sup>53</sup> The homage consists of three parts, designed to present the literary achievements of a fictitious Valencian author. First, there is a lecture on the writer, incorporating slides and a parodically pedantic academic style with an unbearable lyrical bent: 'Oh, Florentí, my dear Florentí, let my tremulous voice rise to uncover the magnificent symbolism which lies dormant in the very date of your birth!'<sup>54</sup> At the end, everybody sings the 'Anthem of the Association for the Defence of the Traditional Values of Our Land', printed in the apocryphal programme (which also has a picture of Montfort in it).<sup>55</sup> The second part consists of a recital of some of

Montfort's truly atrocious poems. Then there is the performance of one of his plays in verse. In an 'Epilogue', the actors fall down, a dance of death goes through the audience, and the fictitious nature of Florentí Montfort is revealed.

At the centre of the literary parody there are sharp criticisms, both about the status of culture within the Valencia region and about the sort of bourgeois society which promotes folkloric, sentimentalist, conservative authors. In the text of a planned documentary film which was to close the play, but was prohibited by Francoist censorship, the commentary becomes explicit: 'The Valencia region, its back turned to its reality as a people, continues living tied to a glorious past, and has not adjusted to its present possibilities.'<sup>56</sup> Without this explanation, the show managed to claim some victims. Although many were pliant accomplices in the joke, there were audiences who believed in the actual existence of Montfort (together with all his grotesque literary baggage) and only realized that they had witnessed a satire at the end.<sup>57</sup> Rodolf Sirera once spoke for *El Rogle*, declaring that their intention was 'never to start from zero, but to situate ourselves in tradition and then attack it'.<sup>58</sup> *Homage to Florentí Montfort* is a good example of the procedure, both formally and thematically.

Rodolf Sirera used the idea of a fictional personality again in *Plany en la mort d'Enric Ribera (Lament for the Death of Enric Ribera)* (1972) which, because of censorship, had to wait until after the death of Franco for its premiere production. Subtitled 'A Symphonic Experiment in Biographical Documentation', the play stands as a stylistic turning-point. In Sirera's own words, 'dramatic progress and the production narrative of epic theatre are here rejected'.<sup>59</sup> What replaced them was a textual collage of a Valencian actor's life, divided into sections like the movements of a symphony, ranging from prelude to coda. In addition to biographical fragments, Sirera incorporated theatre reviews from 1936, poetry by Ausiàs March, children's literature and scenes from other plays. In the printed version there is no indication as to which character is speaking. Speeches are set out side-by-side. Some texts are in bold, others in italic type. On some pages the text runs horizontally, on others a vertical pattern occurs. Blank pages allow for the potential development of verbal 'tunes' already established. (The 'andante' has five such pages.) Phrases and words are repeated, without any grammatical coherence. Towards the end, this kind of repetition brings previous themes together. In a fragment from one column of the 'coda', statements about aesthetic commitment during the Civil War intertwine with memories of Ribera's incestuous love for his sister and his pleading (to Franco) about the way he was forced into acting in leftist theatre:

*What is needed in Spain is social theatre*

Enric Ribera

*You'll marry me when we grow up*

Enric Ribera

*I didn't want to, General, they forced me into it!*

Enric Ribera<sup>60</sup>

All this obviously constitutes a challenge for any director to interpret roles and voices. (Joan Ollé produced a well-received version for the Sitges Theatre Festival in 1977.) What emerges in political terms is a portrait of an actor who, rather like the Nobel-Prize winning Spanish dramatist Jacinto Benavente (1866-1954), sided with the Republic, but was eventually actively accepted within Francoist theatrical culture. Moreover, in relation to regional concerns, Ribera specifically refuses to act in Valencian Catalan, and dismisses Valencian theatre as a minor comic genre for purely local consumption. Amidst stylistic innovations, Sirera was still expressing his political preoccupations.

Not all of the texts he wrote during Francoism were so directly political. Whereas *Peace* carried an epigraph by Brecht, the *Tres variacions sobre el joc del mirall* (*Three Variations on the Mirror Game*) (1974) are dedicated to Groucho (rather than Karl) Marx. They play with theatrical convention in a way reminiscent of Dadaist drama and Ionesco. In an 'Epilogue in Homage to Alfred Jarry', Pere Ubu enters, cries 'Justrice!' [sic], and the lights go up on an auditorium filled with an audience dressed in black. Other short texts subvert the detective genre and Greek tragedy.<sup>61</sup>

By the end of the Francoist period, Rodolf Sirera was pessimistically proclaiming: 'it would be too idealistic to think that the theatre changes things. Theatre doesn't change anything, just as culture and art don't change anything.'<sup>62</sup> This pessimism was voiced in *Memòria general d'activitats* (*General Report on Activities*) (1976), collectively written and produced by El Rogle as their final show, in the year following Franco's death. Conceived in allegorical form, the play concerns the activities of a Belgian theatre company and reveals personal tensions within members of the group, as well as wider questions of the role of a minority language in a social and political context. A potential explanation for El Regie's failure in establishing effective committed Valencian theatre comes when the promoter who has hired the Belgian group describes whom they will be acting for: English tourists who understand neither French nor Flemish. It therefore does not really matter what language they perform

in (French or Flemish, or, in El Rogle's case, Spanish or Catalan); the theatre is hardly important anyway. As the promoter says, referring to the tourists: 'It's merely a question of taking them to the theatre from time to time . . . It's a cultural custom we've always wanted to respect.'<sup>63</sup>

Despite such views on the superfluous status of theatre in Valencian society, the Sirera brothers continued, during the transition to democracy, to write plays dealing with events that had clear historical resonances. Their trilogy entitled *La desviació de la paràbola* is set against a background of Valencian history spanning 1868-1902.<sup>64</sup> The precise social context of each play allows specific conflicts to surface, even if the action takes place in fictional locations in the Valencia region. In *El brunzir de les abelles* (*The Buzzing of the Bees*) (1975), the concentration on a firm manufacturing church candles and votive offerings leads to representations of the changing influence of the church according to national politics. (Religious pictures are withdrawn from the set and replaced in response to wider cultural changes.) The place of workers in the capitalist enterprise also comes under scrutiny.<sup>65</sup> *El còlera dels déus* (*The Cholera of the Gods*)<sup>66</sup> (1976) jumps from 1875—the end of *The Buzzing of the Bees*—to focus on three days during the cholera epidemic which hit the Valencia region in 1885. With blackmail, swindling and the key role of a local newspaper, *The Cholera of the Gods* has strong echoes of Ibsen's *An Enemy of the People*.<sup>61</sup> But the intrigue is directly compared to national events in a form which has contemporary relevance. The corrupt mayor of the play proudly declares: 'I find consolation in the thought that my corruption is only very small . . . , only a modest grave, in the cemetery which now carries the name of Spain.'<sup>68</sup> *El capvespre del tròpic* (*The Twilight of the Tropic*) (1977) continues this vision of irreversible decline.

The dialogue in these historical plays is realist, including sometimes heavy-handed exposition of background events. Rodolf Sirera returned to a Brechtian style in *L'assassinat del doctor Moraleda* (*The Murder of Doctor Moraleda*) (1978), a kind of political mystery novel given dramatic form. At about the same time, in a two week respite from longer projects, he wrote his most successful play to date, *El verí del teatre* (*The Audition*) (1978). Performed in France, Britain, Ireland and all over Spain, *The Audition* is a compelling dialogue set in Paris in 1784. An aristocrat (called, with echoes of the Marquis de Sade, simply 'Marquis de . . .') invites an actor (Gabriel de Beaumont) to his home to make him perform Socrates's death scene. Having been dissatisfied by Gabriel's first performance, the Marquis leads him into believing that the wine he drank earlier was in fact poison and that Gabriel will receive the



Abel Folk and Sergi Mateu in Rodolf Sirera's *El verí del teatre* (*The Audition*), at the Poliorama Theatre, Barcelona, 1993.

antidote only if his next performance is adequate. After his second performance, the Marquis gives his victim another drink which is not the antidote, but a real, deadly poison for which there is no cure. The final death scene takes place after the play has ended.

*The Audition* is not just an eighteenth-century version of Anthony Shaffer's *Sleuth*. The Catalan title means 'the poison of (the) theatre' and, bolstered by the mention of Socrates, gives much of the game away from the start. However, several references keep sending one back to the text from different perspectives. There is mention of Rousseau in relation to cruelty, and the dialogue draws some inspiration from Diderot's *Paradoxe sur le comédien*. The characters discuss whether real emotions are actable onstage and any audience is left wondering who, of the two, is the better actor. At the beginning, the Marquis pretends to be a servant so well that Gabriel believes his performance and treats him accordingly. On the eve of the French Revolution, a series of class associations therefore come to the surface. Layers of irony, revealed, then concealed, find their place in a faultless dramatic structure. Of course, the real performance has to occur offstage, but until the closing moments, the drug of drama—another form of theatrical poison—keeps us hooked.®

Rodolf gave death a more comic treatment in his *Bloody Mary Show* (1979), subtitled 'Dramatic Suggestions for a Cabaret Show'. Made up of sketches, dances, tricks, puppetry, songs, slides, film and a ventriloquism act, its strongest and blackest moments come from simulated audience participation, when it looks as though members of the public have volunteered as victims. In one such instance, two actors/volunteers stand with little blocks on their heads. The blocks have representations of an eye and a heart drawn on them. The star marksman, blindfolded by another (real) member of the audience, shoots at the volunteers. They both drop down dead, one with his or her face covered in blood and the other with blood over the chest.<sup>70</sup>

The most striking characteristic to emerge from Rodolf Sirera's theatre produced from the late 1970s onwards has been the author's versatility at working in highly different styles. He has written a drama on the medieval Catalan figure Arnau (1978) and, in collaboration with his brother and on his own, two opera libretti.<sup>71</sup> In spite of formal disparities, two general directions are identifiable in Sirera's work developed during the 1980s. The first is a concern with personal emotional issues portrayed by a reduced number of contemporary characters, in plays like *La primera de la classe (Top of the Form)* (1984) and *Indian Summer* (1987).<sup>72</sup> The second comprises a continuing historical

preoccupation, in the three plays written with Josep Lluís and collectively entitled *Trilogia de les ciutats* (*Trilogy of the Cities*).<sup>14</sup>

The only onstage characters in *Top of the Form* are two women who were once at school together. Anna is single and Olga, the one who was always 'top of the form', has apparently just left her husband. As they drink and talk, it gradually unfolds that they have loved the same man, but that they also feel a type of affection for each other. The rivalry between them is given a twist at the end so that Anna is, in her own way, 'top of the form' as well. While the running conversation between the former class mates is colourful, witty and flowing, it also includes a reflection on the definition of personal and professional success. As Olga says: 'We will never do anything extraordinary in life.'<sup>14</sup> Shot through the text is an intense fear of solitude; the women may be in search of a man, but what they really want is company.

*Indian Summer* is, according to its author, the completion of a journey started in *Top of the Form*,<sup>15</sup> but it is a more playful and technically more complex comedy in which similar scenes are juxtaposed, phrases are repeated and echoed, and the audience has to remain constantly alert. By describing Spaniards working in a North-American university campus, Sirera is as much concerned with the nature of love and generosity as with the loneliness of temporary exile. Uncertainties as to the chronology of the action never take away interest from the position of the central protagonist (himself a creative writer) with regard to two women.

There are also chronological illogicalities, repetitions and echoes in *Cavalls de mar* (*Sea Horses*) (1986), although they are firmly rooted in a history spanning the beginning of the century to the Spanish Civil War, the conflict which serves as a focal point for all three plays of the *Trilogy of the Cities*. It is an ambitious text and has the appearance of a series of continuous film takes. Some of the action is indeed centred on the embryonic cinema industry in Valencia. Yet the play is also about twentieth-century modernization and there are comments on the European aspirations of Valencians. (Perhaps it is no coincidence that the piece was written in the same year as Spain joined the EEC.) Against this political backdrop evolves a personal plot about unfulfilled love. The blend of historical and emotional strands is more accomplished than in the previous trilogy and, supported by some strategically placed monologues, *Sea Horses* initiated a fresh approach to collaborative writing. This approach was subsequently exploited in *La ciutat perduda* (*The Lost City*) (1993) which involves the manipulation of the medium of radio.



At the beginning of this chapter, Rodolf Sirera insists on the mediocre level of most of the Catalan drama performed until the mid-1960s. If the Valencia region can make any claims to have transformed this mediocrity and produced a theatre worthy of serious consideration, it is almost entirely due to the work of the Sirera brothers.

## Notes

1. 'El teatre de Joan Oliver al volum segon de les seves obres completes', in *La malícia del text* (Barcelona: Curial, 1992), pp. 177-84 (p. 182).
2. Benet i Jornet, 'El teatre de Joan Oliver', p. 182.
3. From Joan Oliver, *Obres completes de Joan Oliver*, 3 vols (Barcelona: Proa, 1977), II: *Teatre original*, Prologue, pp. 9-26 (pp. 13-14).
4. Under the Treaty of Utrecht one of the Balearic islands, Menorca, fell under British sovereignty in 1712 and did not return to the Spanish Crown until 1802.
5. From the Prologue to Joan Oliver, *Teatre original*, II, 17-18.
6. There is a complicated word play here involving the different meanings of *estimar* in Catalan and Castilian.
7. The King begins by using the Catalan word for 'because', which is 'car', before switching to the Castilian word 'pues'. The complication is that 'caro' in Castilian means 'dear'.
8. Joan Oliver, *El 30 d'abril*, in *Teatre original*, II, 200.
9. See, for example, Raymond Carr, *Spain: 1808-1975*, 2nd edn (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), pp. 480-89; Shlomo Ben-Ami, *The Origins of the Second Republic in Spain*, Oxford Historical Monographs (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), pp. 57-58.
10. There is a vivid account of these events in George Orwell's *Homage to Catalonia*.
11. It is also worth noting as an interesting and highly significant fact—or metaphor—that the President of the Republican Government, Manuel Azana, who was isolated in Barcelona, took advantage of the fighting to write *La velada de Benicarló* (*The Party at Benicarló*), a brilliant but pessimistic dialogue on the character and causes of the Civil War. See Hugh Thomas, *The Spanish Civil War*, 3rd edn (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1986), p. 661.
12. *Comèdia* in Catalan normally indicates a play which is light in tone and has a happy ending, but it can also be used to indicate the more general sense of a play.
13. 'El teatre de Joan Oliver', p. 182.
14. See Joan Oliver, *Tres comèdies* (Barcelona: Selecta, 1960).
15. Enric Gallon, 'El teatre', in *Història de la literatura catalana*, ed. by M. de Riquer, A. Comas and J. Molas, 11 vols (Barcelona: Ariel, 1980-88), XI (1988), 191-219 (p. 214).
16. Joan Oliver, *Pigmalió: Adaptació lliure de l'obra de Bernard Shaw*, Els Llibres de l'Escorpí: Teatre/El Galliner, 95 (Barcelona: Edicions 62, 1986).

17. Joan Fuster, *Literatura catalana contemporània* (Barcelona: Curial, 1972), p. 351.
18. Salvador Espriu, *Teatre*, which is volume 5 of *Obres completes*, ed. by Francesc Vallverdú (Barcelona: Edicions 62, 1990), p. 37. Subsequent references to Espriu's work (with the exception of *The Story of Esther*) are to this volume and are given in the main text. (The Centre de Documentació i Estudi Salvador Espriu in conjunction with Edicions 62 in Barcelona have recently started to publish detailed critical editions of Espriu's works.)
19. Carles Miralles, 'Salvador Espriu', in *Història de la literatura catalana*, ed. by M. de Riquer, A. Comas and J. Molas, X (1987), 389-46 (p. 390).
20. Sinera is, in fact, a way of spelling Arenys backward. In an English translation of *Primera història d'Esther (The Story of Esther)*, Sinera is ingeniously rendered by the translator as Novareba, which spells the South Wales seaside town of Aberavon backwards. See Salvador Espriu, *Primera història d'Esther (The Story of Esther)*, trans. by Philip Polack, The Anglo-Catalan Society Occasional Publications, 6 (Sheffield: The Anglo-Catalan Society, 1989).
21. Josep Maria Benet i Jornet, 'Visita al laberint grotesc', in *La malícia del text*, pp. 55-69 (p. 63).
22. Xavier Fàbregas, *Teatre d'agitació política*, Llibres a l'Abast, 74 (Barcelona: Edicions 62, 1969), p. 295.
23. *Primera història d'Esther (The Story of Esther)*, trans. by Philip Polack, p. 97.
24. For an introduction in English to the work of Valle-Inclán, see John Lyon, *The Theatre of Valle-Inclán*, Cambridge Iberian and Latin American Studies (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983). For an anthology of translations, see Valle-Inclán, *Three Plays*, trans. by Maria M. Delgado (London: Methuen Drama, 1993).
25. Ricard Salvat, 'El teatro Catalan: Los inconformistas: Salvador Espriu: *Primera història d'Esther*', *La Carreta*, no. 7 (August-September 1962), 14.
26. On the development of the show, see Ricard Salvat, *Els meus muntatges teatrals*, L'Escorpí, 31 (Barcelona: Edicions 62, 1971), pp. 49-63; and 'Per a una història de *Ronda de mort a Sinera*' which is the Introduction to Salvador Espriu/Ricard Salvat, *Ronda de mort a Sinera* (Barcelona: Empúries, 1985), pp. 7-32. See also the translation Salvador Espriu and Ricard Salvat, *Death Around Sinera*, trans. by Peter Cocozzella, *Modern International Drama*, 14, no. 1 (Fall 1980), 3-60.
27. Plays by writers such as Baltasar Porcel and Maria Aurèlia Capmany can be considered within this category, and are discussed by Enric Gallén in Chapter 1.
28. See Enric Gallén, 'La obra de Josep M. Benet i Jornet', in Josep M. Benet i Jornet, *Deseo*, Teatro, 17 (Madrid: El Publico, 1990), pp. 13-23 (p. 16).
29. Josep Maria Benet i Jornet, *Fantasia per a un auxiliar administratiu (and Cançons perdudes)*, Biblioteca Raixa, 78 (Palma de Mallorca: Moll, 1970), p. 119.
30. Josep Maria Benet i Jornet, *La nau*, Els Llibres de l'Escorpí: Teatre/El Galliner, 40, 2nd edn (Barcelona: Edicions 62, 1983), p. 8. For an English translation of the play see *The Ship*, trans. by George E. Wellwarth, in *3 Catalan Dramatists*, ed. by George E. Wellwarth (Montreal: Engendra Press, 1976).

31. 'El realisme històric', in *Història de la literatura catalana*, ed. by M. de Riquer, A. Comas and J. Molas, XI (1988), 221-83 (p. 279).
32. Enric Gallén, 'Estudi introductor' in Josep M. Benet i Jornet, *Una vella, coneguda olor. Revolta de bruixes*, L'Estel, 12 (Valencià: Edicions Tres i Quatre, 1991), pp. 7<sup>4</sup>-6 (p. 22).
33. Josep M. Benet i Jornet (with Terenci Moix), *Quan la ràdio parlava de Franco o Vides deplexiglàs*, Els Llibres de l'Escorpí: Teatre/El Galliner, 55, 3rd edn (Barcelona: Edicions 62, 1990), p. 106.
34. For details on this period, see Raymond Carr, *Spain: 1808-1975*, pp. 129<sup>16</sup>.
35. For a longer analysis of the play see Josep Sebastià Cid's review (in English) of the text, *Catalan Writing*, no. 2 (December 1988), 104; Enric Gallén, 'Benet i Jornet o la passió pel teatre', in Josep M. Benet i Jornet, *El manuscrit d'AlíBei*, Els Llibres de l'Escorpí: Teatre/El Galliner, 90 (Barcelona: Edicions 62, 1985), pp. 9-29; Maria Teresa Cattaneo, 'Scrivere l'avventura: A proposito di *El manuscrit d'AlíBei* di Josep M. Benet i Jornet', in *Dialogo: Studi in onore di Lore Terracini*, ed. by Inoria Pepe Sarno (Rome: Bulzoni, 1990), pp. 129-36.
36. 'El laberinto del deseo', in Josep M. Benet i Jornet, *Deseo*, pp. 9-11 (p. 11).
37. Jordi Castellanos, '*Desig*: Un teatre d'explotació', in Josep M. Benet i Jornet, *Desig*, Teatre 3 i 4, 24 (Valencià: Edicions Tres i Quatre, 1991), pp. 15-17 (p. 16).
38. For an explanation of the meaning of *auca* see Chapter 1, note 20.
39. *Història del teatre català*, Catalunya Teatral: Estudis, 1 (Barcelona: Millà, 1978), p. 324.
40. Jordi Teixidor, *El retaule del flautista*, in Jordi Teixidor, Alexandre Ballester and Rodolf Sirera, *Teatre, Història de la Literatura Catalana*, 18 (Barcelona: Edicions 62/Edicions Orbis, 1984), p. 13. For a translation of the play see *The Legend of the Piper*, trans. by George E. Wellwarth, in *3 Catalan Dramatists*, ed. by George E. Wellwarth.
41. The Catalan word is 'pegats', which also means 'beaten' and 'patched up'.
42. Teixidor, *El retaule del flautista*, p. 88; *The Legend of the Piper*, p. 232.
43. Jordi Teixidor, *Lajungla sentimental*, Els Llibres de l'Escorpí: Teatre/El Galliner, 29 (Barcelona: Edicions 62, 1975), p. 7.
44. Feliu Formosa, 'Pròleg', in Jordi Teixidor, *Dispara, Flanagan!*, Els Llibres de l'Escorpí: Teatre/El Galliner, 33, 3rd edn (Barcelona: Edicions 62, 1989), pp. 5-7 (p. 6).
45. 'Amb un gran passat a l'horitzó', in Jordi Teixidor, *Residuals*, Biblioteca Teatral, 67 (Barcelona: Institut del Teatre, 1989), pp. 5-10 (p. 9).
46. For the background to Valencian theatre, see Josep Lluís Sirera, *Passat, present i futur del teatre valencià*, Descubrim el País Valencià, 5 (Valencià: Institució Alfons El Magnànim, 1981). A large portion of the book (pp. 45-82) is devoted to an interview with Rodolf Sirera.
47. The Valencia region (El País Valencià) is known in administrative terms as the Comunitat Valenciana, or 'Valencian Community', and includes Alicante (the Catalan name for which is Alacant).

48. See Antoni Bartomeus, *Els autors de teatre català: Testimoni d'una marginació*, La Mata de Jonc, 6 (Barcelona: Curial, 1976), p. 108.
49. Antoni Prats and Rodolf Sirera, 'Rodolf Sirera parla de les seues obres dramàtiques' (Interview), *L'Aiguadolç*, no. 2 (Spring 1986), 9-17 (p. 9).
50. For a history of the group, see Josep Lluís Sirera, 'Pròleg: "El Rogle"', cap a un assaig d'interpretació', in El Rogle, *Memòria general d'activitats*, Els Llibres de l'Escorpí: Teatre/El Galliner, 44 (Barcelona: Edicions 62, 1978), pp. 5-12.
51. An earlier version of the play was premiered by another group in 1970. The revised published version is dated 1973, although El Rogle performed the text in 1972.
52. Rodolf Sirera, *La pau (retorna a Atenes)*, Els Llibres de l'Escorpí: Teatre/El Galliner, 27, 3rd edn (Barcelona: Edicions 62, 1982), p. 36.
53. On the role each brother adopts when they write a play together, see Antoni Prats and Rodolf Sirera, 'Rodolf Sirera parla de les seues obres dramàtiques', p. 12; Jordi Sebastià, 'Entrevista amb els germans Sirera, autors teatrals: "Un cas de fascinació"', *El Temps*, 13 April 1992, pp. 56-58 (p. 58).
54. Josep Lluís and Rodolf Sirera, *Homenatge a Florentí Montfort*, Els Llibres de l'Escorpí: Teatre/El Galliner, 18, 2nd edn (Barcelona: Edicions 62, 1983), p. 29.
55. For a reproduction, see Xavier Fàbregas, 'Josep Lluís i Rodolf Sirera i el nou teatre valencià', *Serra d'Or*, 17, no. 191 (15 August 1975), 57-61 (p. 59).
56. Josep Lluís and Rodolf Sirera, *Homenatge a Florentí Montfort*, p. 97.
57. See Bartomeus, pp. 104—05; Josep Lluís Sirera, 'Pròleg: "El Rogle"', cap a un assaig d'interpretació', p. 9.
58. José Monleón, 'Entrevista con Rodolf Sirera sobre el teatro valenciano', *Primer Acto*, no. 168 (May 1974), 58-61 (p. 61).
59. Rodolf Sirera, *Plany en la mort d'Enric Ribera*, Els Llibres de l'Escorpí: Teatre/El Galliner, 70 (Barcelona: Edicions 62, 1982), pp. 31-32. For a detailed analysis of the play, see the Introduction to the same volume by Josep M. Benet i Jornet.
60. Rodolf Sirera, *Plany en la mort d'Enric Ribera*, pp. 111-12.
61. Rodolf Sirera, *Tres variacions sobre el joc del mirall*, Els Llibres de l'Escorpí: Teatre/El Galliner, 36 (Barcelona: Edicions 62, 1977).
62. Bartomeus, p. 106.
63. El Rogle, *Memòria general d'activitats*, p. 30.
64. The title is a play on the ideas of the 'deflection of the parabola' and the 'deviation of the parable'. For an analysis of the trilogy, see Xavier Fàbregas, 'De *La Gloriosa* a la primera guerra colonial', the Introduction to the third play of the trilogy, Josep Lluís and Rodolf Sirera, *El capvespre del tròpic*, Teatre 3 i 4, 7 (Valencia: Edicions Tres i Quatre, 1980), pp. 7-12.
65. Josep Lluís and Rodolf Sirera, *El brunzir de les abelles*, Els Llibres de l'Escorpí: Teatre/El Galliner, 77 (Barcelona: Edicions 62, 1983).
66. The title, like that of the third part of the trilogy, has deliberately Wagnerian echoes.

67. Rodolf Sirera adapted Ibsen's *The Lady from the Sea* in 1980. He has also written Catalan versions of medieval French farces and Chekhov's *The Cherry Orchard*.
68. Josep Lluís and Rodolf Sirera, *El còlera dels déus*, Teatre 3 i 4, 6 (Valencia: Edicions Tres i Quatre, 1979), p. 90.
69. Rodolf Sirera, *L'assassinat del doctor Moraleda*. *El verí del teatre*, Els Llibres de l'Escorpí: Teatre/El Galliner, 47 (Barcelona: Edicions 62, 1978); *The Audition*, trans. by John London, in *Plays of the New Democratic Spain (1975-1990)*, ed. by Patricia W. O'Connor (Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 1992).
70. Rodolf Sirera, *Bloody Mary Show*, Els Llibres de l'Escorpí: Teatre/El Galliner, 54 (Barcelona: Edicions 62, 1980), pp. 25-26.
71. Rodolf Sirera, *Arnau*, Biblioteca Teatral, 20 (Barcelona: Institut del Teatre de la Diputació de Barcelona/Edicions del Mall, 1984); Rodolf Sirera, *El príncep*, Els Llibres de l'Escorpí: Teatre/El Galliner, 94 (Barcelona: Edicions 62, 1986); Josep Lluís and Rodolf Sirera, libretto for *El triomf de Tirant*, published in the programme for the production (Valencia: Generalitat Valenciana, 1992). For an analysis of *Arnau*, see Antoni Tordera, 'Arnau, l'escenari d'un mite', *L'Aiguadolç*, no. 2 (Spring 1986), 22-29.
72. Rodolf Sirera, *La primera de la classe*, Els Llibres de l'Escorpí: Teatre/El Galliner, 85 (Barcelona: Edicions 62, 1985); *Indian Summer*, Bromera/Teatre, 2 (Alzira: Edicions Bromera, 1989).
73. Josep Lluís and Rodolf Sirera, *Cavalls de mar*, Els Llibres de l'Escorpí: Teatre/El Galliner, 107 (Barcelona: Edicions 62, 1988); *La partida* (Alicante: Ajuntament d'Alacant, 1991); *La ciutat perduda*, Teatre 3 i 4, 31 (Valencià: Edicions Tres i Quatre, 1994). For a general view of the trilogy, see Rafael Pérez Gonzalez's Introduction to the last play.
74. Rodolf Sirera, *La primera de la classe*, p. 59.
75. Manuel Molins, 'Introducció: Rodolf Sirera: Els territoris misteriosos', in Rodolf Sirera, *Indian Summer*, pp. 9-23 (p. 20).

## Chapter 3

### Avant-Garde **Drama**

David George & John London

#### Joan Brossa

If it were possible to speak seriously of *Or i sal (Gold and Salt)* [. . .], we would call it a monstrous product of ignorance and pride. Never have common sense and the theatre been so cynically mocked as in this corrosive production, which is based on the models of Beckett and Ionesco, from whom some of the scenes are almost exactly copied.

So wrote the theatre critic, José Maria Junyent in *El Correo Catalan* on 5 October 1961. The review is indicative, not only of the appallingly low level of Spanish theatre criticism during much of the Franco era, but also of the way in which Brossa's work was hopelessly misunderstood for many years, particularly in his native Catalonia, by all but the most perceptive of critics.<sup>1</sup>

Joan Brossa (1919-) is the most prolific of contemporary Catalan dramatists, his work running to six volumes or over 2200 pages. His first play was written as early as 1942, well before Beckett and Ionesco were performed in Paris in the early 1950s. Although there are certain thematic and stylistic similarities between Brossa, Beckett and Ionesco, Brossa himself rejects any suggestion that he has been influenced by the Theatre of the Absurd. Indeed, he is positively hostile to it. When asked by Jordi Coca in 1971 for his views on the subject, Brossa replied: 'I don't like it at all. I am more interested in the Marx Brothers and all the clowns (except for Dali).'<sup>2</sup> Brossa's work is steeped in the popular culture of Barcelona. His drama reflects the festivals and the speech forms of the working classes which he had absorbed before 1936. He saw it as his role to continue the work of the great avant-garde writers of the pre-1936 generation (both Spanish and Catalan) whom he so admires: Josep Vicenç Foix, Federico García Lorca and Rafael Alberti.

As well as writing independently, Brossa has collaborated with Catalan painters and musicians of the avant-garde, such as Joan Miró, Antoni Tàpies and the pianist Carles Santos. Brossa was a founding member of the important avant-garde art and literary review *Dau al Set* in 1948.<sup>3</sup> Many of his art works (which he calls Object Poems or Visual Poetry) juxtapose everyday objects in an unexpected way, and contain satirical comments on Francoist Spain or life in general. In *Burocràcia (Bureaucracy)* (1967), two leaves (from trees) are held together by a paper clip. The expected association would be between the paper clip and sheets of paper (*fulles* in Catalan), but Brossa substitutes these *for fulles*, the natural leaves. *Colxesa (Lameness)* (conceived in 1975) consists of a bottle of red wine the label of which has the red and yellow colours of the Spanish flag and a picture of Franco on it. Set next to the bottle is a wine glass, which, in a distortion of form, seems to bend away from the bottle of wine. Some of the art works are highly theatrical. In *Intermedi (Interval)* (1991), the empty chairs of a chamber trio are accompanied, not by musical instruments, but by machine guns. There is black humour in this evocation of an audience/player relationship.

If Brossa calls his art pieces Object Poems, he sees all his artistic and literary activity in terms of poetry. He has named his plays *Scenic* or *Theatrical Poetry*, and in 1961 wrote: 'I don't believe in the confetti of escapist theatre, and I also think that "photographic" reduction is limiting and illogical. Poetry is fundamental, and, set between lies and deceit, it becomes the sun, the wind, life.'<sup>4</sup> In a manner that recalls Lorca's definition of the theatre as poetry which has come to life and is made human, Brossa defines a written poem as passive poetry and the theatre as active poetry.<sup>5</sup> He has stressed the importance of imagination in poetry, but rejects fantasy.<sup>6</sup> Poetry can be found in the most prosaic of everyday objects.<sup>7</sup> His most important collection of poetry is thus entitled *Poesia rasa (Plain Poetry)*, an anthology of seventeen books written in the 1940s and 1950s.»

While Brossa claims to prefer comic actors of the cinema and clowns to the Theatre of the Absurd, he is also fascinated by other so-called low forms of entertainment, such as that of the Italian transformist Leopoldo Fregoli. He loves magic too (he has collaborated many times with the Catalan magician Hausson), carnival, pantomime and the *commedia dell'arte*.<sup>9</sup> Like many avant-garde writers, painters and composers of the early twentieth century, Brossa has integrated all these popular paratheatrical forms into his own work, and along with everyday objects, has elevated them to the level of high art. His vision is one of theatre in a wide definition:

I've always believed that the basic ingredient of the theatre (and that's why I like Fregoli), is not literature but the carnival. In this profound sense the theatre will not die because people carry it deep within them, and it is as old as humanity itself. Harlequin, Pierrot and Columbine, this is the essence of the theatre. I mean that the theatre is a means which works on the imagination and the feelings and not just the intellect.<sup>10</sup>

Brossa sees popular culture as Surrealist *avant la lettre*. As the art critic Victoria Combalia says: 'Brossa compares magic with poetry since, according to him, both imply transformation, manipulation of reality.'<sup>11</sup> Two of the most striking and original features of Brossa's plays are their often hilariously funny juxtapositions, and their startling transformations. In *El sabater (The Shoemaker)* (1957), a very ordinary married woman working in a shop which sells fireworks is transformed into a passionate mistress when her lover comes into the shop, declaring 'with you I am another woman'.<sup>12</sup> In *Gran Guinyol* (1957), Pierrot goes round houses collecting electricity bills, and declares to one of his customers/victims that he calculates the size of debts by moons. Completely mundane dialogue is set alongside ruminations on mythology, as in the following conversation from *Calç i rajoles (Limestone and Bricks)* (1963) between a husband—who is obsessed with the idea of mythological heroes and the disasters which befall them—and his wife and daughter:

DAUGHTER (*enters; she is very feminine*) Dad, I can't find the umbrella.

HUSBAND We must watch out that no-one attacks us while we are asleep.

WIFE She's not talking about that; she says she can't find her umbrella.

(IV, p. 259)

As one would expect from such a radical exponent of the avant-garde, Brossa is critical of contemporary Catalan commercial theatre. His views emerge from *La sal i el drac (Salt and the Dragon)* (1956), particularly through the ideas of the First Author, who declares that 'life must recover everything that the theatre has been storing in its coffers' (II, p. 88). His views are opposed by the Second Author who is willing to provide the theatre owner with the quick commercial successes he demands. (There is a painful personal element here, reflecting the fact that Brossa has been so little performed in





Dibuix de Joan Ponç

# SESSIÓ DE TEATRE

ORGANITZADA PER CLUB 49

Representació per primera vegada d'obres de JOAN BROSSA

FARSA ENTENENT QUE L'ESPECTADOR  
HA DE TRANSPORTAR-SE AL CENTRE  
MATEIX DE L'ESCENA.

Obra en un acte.

Persones, Vella, Elisenda Ribas, Home, Amoni Oliveres, Un  
senyor, Joan Ponç; Un altre, Víclor Castells, Un altre, Joun  
Brossa, Home I, Lluís Tarrau, Dona, Guillemina Montmany,  
Home II, Carles Boliera, Home III, senyor X, Grup de senyors:  
Garcia-Vilella, Josep Guinovart, J.J. Tharrals, Antoni Ponç  
i Enric Calders.

INTERMEDI D'OMBRES XINESES

per JOANYS Jr.

3

NOCTURNS ENCONTRES.

UN MILIONARI ES TROBA ARRAN DE LA MORT. UNA  
FILLA SEVA, ÚNICA HEREUA, PRESA D'UN DESENGANY  
AMORÓS EL CURA AMB SOL LICITUD. ELS PARENTS DEL  
MORENT FAN TOT EL POSSIBLE PER DESHERETAR-LA I  
NO DUBTEN DE RECÓRRER AL CRIM.

Obra en un acte.

Persones.- Home, Antoni Oliveres, Dona, Guillemina Mont-  
many, Home I, Lluís Tarrau, Home II, Carles Bohera, Velin,  
Elisenda Ribas, Arlequí, Joan Closa, Cambra, Mercè Aldeí..

Ambdues obres foren escrites el 1947.

Direcció: JOSEP CENTELLES.

Presentarà la vallada ALEXANDRE CRUCHI-PÉLUCER.

Dissabte, 2 de juny de 1951, a les 10'30 nit, a l'antic  
Teatre Olimpo, carrer de Mercaders, 38. Barcelona.



A page from the theatre programme for a production of two plays by Joan Brossa at the Olimpo Theatre, Barcelona, 1951.

Catalonia. Brossa was also dissatisfied with the training of Catalan actors, and has said that if his plays had been properly acted in the past, audiences would not have found them as extravagant as they have done.<sup>13)</sup>

Although critical of the ethics of the commercial theatre, Brossa is certainly no supporter of so-called social drama, considering that by its very nature it is an ephemeral and extremely limiting genre. Brossa was labelled an obscure, irrelevant writer by left-wing critics in the highly politicized atmosphere which dominated certain circles in Spanish culture during the late 1960s and early 1970s.<sup>14</sup> Even Xavier Fàbregas, who later wrote perceptive analyses of Brossa's work, initially fell into this category.<sup>15</sup> Yet it would be foolish to accuse Brossa of ignoring the social and political realities of his country, since most of his plays are permeated by them to a greater or lesser degree. His attitude towards Franco's Spain is highly critical, and he often ridicules its traditional values. What he does not do is to write in a social realist style. The socio-political aspect is just one among many. This is well illustrated in *Gold and Salt*, probably Brossa's best-known play.

Its three acts are unconnected at the superficial level of plot, but, as is common in Brossa, have a number of linking thematic and technical features. Act 1 seems to be set in modern times, and concerns a disconcertingly nonsensical conversation between the First Man and the Second Man.<sup>16</sup> Following the appearance of the Third Man, it is discovered that the First Man has bought a bar from the Second Man. The Third Man believes that this is a mistake, and exposes the Second Man as a deceiver and a hypocrite. Act 2 is set in the past, and opens with characters dressed in sixteenth-century style. Its interest lies mainly in a philosophical conversation between Tomàs and Agustí about religion, provoked by the impending trial in Rome of Jeroni, a conjurer and companion of theirs who has been accused of heresy. Act 3 concerns a seemingly ordinary couple, Husband and Wife, whose activities are far from ordinary. He is obsessed with hunting dragons, and has built two towers, complete with lifts, to aid him in his task.

Historical perspective is an important element of *Gold and Salt*. In Act 1 the Second Man tries in vain to see parallels between Biblical episodes and his own life, but the latter is generally banal and tends to undermine the former. This seems to be a criticism of the Church, a point that is reinforced when the Second Man's hypocrisy is exposed. Christianity is implicitly linked with invented mythology, and, in a more general sense, the distinction between truth and myth is blurred. In Act 2 Agustí and Tomàs discuss the question of religious certainty and faith. Tomàs (true to the tradition of

Thomas the Doubter) questions faith and defends the need for a plurality of interpretations of the truth. He is faced with a dilemma: he has been asked by Jeroni not to reveal to the Inquisition the secrets of his card tricks, but he knows that if he does not, his friend will be condemned as a dangerous sorcerer who has links with the devil. Agustí counterbalances Tomàs in that he is a man of action and not an intellectual, as exemplified in his words 'the combat must be real! Philosophy exists only in your mind' (III, p. 110).

There is a parallel between Agustí and the Husband in Act 3, who is likewise a man of action. In Act 3 Brossa explores further the relevance of history to the modern era. The hunting of a dragon is a primitive act belonging to a past age, while the device he has chosen to hunt it relies on modern technology. The contrast involves a familiar piece of Brossan juxtaposition, but, taken together with the persecution of Jeroni in Act 2, contains an implicit evocation of a modern-day witch-hunt, be it McCarthyite or Francoist. Perspectivism is also present in the Husband's looking down on a landscape through binoculars, and observing objects from his vantage-point.

In *Gold and Salt*, then, social and existential questions are given a meditative depth, as is Brossa's passion for conjuring and magic. Typically, however, the author does not neglect humour and ingenious technical slights of hand. The conversation between the First Man and the Second Man in Act 1 contains a banal but at the same time surrealistically connected series of comments. The two men talk as they pick apples from a box and separate the good ones from the bad:

FIRST MAN I've been combing my hair since I got up.  
 SECOND MAN That's exactly how women make themselves beautiful.  
 FIRST MAN (*wipes his brow*) Phew, on with my work! (*Pause.*)  
 The female caretakers I've known are all the same ... I make mature women pronounce the word 'moustache'. They go red.  
 SECOND MAN And does that bring you good luck?  
 FIRST MAN I'm a nobody.  
 SECOND MAN And where will you go now?  
 FIRST MAN I don't know. To see the white foam of the sea beating against the black rocks.  
 SECOND MAN I prefer to see the boats being rowed.  
 FIRST MAN That's a different seat.  
 SECOND MAN But I've never pitied scarecrows.

(III, p. 88)

As in the above example, much of the dialogue of *Gold and Salt*, like that of most of Brossa's plays, is a blend of the banal and the poetic. Imagination is a key element, and is linked to a sense of artistic liberation. Jeroni's card tricks are more exciting and offer much broader horizons than conventional Christianity; they suggest the subversive nature of popular culture. The Husband in Act 3 is not only a man of action, but displays a vivid imagination when he sees one rock through his binoculars as a cloaked dragon, and another as his wife. The idea of the theatrical trick is reflected also in some of the sets, such as the different coloured backcloths which follow each other in rapid succession at the beginning of Act 2. Hence, although *Gold and Salt* may appear to be located in a world of fantasy, issues to do with artistic and spiritual freedom are clearly of vital importance in a dictatorship.

Around the early 1960s, Brossa's theatre took on a more overtly political stance, in plays such as *El dia del profeta (The Day of the Prophet)* (1961), *El sol amb cara*<sup>11</sup> (1962) and *El saltamarti (The Aunt Sally/ The Grasshopper)* (1962), but even these plays are not Naturalist in form. They contain the incongruous dialogues and situations, the apparently disconnected scenes and the varieties of linguistic register that are Brossa's hallmarks.

Class conflict is an essential part of *The Aunt Sally*, which consists of six scenes. In Scene 1, two Gentlemen discuss the state of business and politics in Catalonia and Spain. They are Catalan businessmen, who typify the more prosperous end of the social spectrum. The other social extreme is represented by the three Norns of the Wagnerian opera *The Twilight of the Gods* which the Gentlemen attend (Scene 2), by the Husband and Wife (Scenes 3 and 4) and by the two Women (Scene 6). In Scene 1 there is a discussion of whether the future of Catalan business lies with Madrid-based capitalism or within a more politically open and liberal Europe. Another contentious issue, touched on briefly in Scene 6, is whether the poor should keep silent and accept their miserable lot as an exploited class or whether they should be more rebellious. The play ends on an open-ended, even defiant note, with the words spoken by the First Woman: 'I protest! I protest! I protest!' (IV, p. 159).

Two pillars of the Franco Establishment—the Church and the Armed Forces—are satirized in *The Aunt Sally*. The former is ingeniously ridiculed in the course of Scene 4, in which the Priest tries to make the Husband and the Wife wear spectacles. The Husband is sceptical, commenting: 'I don't need myths, I mean glasses' (IV, p. 144). The Wife, however, willingly accepts the Priest's demands:

PRIEST Who is God?

WIFE He is the most perfect being, creator and Lord of all.

PRIEST Good. Where is God?

WIFE God is everywhere.

PRIEST Has He always existed?

WIFE He has always existed and exists.

PRIEST And will exist.

WIFE And will exist; yes.

PRIEST What is Heaven?

WIFE It is paradise, that is to say, happiness.

PRIEST And what has a slave to do?

WIFE Resign himself, because in obeying his master he obeys God.

PRIEST Good. Now do you see how you have changed?

WIFE Oh, thank you! I'll have these spectacles. I'm sure of one thing: I'm seeing everything clearly.

(IV, pp. 146-47)

The inane nature of the dialogue is not gratuitous, but underlines a view of the Church as simultaneously repressive and ridiculous.

In Scene 5 soldiers march mechanically from left to right of the stage, which, appropriately, has a khaki back curtain, to the sound of a typical address by General Franco. The address is, needless to say, given in Castilian Spanish, which is by implication an imperialist language. However, Brossa is too subtle to devise a piece of simplistic pro-Catalan nationalist propaganda: the two capitalists in Scene 1, concerned as they are exclusively with the future of Catalan capitalism and thereby with their own pockets, are really no better than the centralists associated with the Franco regime.

The political satire does not date Brossa's plays. Indeed, there are signs that they are now better appreciated than when they were written, due to the improved quality of the productions. A case in point is *El sarau (The Party)*, written in 1963, but not performed until the summer of 1992 at the Teatre Poliorama, in the context of Barcelona's Olympic Arts Festival. One commentator summed up the impact of Hermann Bonnin's production: 'With the premiere of *The Party* [ . . . ] audiences and critics have recognized that Brossa is viable onstage.'<sup>18</sup> *The Party* is focused on two events, the great Barcelona snowfall of 1962-63 (Act 1) and the death of the Catalan actor Enric Borràs in 1957 (Act 2). Acts 1 and 3 are set in a working-class district of Barcelona

and Act 2 concerns the upper-middle class. The play has a Naturalist veneer in the contemporary setting and the easily recognizable social types.

The contrast between the characters of Act 1, who suffer real privations, but whose feelings are genuine and sometimes touchingly simple, and those of Act 2, with their trivial preoccupations and reactionary attitudes, gives a sharp social edge to the play. In Act 1 the Old Man is particularly critical of the local authorities for their handling of the snow crisis and of the press for glossing over the deficiencies of the authorities during such crises. By contrast, the attitudes of some of the upper-middle class characters of Act 2 are reactionary, and vehemently insulting towards immigrants and members of the working class.

Yet *The Party* is not a Naturalist play, since it contains an apparently disjointed plot, and the juxtaposition of banal and sublime dialogue. This is most noticeable in the discussion on the relative merits of various foreign cheeses in Act 2, and in Act 3, when a clothes shop assistant dreaming out loud of Greek mythology is cheated by a customer. The work is also underpinned by a strong sense of theatricality. This is obvious in the Greek mythology recitation, but the most interesting example occurs in Act 2 when news of Enric Borràs's death is announced by the First Old Man. The characters are distraught, for they saw in him not only a great declamatory actor, but one of the pillars of the Catalan cultural Establishment. In a highly melodramatic scene, they lament that not only Catalan theatre, but world theatre is now in mourning. Their eulogy of the great Borràs is very different to the First Old Woman's view on the carnival, expressed just before the announcement of Borràs's death: 'Oh, the carnival is forbidden; thank God we now go straight into Lent' (IV, p. 192). (This point is historically accurate, because the carnival was initially prohibited in Franco's Spain.) The theatrical whole comprises a strikingly original mixture of social criticism, speculation and parody, contextualized in twentieth-century Catalan theatre and in the middle- and lower-class life of Catalonia.

Brossa has always appreciated brevity in literature, preferring poetry and drama to the novel.<sup>19</sup> Although he has written a large number of plays, few of even the three-act ones are very long. He has also written many short pieces without dialogue, or quasi-happenings *avant la lettre*, most of which have never been performed.<sup>20</sup> They consist of 68 *Accions Espectacle* or *Posttheatre* (*Spectacle Actions* or *Posttheatre*), written between 1948 and 1962; a series of 49 ballet scripts written between 1948 and 1954 and collected in *Normes de mascarada* (*Rules of the Masquerade*); the *Accions musicals* (*Musical Actions*), collected in 1983, but the result of Brossa's work in previous years

with the composer Mestres Quadreny, the pianist Carles Santos and the singer Anna Ricci; the transformation monologues or *fregolismes*, named after Fregoli, which consist of 30 works from 1965 and 1966;<sup>21</sup> and 72 pieces written between 1966 and 1967 entitled *Strip-tease i teatre irregular (Striptease and Irregular Theatre)*, which arose from Brossa's desire to explore the artistic possibilities of this commercially debased entertainment which he had witnessed during his visits to Paris.

These short texts were written throughout the *Scenic Poetry* period, and range from the hermetic sketches collected in volume 1 of the *Complete Theatre* to overt political statements. Many of the idiosyncratic features of the full-length plays recur in the short pieces, but owing to their brevity and the absence of dialogue, it is sometimes even more difficult to spot logical patterns and connections. To an extent, the short pieces are compressed versions of the full-length plays, rather in the manner of a painter's preliminary sketches.

The *Spectacle Actions* depend for their effect on audience participation: in some, the audience moves through corridors and into rooms, while in others the audience is not itinerant, but is invited to take part in the action. Frequently, the actors have a joke at the spectators' expense, as in the fifty-fifth *Action* in which the spectators are asked to hang a calendar on the wall at the end of the piece. Once the sole actor (Man) has gone offstage, a member of the audience carries out his request, but all the numbers of the calendar fall onto the floor. In the fifth *Action*, two men pretend to throw over the audience water from a bucket which turns out to be empty. A pierrot then hauls in through a window a red paper star with a long tail, which he drags offstage but which, because of its length, continues crossing the stage long after he has disappeared.

A common feature of the short pieces is the breaking of the classical norms associated with a particular genre. Before the beginning of *Rules of the Masquerade* there is a quotation from the painter Juan Gris: 'Any work which is destined to become a classic can have nothing in common with the classical works which have preceded it' (I, p. 451). The action of classical ballet is interrupted when extraneous characters, sometimes wearing disguises, interrupt its smooth progress. One piece is entitled *La nit (Night)*:

The curtain opens. Complete darkness. One can just see how one of the ballerinas makes an effort to light a candle on a table, but someone blows out the match. After she has tried again several times, the stage lights go up unexpectedly. The other ballerina, who is now carrying a dog, screams when she

realizes that the person who was blowing is a tall character, wearing a leotard and a red cape. The curtain shuts quickly.

(I, p. 476)

Disruption of convention through unlikely events and through the use of disguise is also a characteristic of a number of the *Musical Actions*. In one section of *Suite bufa (Comic Suite)*, the pianist leaves the stage after playing a few notes with great passion. The piano continues playing on its own, and then a bald-headed moustachioed man enters from the left while putting on a top hat. He picks up a suitcase and exits stage right. He then reappears after the piano has finished playing the piece on its own, takes off his wig, glasses and false nose, whereupon it is discovered that he is the pianist (VI, p. 295). Here Brossa has used techniques which are more appropriate to popular entertainment like the circus or music-hall to disrupt the seriousness of a classical music concert and to raise questions of identity.

Disillusioned by a hostile reception and woefully few productions, Brossa stopped writing his Scenic Poetry in the 1970s. Only in the 1980s did his theatre begin to attract the sort of performances one might expect for the work of an accomplished dramatist. But the process will be a long one: the majority of Brossa's rich, complex, quirky texts still await full-scale productions.

### **Manuel de Pedrolo**

Whereas Brossa sees himself as a poet with a passion for redefining theatre in poetic terms, Manuel de Pedrolo (1918-1990) always stressed his own activity as a novelist: 'I am not a dramatist', he said in the 1970s. 'I am a novelist who happens to have written a few plays.'<sup>22</sup> Any glance at the quantity of novels Pedrolo published during his career confirms that this assertion is, in his own words, 'an objective fact'.<sup>23</sup> Yet, if Pedrolo's name is recognized outside Spain, it is in connection with the plays he wrote in the late 1950s and early 1960s.<sup>24</sup> There may be a kind of justice in this paradoxical situation. For, although he later dedicated himself almost exclusively to experiments in narrative form, the first substantial piece of literature Pedrolo remembers creating is a short comic play he wrote with a friend. It was performed on only one occasion at his school. The audience was so bewildered that nobody dared to clap.<sup>25</sup>

This initial reception established an ominous precedent for his mature plays. Given such public inhibition, it is ironic that Pedrolo considered freedom to be the central theme of all his drama. He claimed in 1963 that man had never been so shackled as in the preceding twenty-five years.<sup>26</sup> The concept



was viewed philosophically as well as politically. Sartre and Camus are two of the authors whose ideas have most influenced Pedroló's writing.<sup>27</sup> Besides the general pressures of Francoism, Pedroló had his own reasons to be obsessed with freedom. He had continuous problems with the censors and his scripts often ended up being performed years after they were written.<sup>28</sup>

Pedroló's first surviving play, *Els hereus de la cadira* (*The Heirs to the Chair*) serves as an example of such a delay. Written in 1954, it was premiered in 1975, one month after Franco's death. The play stands in impertinent contrast to the standard drawing-room drama of the period. It is set in a public lavatory and, throughout the dialogue, the audience can see men entering, using the urinals, then making an exit. Against this background occurs a more profound process of self-discovery. A shoeblack picks up a note dropped by one of his clients. It is from Carme and explains the times when her husband is away and she can be visited. The shoeblack identifies the author of the note as his wife and, having described his chance discovery as an exceptional occurrence, he begins to feel a different person. He gives up his job, and persists in maintaining his new, independent identity, even after he has admitted he is not sure whether or not his wife is being unfaithful. All the while criticizing the conventionality of human existence, he leaves his wife, his job and, just before handing over his chair to the lavatory attendant, defines the new man he has become: 'A creator who is capable of everything. With him the path to freedom begins.'<sup>29</sup>

*The Heirs to the Chair* is a concise one-act statement which succeeds theatrically because of the comedy within the dialogue as well as the strangeness of the situation. *La nostra mort de cada dia* (*Our Daily Death*) (1956), is rather more verbose, sprawls over four acts and develops in a repetitive structure. Death, in the shape of an attractive, thirty-year-old man called M., comes to a house to take away Marina, despite her parents' protestations. In the course of the seduction, a conclusion emerges about time. The Father claims that days have gone by, but M. redefines the past: it is true death. Once an event stops existing in the future, a minute and one hundred years can be regarded as the same. To free yourself from time you give in to death.<sup>30</sup>

Occasionally in *Our Daily Death* there are glimpses of the makings of a Symbolist drama. *Cruma* (1957), on the other hand, is the only one of his plays Pedroló terms 'absurdist'. He admitted that he could not have written it if he had not read Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*.<sup>31</sup> The title itself is an indication of an absurdist stance. *Cruma* is the name of an Etruscan measure or measuring instrument, now clearly useless for understanding the contemporary world.

The Resident and the Visitor try to measure the dimensions of a corridor. Their activity is as much designed to pass the time of day as to achieve some scientific purpose. In any case, their task is doomed because, as they soon realize, their tape measures have no numbers on them. (Pedrolo used a similar kind of apparently ridiculous action in *Sóc el defecte (The Flaw)* (1959), where characters go up and down stairs and ladders, revealing the relativity of their positions and, in their verbal interaction, varying approaches to the acquisition and value of knowledge.<sup>32</sup>)

The futile measuring exercise is not the only illogicality in *Cruma*. With the intermittent presence of Nagaio, a Stranger and a Girl, we are soon thrown into a confusion of names and identities. The Resident refuses to believe in the existence of other characters. After the Stranger has seen the Girl pass by, the following exchange occurs:

STRANGER [... ] Hey, wait a minute! Who's that?

RESIDENT The same as the other one: nobody.<sup>33</sup>

Pedrolo explained that his concern in *Cruma* was to define authenticity starting from Heidegger's premises. The Resident's authenticity leads to isolation and a loss of contact with reality.<sup>34</sup> In the closing moments, the Resident and the Visitor admit that they are in the same situation as they were at the beginning. Somebody knocks at the door. The curtain falls as the Resident goes to open it. When *Cruma* was first performed, in the year it was written, audiences had no idea whether they should laugh or not.<sup>35</sup> Dramatic uncertainties about identity, objective reality and the success of verbal communication had palpable consequences for the witnesses to the events onstage.

There is also a good deal of ambiguous humour in *Homes i No (Men and No)* (1957), although the visual imagery of the play sets a repressive tone from the outset. Two groups of three characters are in prison cells on either side of No, the gaoler. As No sleeps, the prisoners talk about their fate and a discussion on power and suppression evolves. (The subtitle of the play is 'An Investigation in Two Acts'.) No—the archetype of negation—is strong because he possesses knowledge. He has always existed, but perhaps he owes his existence to the bars of the prison. Without the prisoners he would be nobody. After No has woken up during an attempt to drag him by one of his feet towards an occupied cell, he claims that he is protecting the other characters against themselves. The second act takes place years later, but No is still reading the same newspaper. The younger generation of prisoners—Feda and Some—become more inquisitive in their search for freedom. They discover

a precipice beyond the fourth, invisible wall (through which the audience observes the action). Eventually, despite No's warning, Feda and Some tear down the curtain at the back of their cells. Behind it are bars which imprison not only the two families, but also No himself. Three silent men in black uniforms are on the other side of the bars.

The message seems unquestioningly grim. If Pedroló's play shares anything besides its title with Elio Vittorini's novel *Uomini e no* (published in 1945), it is the definition of what it is to be a human being in a context where extreme suffering is caused by one's fellow men. But there are signs that a kind of progress has been achieved in the course of *Men and No*. Language is a powerful tool. The characters constantly analyse their situation. As one says, the bars remain where they are, but 'despite them we shall open a path to the truth. Each word we speak brings us closer'.<sup>36</sup> Pedroló objected to accusations that the play was pessimistic. After all, the children accomplish a kind of victory in that they break down a barrier. The fight should be continued, if not by Feda and Some, then by their children.<sup>37</sup>

The discursive quality of Pedroló's texts entails a logical analysis of repression and thus distances him from Beckett's poetic reflections. Another instance of this process is *Situació bis (Full Circle)* (1958). For years a group of characters has awaited the arrival of letters not addressed to them, but placed twice daily by an anonymous dictatorial force in a giant wastepaper basket. Like the characters in *Men and No*, they try to see how their situation could be changed, and decide to rebel. Melo and Glada struggle with the two men who deliver the letters. Glada is killed in her room and Melo is overpowered. This violence provokes the group into killing the two men during their next visit. By the third act, Melo and Pral have substituted the two men, but they follow the same laws as their predecessors and have become just as dictatorial. The conclusion is simple: a real revolution should transform structures, not merely substitute leaders. In the words of Orel, who has suffered under the new regime, 'It's pointless to replace *people* when it's the system itself which corrupts them.'<sup>38</sup>

*Algú a Valtre cap de peça (Somebody at the Other End of the Room)* (1958) reverses the perspective of repression.<sup>39</sup> Here, the majority of characters seem to be in control as they confront a harmless, virtually mute Old Woman who constitutes a threat because of her indifference. After a time, the Old Woman starts speaking and manipulating those around her. As the others discuss what they can do with her, an anonymous Individual carries her off when they are not looking. Again, those in power depend on their victims to maintain their status.

In other texts, the essence of power relationships is psychologically more obscure. In *Bones notícies de Sister (Good News from Sister)* (1962), the characters wait for a telephone call from a woman called Sister. But her identity is nebulous. For some she wore dark glasses, for others she did not. Her hair seems to have changed colour. There is also a city called Sister. The telephone keeps ringing, but Sister is never on the line. In the closing seconds, one character says that Sister is dead and another suggests that maybe they had not buried her deep enough.<sup>40</sup>

While most of Pedroló's best-known plays contain a discussion with political overtones, *Darrera versió per ara (Last Version, for the Time Being)* (1958) comes close to an allegory of the Fall of Man.<sup>41</sup> A large white sphere or ball lies in one of Pedroló's typically undecorated rooms, similar in their restrictive capacities to the enclosed spaces of Harold Pinter's early plays. A Man and Woman attempt to change their contract with the Concierge who is also the owner of the building. A Boy with a white ball enters. He seems to have a more favourable contract and is not restricted to his room. Then a Bohemian with a black ball encourages the couple to break free and take possession of their ball. This they do, and their contract is thus invalidated: they can leave. Yet this liberty is in itself a burden. The Man concludes that they have gained the responsibility of freedom, the need to make decisions, and an eternal disquiet.

*Tècnica de cambra (The Room)* (1959) is another global allegory and involves another landlady, only in this context she remains a voice offstage, welcoming guests to stay in a room full of objects, such as a clock, an iron and a packet of cigarettes. However, there are not enough objects to go round, and a dictatorial relationship develops, with Belet in charge. When Belet is eliminated, all the other characters are also called away by the voice of the landlady. Having been attracted to each other, ambition and power, they make their exit from life just as they entered. Moreover, little, if anything, can be learnt from experience. Cleda expresses the overwhelming sentiment when she claims it is impossible to know the validity of moral values. Indeed, one can know nothing at all.<sup>42</sup>

*L'ús de la matèria (The Use of Matter)* (1963) marks a change of stylistic direction for Pedroló. There is yet another anonymous controlling power and the inevitable process of waiting recurs, but the location of the play is more precise and its tone closer to farce than existential tragicomedy. Employees in an office are waiting for papers and files to sign. Their tasks are specialized, but mindless. Some are assigned to crossing t's, others to writing one accent. The stifling bureaucracy is all-consuming—it envelops everybody—although

Pedrolo is careful to underline that it is a product of an idealized vision, expressed by one character as: 'Everyone forming part of a communal enterprise, everyone understanding everyone else, everyone brother to everyone else, real brothers just like you and me now . . .',<sup>43</sup> The actual results are chaotic and fatal. (The play has justifiably been compared to Vaclav Havel's *The Memorandum* [1965].<sup>44</sup>) To avoid keeping incomplete collections of papers, the papers are destroyed, yet the employees have to retain two copies of each of the documents destroyed. A typical victim of the bureaucracy is Mrs Greda whose husband has died because she has had to wait two years for an 'extraction permit' to remove him from the bottom of a well.

In 1966 Pedrolo wrote a brief sketch about betrayal,<sup>45</sup> but by the early 1970s he considered his dramatic experiments to have been negative because they had reached only minority audiences. He thought his plays had a historical value, within their period, even if they were a 'great mistake'. It was because of this self-assessment that Pedrolo stopped writing for the stage.<sup>46</sup> These comments proved premature. In June 1973, Pedrolo wrote *Aquesta nit tanquem* (*Tonight We Are Closing*), which developed the more open critical stance initiated in *The Use of Matter* and, as the Pirandellian echo of the title suggests, incorporated the semblance of improvisation.<sup>47</sup> At the start, a group of youths announce that a popular militia has taken over the theatre and that the first truly free lecture in the military state is about to take place. Despite interruptions and vociferous opposition from an official in the audience, the youths act out 'authentic' scenes of repression—particularly related to censorship—that have occurred during the regime. Behind the highly theatrical aesthetics, there is a sense of desperation in the text. The play ends provoking the audience into resistance. A plea for freedom previously treated by abstract allegories has become an overt call to arms. *D'ara a demà* (*In the Space of a Day*) (1977) employs an equally clear style to deal with a specific topic: abortion and the subordinate role of woman in society.<sup>48</sup>

The failure of Pedrolo's theatre to reach a wider audience is as much due to the nature of the theatre industry in 1950s Catalonia as it is to the sometimes abstract qualities of his plays. It takes time to grow accustomed to dramatic tension derived, in Jordi Arbonès's words, from 'the confrontation of ideas and not the clash of passions or feelings'.<sup>49</sup> Any production has to highlight the humour in Pedrolo's language as well as the inherent incongruity of the situations. In *Men and No*, there is constant punning on No's name. The staccato dialogue in *Pell vella alfons del pou* (*Old Bit of Skin at the Bottom of the Well*) (1957) is underpinned by a deep-rooted, nervous fear, but at first interlaced

with a discussion about worms.<sup>50</sup> *Acompanyo qualsevol cos (I Accompany Any Body)* (1962) is a difficult play, yet its questions about time and identity surface in exchanges which have light-hearted potential:

BORRA The last time we had a calendar was in the year 1950.

BOSNIVA It's '62 now.

NIL How do you know?

BOSNIVA In '60 it rained.

BORRA It rains every year.

NIL It does now.<sup>51</sup>

Such dialogue, when combined with a striking central image, makes Pedroló's own assessment of his works too harsh. Plays like *The Heirs to the Chair*, *Cruma* and *The Use of Matter* have a value which is theatrical, not merely historical.

### **Llorenç Villalonga & Baltasar Porcel**

Pedroló is not the only Catalan novelist to have been drawn to the theatre. Some of the most interesting experiments in avant-garde drama during Francoism are by the Mallorcan novelists Llorenç Villalonga (1897-1980) and Baltasar Porcel (1937-).

Villalonga began writing his texts called *Desbarats (Pieces of Nonsense)* in the 1940s, with no view to full-scale performance, but rather to provide dialogues, probably intended for reading out loud in small groups. The Catalan spoken in *Pieces of Nonsense* is a Mallorcan dialect so particular that even modern Catalan editions of the plays contain explanatory glossaries. However, such apparently untheatrical features do not take anything away from the humour or the dramatic potential of several pieces, especially those centred on Catalina, the Marchioness of Pax (or Pachs), an eccentric widow, known more familiarly as Mumare (Ma, Mum or Mammy). In one scene, preparations for a trip to the theatre lead to confusion over the booking of tickets and a discussion on the morality of Zorrilla's play *Don Juan Tenorio*. In another, Mumare's household is thrown into panic over the impending visit of the Spanish Infanta. Labourers try to repair the fabric of the building and everybody is plunged into darkness as the electricity fails. Finally, after all the fuss, the old lady accompanying the visiting Infanta reveals (in Spanish, of course): 'What the Infanta likes the most is that it's obvious you haven't made any special preparations because of her.'<sup>52</sup>

Whereas this kind of comedy may seem crude, a more illogical humour emerges when Mumare becomes the victim of a highway robbery, but actually

enjoys the experience, has her belongings returned, and suggests giving a tip to the malefactors. Moreover, in all the dialogues, there is a sense of stage space, a sharp awareness of the idiocy of everyday speech and a constant interplay between Catalan and Spanish, usually at the expense of the latter. Mumare initially insists on addressing a Spanish-speaking carpenter in Mallorcan Catalan. The stage directions comment that the Infanta's Spanish is '*somewhat international, as in circuses*',<sup>53</sup> Inhabitants of the Spanish-speaking mainland are not the only ones to suffer from Villalonga's wit. Members of the Mallorcan middle and upper classes also come under attack, above all for their ignorance of the harshness of social reality. In the *Piece of Nonsense* entitled *Viatge a Lisboa el 1945 (Trip to Lisbon in 1945)*, one character judges all foreign cities according to the quality of the hotels she has stayed in. The criticism often becomes implicitly political: many of the dialogues paint a far from rosy picture of post-Civil War Spain, and thus constitute a kind of repudiation of the author's previous, pro-Falangist activities during the conflict.<sup>54</sup>

Since he was born during the Civil War, Baltasar Porcel had no such past to justify or reject. He situated himself on the left from the beginning and had ambitions to be the Sean O'Casey of Catalonia.<sup>55</sup> Although he has written several Brechtian plays, notably *Èxode (Exodus)* (1962), Porcel's *La simbomba fosca (The Dark Zambomba)* (1961) is closer to the Theatre of the Absurd. Like *Waiting for Godot*, it is subtitled 'a tragicomedy' and has as little progressive dramatic action as Beckett's play. The guests of a boarding house, in which everything is '*old, worn out and absurd*'<sup>56</sup> are perplexed by the death of their old landlady. Among the varied characters are a travelling salesman, a civil servant and a boxer who speaks a strange dialect and is trying to construct a zambomba. As they discuss what they should do with the corpse, metaphysical definitions develop in the midst of macabre desperation. A retired schoolteacher suggests eating the landlady's body, while the salesman is more worried about his own protection when he says: 'And when we've buried her, where will we go and live?'<sup>57</sup> The civil servant questions the purpose of doing anything, because it all ends in death. Some scenes are enacted as if they were part of a ballet and there are moments of unexplained silence. No wonder one reviewer reported that the premiere production (in 1962) 'surprised and irritated people'.<sup>58</sup> Yet the same critic went on to comment that, if the play had been presented as a translation of a non-Catalan work, it would have been received more favourably. The avant-garde had arrived, but it was having problems being accepted as a Catalan phenomenon.

### Sergi Belbel

Sergi Belbel (1963-) has had no great problems being accepted either as an avant-garde dramatist or as a Catalan writer, in spite of his Spanish-speaking family background. Of all the writers included in this book, Belbel is unique for his exclusive dedication to the theatre, and his independence from the shadow of the Franco era. He is also being viewed as the saviour of Catalan text-based drama, and most of his plays have been produced and published in Spanish as well as Catalan. At the beginning of 1989, Belbel had two full-scale productions running in Barcelona and a series of activities based on his work was organized at the Institut del Teatre. The Catalan daily *Avui* summed up the impact caused by the twenty-five-year old dramatist with an article entitled 'Catalan Theatre is Called Sergi Belbel'.<sup>59</sup>

Belbel first came to public attention four years earlier when he won the Marqués de Bradomín Prize for a play that he had begun writing in Catalan, but finally presented in a Spanish version.<sup>60</sup> The abbreviations in *A. G./V. W., Calidoscopis i fars d'avui* (*A. G./V. W., Kaleidoscopes and Lighthouses of Today*) (1985) initially appear to refer to the main characters of the first two acts—Andre Gide and Virginia Woolf. They are both physically linked by elastic to the people most important to them, and, in biographical fragments, the text portrays Gide's childhood (in Part One) and Woolf's unsuccessful struggles with mental pressure (in Part Two). The third section is called 'Today' and places a contemporary couple, Alfred Geis and Verònica White, in a confrontation which is witty and sarcastic, yet at times refers overtly to images of the previous two acts.

Although the play contains some wooden dialogue, it establishes what have become Belbel's thematic and stylistic strengths: a concentration on personal relationships, a treatment of sexuality (often considered 'deviant') and the use of monologues and repeated phrases sometimes uttered anonymously. The play also demonstrates a precise notion of the potential of movement onstage and an ability to unite different acts through tone and theme rather than through the development of the same characters. Furthermore, even in this first play, Belbel had started to dissect language as if he were constantly conscious of its potential for ambiguity. (He subsequently explained that, since it was his mother tongue, he had never really questioned Spanish. Catalan, on the other hand, was a language he felt he could manipulate, because he was more distant from it.<sup>61</sup>) While these traits acquire a personal stamp in Belbel's work, they also coincide with the nature of much non-Spanish drama for which he has an acknowledged admiration. He has directed his own translations



of *Hamletmachine* and *Quartet* by Heiner Müller and Georges Perec's *L'Augmentation*, and has also translated plays by Bernard-Marie Koltès and Samuel Beckett.

The play most obviously related to *A. G./V. W.* is *Elsa Schneider* (1987), both because of its structure and its biographical features. Yet *Elsa Schneider* is a more concentrated, more engaging piece of theatre, despite the fact that it consists of three monologues. In the first, based on Arthur Schnitzler's story *Fräulein Else*, a nineteen-year old girl (Elsa) recounts how she allowed herself to be seduced in order to help her father repay his debts. The second relates the tragic private life of the film star Romy Schneider. In the 'Epilogue', an actress playing 'Elsa Schneider' appears. Having expressed uncertainty about how to deal with her own role, she consumes a glass of champagne, collapses melodramatically, but then gets up demanding that the lights be switched off.

Apart from the intrinsic interest of the narratives within the first two sections and the anti-narrative of the third part, Belbel succeeds in theatricalizing his monologues by creating an intimate link with the audience. From the first few seconds we are staring at Elsa like *voyeurs*, as she takes a glimpse at the audience and wonders why two young men are greeting her. There are recorded sounds of clapping as one of Romy Schneider's films comes to an end. In another scene, she looks into the auditorium and we become photographers, keen to exploit the visual aspect of her mourning her dead husband. The *raison d'être* of Elsa Schneider is apparently to please the audience, to introduce the actresses who have played the preceding two roles and to end the play. But the real unity of the play is achieved through subtler means. Objects and images echo each other and implicitly compare situations and emotions. Elsa repeatedly says 'the air seems like champagne'. Romy Schneider alludes to success in terms of champagne. And at first, Elsa Schneider asks what the symbol means: 'why am I holding this glass of champagne? should I be drinking a toast? to what? who to?'<sup>62</sup> Similarly, a chair appears in all three sections and is spotlighted in the final moment of the play.

That Belbel has a mission to push actors to their limits is plain from all his work. In another monologue, *La nit del cigne (L'impossible silenci) (The Night of the Swan [The Impossible Silence])* (1986), an actor eventually performs a sketch by Chekhov. But before that, he begins in the auditorium and asks how he should start his performance. Later he takes a member of the audience to be his former lover and talks to her.<sup>63</sup> This tendency to treat the audience as ironic, intelligent onlookers or participants has led some to classify

Belbel's plays as somewhat self-indulgent. In the words of Eduardo Galàn: 'His commitment is not to the audience, but to himself, to his project of theatrical creation, which, for the moment, refuses to make any concession to audiences.'<sup>64</sup>

What might be seen in traditional terms as Belbel's most anti-theatrical play to date is also, of all his texts, the one which places the most pressure on his actors. *En companyia d'abisme (Deep Down)* was originally written in 1988 as part of a trilogy, but stands out as a self-contained text, and has been performed successfully on its own. Located in 'an undefined, totally bare zone in the abyss', two men discuss the reasons for and nature of their supposedly haphazard meeting. If the artist Paul Klee talked of 'taking the line for a walk', Belbel's dialogue is the closest thing to it in dramatic terms. The opening exchanges are like artistic doodling, executed without any apparent awareness of the overall effect:

YOUNGER MAN Meeting like this, unexpectedly, it's . . .  
 MAN Unexpectedly?  
 YOUNGERMAN Yes.  
 MAN Ah, I see.  
 YOUNGERMAN Sorry?  
 MAN No, it's nothing. But, I wouldn't have chosen that particular word.  
 YOUNGERMAN Which word?  
 MAN Unexpectedly.  
 YOUNGERMAN Unexpectedly?  
 MAN Yes.  
 YOUNGERMAN Ah, I see.  
 MAN Go on.  
 YOUNGERMAN Go on? With what?  
 MAN You were saying: 'Meeting . . . like this, unexpectedly, . . . it's ...' Go on.<sup>65</sup>

Although such subject matter seems vacuous, *Deep Down* soon develops into a conflict in which words become instruments of torture by their very articulation. Belbel's punctuation plays havoc with normal sentence structure. Questions (together with question marks) occur within phrases, as do parentheses which sometimes appear to replace stage directions as indications of changes in tone. Amidst repetitive, extended sentences, the actors have to find new signals for expression and breathing. The pressure is also physical. The

two men remain totally immobile apart from six, isolated small movements (three by each character) which inflict enormous pain on the character who does not move, even though there is no body contact between the two. Another kind of pain is transmitted to the audience through sympathy for the actors' plight. (At one point, the Younger Man stays with his arms at chest level for an excruciatingly long time.) Thus, the almost total immobility of the play becomes highly histrionic. The relationship between the two characters is never wholly clarified. (The Younger Man ends the play by saying 'I'd been waiting for you for so long, deep down'.) However, the joking, cruel, mysterious qualities of their interaction are what give *Deep Down* its impact.

A sense of mystery also pervades *Dins la seva memòria* (*Within His Memory*) (1987), in which a character called simply 'He' relives and meditates on the guilt he feels for the death of his twin brother. Accompanied by three internal voices which alternate between the fragmented narration of events and the performance of scenes from the past, He participates as much by listening to evocations (perhaps simply the product of his own memory) as by speaking his own words. The dialogue is once more repetitive and poetic. Yet Belbel adds another stylistic peculiarity. Sentences are often divided between the three voices (1, 2, 3). An entire scene—entitled 'First Parenthesis'—consists merely of the following:

- 1 You will remember
- 2 as well
- 3 that laughter of his,
- 1 that superficial, abnormal, outlandish laughter.
- 2 From now on
- 1 you will hate
- 3 above all else
- 2 that laughter of his,
- 1 that superficial, abnormal, outlandish laughter.<sup>66</sup>

Even if the tone in *Within His Memory* is sombre, the style of presentation is experimental and consciously indirect. It is as though Belbel were continually playing with form. In contrast to many dramatists from preceding generations, locked into a system of censorship, Belbel has no qualms about admitting his ludic approach to theatre: 'I think I want to play and, why shouldn't I if I'm given the chance?'<sup>67</sup> Farce is therefore understandably attractive territory although, as is always the case with Belbel, it is not just the characters that are manipulated and mocked, but the genre itself. *Tàlem* (*The Marriage Bed*)

(1989) puts bedroom farce into a post-modernist context. One couple tries to make another couple sleep in a big bed which dominates the stage. Belbel has revealed how the nucleus for the play came from one scene, and that he ended up constructing other scenes around it.<sup>68</sup> But the plot (such as it is) is not straightforward: the thirty-eight scenes alternate between advancing the action and taking it back in time. What is more, all the scenes are played twice and alter in meaning according to the context in which they are performed. Nerves, circumstance and incompatibility prevent the bed from being used, but along the way we watch a striptease, witness masturbation and hear 'Strangers in the Night' (in English) and a weird Catalan version of 'My Way'.

While such fun is removed from a committed stance in relation to social reality, in *Carícies (Caresses)* (1991) Belbel took another attitude. Already translated into Portuguese, German and French, *Caresses* is a Catalan drama for the 1990s—violent, sexual, perverse and unequivocally modern. Structured on Arthur Schnitzler's *La Ronde*, each of the 'ten scenes and an epilogue' brings a pair of characters together. The following scene includes one of the characters of the previous episode. This technique engages the audience's attention, for the ties between the two characters are at first unclear. Seeing



Miquel Bonet, Pere Arquillué, Anna Güell and Emma Vilarassau in Sergi Belbel's *Tàlem (The Marriage Bed)*, at the Romea Theatre, Barcelona, 1990.

one of them in a different light in the subsequent scene provides another perspective. The first encounter of the play sets the tone for the reciprocal aggression of the rest of the text. A young man tells a young woman that he has the feeling that it is as if they no longer have anything to say to each other. She claims the contrary. Then he starts hitting her. She asks what he wants for dinner and, while she describes the proposed salad, knees him in the groin and then kicks him in the face. Following his gasps of pain, she asks: 'Maybe you want to tell me something?' He utters a strangled 'Mmm ... yes... .' She then retorts: 'You see? You see how you've still got something to say to me?'<sup>69</sup>

None of the scenes involves quite this extent of black humour, but all of them present human relationships as problematic and confused. There is a constant conflict between generations. A daughter tells her mother that she should have aborted. This may sound cruel, but in the next scene, the mother tells an old woman that she hated her 'disgusting' daughter, because she prevented her from dancing. Everybody in the play seems alienated and alone, whether it is through sexual infidelity or poverty. At one moment, an old tramp looking for food in a rubbish container protests to a little boy who calls him an animal: 'I am a man I am a man I am a man.' These emotional states are set against a background of drugs, sex and the coarsest aspects of popular culture. The same little boy—in a street Catalan never heard before on the stage—talks of pop groups called Social Shit, Dirty Sheets and Fucking My Mother. One scene culminates in fellatio.<sup>70</sup> Although these elements could categorize *Caresses* as a play designed merely to shock audiences, Belbel is too young to be thoughtlessly taking advantage of the breath of freedom which occurred immediately after the death of Franco when all sorts of excesses (including live bestiality) took place in Barcelona. He is instead painting a picture of contemporary society and indicating ways of portraying it in personal terms.

It would not be totally accurate to claim that nobody has been offended by Belbel's work, but, as he is being written into the literary history of Catalonia,<sup>71</sup> one of the striking phenomena related to his drama is the high level of Catalan theatre criticism it has provoked. Nothing could be more distant from the blindly abusive tirades written by José Maria Junyent against Joan Brossa's plays. Furthermore, there is a perception among many that Belbel is at the forefront of a Catalan dramatic style which characterizes Benet i Jornet's most recent work and that of Joan Casas.<sup>72</sup> At last, Catalan avant-garde drama can be recognized on its own terms, as an often innovative contribution to European theatre.

## Notes

1. Only the critic Julio Coll made a consistent effort to understand Brossa's early theatre. See Enric Gallén, *El teatre a la ciutat de Barcelona durant el règim franquista (1939-1954)*, Monografies de Teatre, 19 (Barcelona: Institut del Teatre/Edicions 62, 1985), pp. 119-21.
2. Jordi Coca, *Joan Brossa o el pedestal són les sabates*, CoHeció Llibre de Butxaca, 52 (Barcelona: Editorial Pòrtic, 1971), p. 114.
3. See Lourdes Ciriot, *El grupo 'Dau al Set'*, Cuadernos de Arte Càtedra, 18 (Madrid: Ediciones Càtedra, 1986).
4. In the programme notes to the 1961 performance of *Gold and Salt* at the Palau de la Música Catalana.
5. See Frederic Roda, '14 Preguntes a Joan Brossa', *Serra d'Or*, 4, no. 12 (December 1962), 54-55 (p. 54).
6. Jordi Coca, *Joan Brossa o el pedestal són les sabates*, p. 79
7. Jordi Coca argues that throughout his life Brossa has been discovering the wonder of the quotidian ('Sis notes', in *Estudiós Escénicos*, 16 [December 1972], 49-54 [p. 52]).
8. A recent edition of selections from *Poesia rasa* is published in *Els Llibres de l'Escorpí: Poesia/ Sèrie Gran*, 3 & 5, 2 vols (Barcelona: Edicions 62, 1990-91). For general introductions in English to all aspects of Brossa's work, see the essays by Glòria Bordons, 'Joan Brossa, Constant Experiment and Surprise', *Catalonia: Culture*, no. 28 (March 1992), 13-15 and 'Joan Brossa and the Avant-garde Tradition', *Catalan Writing*, no. 10 (May 1993), 36-39; Pilar Parcerisas, 'Joan Brossa, Poet of the Imagination', *Catalonia: Culture*, no. 28 (March 1992), 16-17; and the essays in *Joan Brossa, Words are Things: Poems, Objects and Installations*, Exhibition Catalogue (London: Riverside Studios, 1992). The most detailed analysis of Brossa's writing is Glòria Bordons, *Introducció a la poesia de Joan Brossa*, Llibres a l'Abast, 235 (Barcelona: Edicions 62, 1988).
9. See David George, 'Joan Brossa and the *commedia dell'arte*', in *Anales de la Literatura Espanola Contemporànea*, 20, no. 3 (1995) (forthcoming).
10. Jordi Coca, *Joan Brossa o el pedestal són les sabates*, p. 69.
11. Quoted in Maite Ricart, 'Joan Brossa: La màgia del transformismo', *RS*, no. 6 (Winter 1991), 48-51 (p. 51).
12. Joan Brossa, *El sabater*, in *Poesia escènica*, 6 vols (Barcelona: Edicions 62, 1973-83), II (1975), 202. All quotations from Brossa's plays are taken from the appropriate volume of *Poesia escènica*, and the corresponding volume and page numbers are given in the main text.
13. See Antoni Bartomeus, *Els autors de teatre català: Testimoni d'una marginació*, La Mata de Jonc, 6 (Barcelona: Curial, 1976), p. 92.
14. See Àngel Carmona, 'El meu Joan Brossa' and Frederic Roda, 'El meu muntatge d'Or z sal', both in *Estudiós Escénicos*, 16 (December 1972), 55-57 (p. 55) and 58-63 (p. 58).

15. See, for example, his review of *El rellotger (The Watchmaker)* and *Collar de cranis (Skull Chain)* in *Serra d'Or*, 9, no. 11 (15 November 1967), 83, and his review of *Concert irregular* in *Serra d'Or*, 10, no. 11 (15 November 1968), 107.
16. In *Gold and Salt*, as in other Brossa plays, even characters who have such generic names as First Man in the cast list are revealed to have proper names when they speak to each other.
17. Literally translated this means *Sun with Face*, but the title recalls the Falangist anthem *Cara al Sol*.
18. Jordi Coca, 'Brossa', *El Observador*, 4 October 1992, p. 16.
19. See the interview with Maite Ricart, 'Soy un creador de estrategias', *RS*, no. 6 (Winter 1991), 52-58 (p. 58).
20. See John London, 'The Theatrical Poetry of Joan Brossa', in *Joan Brossa, Words are Things: Poems, Objects and Installations*, pp. 20-23 (p. 22).
21. One actor has to play all the roles in the text. Consequently, swift and frequent costume changes are required.
22. Bartomeus, pp. 220-21.
23. Interview with John London, Barcelona, 14 April 1988.
24. His fame abroad has largely been due to the writings of Martin Esslin and George Wellwarth. See Martin Esslin, *The Theatre of the Absurd*, 3rd edn (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1980), pp. 281-85 and the following three items by George E. Wellwarth, 'Manuel de Pedrolo and Spanish Absurdism', *Books Abroad*, 46, no. 3 (Summer 1972), 380-87; *Spanish Underground Drama* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1972), pp. 139-7; *Modern Drama and the Death of God* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1986), pp. 147-52. See also the misleading reference in Wesley Barnes, *The Philosophy and Literature of Existentialism* (Woodbury, NY: Barron's Educational Series, 1968), pp. 135-37.
25. See Frederic Roda, '18 preguntes a Manuel de Pedrolo', *Serra d'Or*, 5, no. 1 (January 1963), 52-54 (p. 52).
26. See Bartomeus, p. 224; Manuel de Pedrolo, *Els elefants són contagiosos: Articles (1962-1972)*, Llibres a l'Abast, 116 (Barcelona: Edicions 62, 1974), p. 35.
27. See Jordi Arbonès, *Pedrolo contra els límits*, Col·lecció la Mirada (Barcelona: Ayrna, 1980), pp. 50-52, 103-04; Jaume Martí-Olivella, 'Paral·lels evolutius a l'obra de Sartre, Camus i Pedrolo', in *Estudis de llengua, literatura i cultura catalanes: Actes del primer col·loqui d'estudis catalans a Nord-Amèrica*, ed. by Albert Porqueras-Mayo, Spurgeon Baldwin and Jaume Martí-Olivella (Barcelona: Publicacions de l'Abadia de Montserrat, 1979), pp. 267-80. Pedrolo translated an anthology of Sartre's plays. See Jean-Paul Sartre, *Les mosques. A porta tancada. La p. . . respectuosa. Morts sense sepultura. Les mans brutes. Les troianes*, trans. by Manuel de Pedrolo, *Quaderns de Teatre*, 21 (Barcelona: Aymà, 1968).
28. See Manuel L. Abellán, 'Problemas historiográficos en el estudio de la censura literaria del último medio siglo', *Revista Canadiense de Estudios Hispánicos*, 13 (1989),

- 319-29 (p. 326); Antonio Beneyto, *Censura y política en los escritores españoles*, Colección Espana: Punto y Aparte (Barcelona: Euros, 1975), pp. 255-61. For the most detailed list of Pedrolo's plays, with information about premieres and publication, see Josep A. Vidal, 'Pedrolo, dramaturg en actiu', *Taula de Canvi*, 16 (July-August 1979), 87-103 (p. 103).
29. Manuel de Pedrolo, *Els hereus de la cadira*, Catalunya Teatral, 2.<sup>a</sup> època, 166 (Barcelona: Millà, 1980), p. 32.
30. Manuel de Pedrolo, *La nostra mort de cada dia*, Biblioteca Raixa, 33 (Palma de Mallorca: Moll, 1958), pp. 95-98.
31. See Jordi Coca, *Pedrolo, perillós?: Converses amb Manuel de Pedrolo*, Pinya de Rosa, 13 (Barcelona: Dopesa, 1973), p. 75; Manuel de Pedrolo, *Si em pregunten, responc* (Barcelona: Edicions Proa, 1974), p. 213.
32. Manuel de Pedrolo, *Sóc el defecte. Pell vella alfons del pou. Algú a l'altre cap de peça*, Biblioteca Raixa, 101 (Palma de Mallorca: Moll, 1975); *The Flaw*, trans. by George E. Wellwarth, *Modern International Drama*, 23, no. 2 (Spring 1990), 5-10.
33. Manuel de Pedrolo, *Cruma*, Catalunya Teatral, 2.<sup>a</sup> època, 150 (Barcelona: Millà, 1979), p. 25; trans. by George E. Wellwarth, in *3 Catalan Dramatists*, ed. by George E. Wellwarth (Montreal: Engendra Press, 1976), p. 26.
34. See Coca, *Pedrolo, perillós?*, p. 74.
35. Information from Jordi Sarsanedas (director of first production of *Cruma*), in interview with John London, Oxford, 28 February 1990.
36. Manuel de Pedrolo, *Homes i No*, Quaderns de Teatre A.D.B., 2 (Barcelona: A.D.B., 1960), p. 13; trans. by Herbert Gilliland, *Modern International Drama*, 10, no. 1 (Fall 1977), 39-74 (p. 55).
37. See Bartomeus, p. 225; Amado C. Isasi Angulo, *Dialogos del teatro espanol de la postguerra*, Colección Fuentesaja, 1 (Madrid: Ayuso, 1974), p. 202.
38. Manuel de Pedrolo, *Situació bis*, Catalunya Teatral, 2.<sup>a</sup> època, 133 (Barcelona: Millà, 1976), p. 49; trans. by Brian Steel, in *3 Catalan Dramatists*, ed. by George E. Wellwarth, p. 137.
39. See Pedrolo, *Sóc el defecte. Pell vella alfons del pou. Algú a l'altre cap de peça*.
40. See Manuel de Pedrolo, *Bones notícies de Sister*, Catalunya Teatral, 2.<sup>a</sup> època, 152 (Barcelona: Millà, 1979); trans. by Albert M. Forcadas and Shelley Quinn, *Modern International Drama*, 25, no. 2 (Spring 1992), 5-24.
41. For an interpretation along these lines, see José Monleón, 'Manuel de Pedrolo', in Manuel de Pedrolo, *Hombres y No*, trans. by José Corredor Matheos, Colección Voz Imagen, 10 (Barcelona: Ayrna, 1966), pp. 13-32 (pp. 28-30). For the text of the play see Manuel de Pedrolo, *Darrera versió, per ara*, Els Llibres de l'Escorpí: Teatre/El Galliner, 8, 2nd edn (Barcelona: Edicions 62, 1980).
42. See Manuel de Pedrolo, *Tècnica de cambra*, Biblioteca Raixa, 67 (Palma de Mallorca: Moll, 1964), pp. 113-14; trans. by Jill R. Webster, in *3 Catalan Dramatists*, ed. by George E. Wellwarth, p. 89.



43. Manuel de Pedrolo, *L'ús de la matèria*, Els Llibres de l'Escorpí: Teatre/El Galliner, 35, 2nd edn (Barcelona: Edicions 62, 1983), p. 43; trans. by George E. Wellwarth, *Modern International Drama*, 20, no. 1 (Fall 1986), 49-103 (p. 68).
44. See Wellwarth, *Spanish Underground Drama*, p. 146.
45. Manuel de Pedrolo, *La sentència*, Institut del Teatre, Barcelona, 896-N, C. mec. no. 3-51 (typescript).
46. See Baltasar Porcel, 'Manuel de Pedrolo: Multifforme i patètic', *Serra d'Or*, 12, no. 124 (15 January 1970), 23-27 (p. 25); Pedrolo, *Si em pregunten, responc*, p. 172.
47. Pirandello's *Tonight We Improve* (1929) was performed in the Romea in Barcelona in 1967.
48. For the texts of these plays, see Manuel de Pedrolo, *Aquesta nit tanquem*, Els Llibres de l'Escorpí: Teatre/El Galliner, 46, 2nd edn (Barcelona: Edicions 62, 1982); Manuel de Pedrolo, *D'ara a demà*, Catalunya Teatral, 2.<sup>a</sup> època, 184 (Barcelona: Millà, 1982).
49. Jordi Arbonès, *Teatre català de posguerra*, Llibre de Butxaca, 75 (Barcelona: Pòrtic, 1973), p. 90.
50. See Pedrolo, *Sóc el defecte. Pell vella alfons del pou. Algú a l'altre cap de peça*, pp. 12-16.
51. Manuel de Pedrolo, *Acompanyo qualsevol cos*, Catalunya Teatral, 2.<sup>a</sup> època, 151 (Barcelona: Millà, 1979), p. 19.
52. Llorenç Villalonga, *La marquesa de Pax i altres Disbarats*, 2nd edn, El Pi de les Tres Branques, 8 (Barcelona: Club Editor, 1975), p. 57.
53. Villalonga, p. 53.
54. For Villalonga's account of these activities, see Beneyto, p. 58.
55. Bartomeus, p. 157.
56. Baltasar Porcel, *Teatre*, Col·lecció Europa de Literatura, 2 (Palma de Mallorca: Daedalus, 1965), p. 72.
57. Porcel, p. 80.
58. Joan Triadu, Review of *La simbomba fosca*, *Serra d'Or*, 4, no. 5 (May 1962), 50-51 (p. 50).
59. Anon., 'El teatre català es diu Sergi Belbel', *Avui*, 4 January 1989, p. 34.
60. The Spanish version is published as A. G.V. W., *Caleidoscopios y faros de hoy*, Nuevo Teatro Espanol, 5 (Madrid: Centro Nacional de Nuevas Tendencias Escénicas, 1986). The Catalan text was subsequently published with a more explanatory title: *André Gide/Virginia Woolf: calidoscopis i fars d'avui*, Catalunya Teatral, 2.<sup>a</sup> època, 282 (Barcelona: Millà, 1994).
61. See PepBlay, 'Entrevista: Sergi Belbel', *Avui Diumenge*, 24 February 1991, pp. 6-7 (p. 6).
62. Sergi Belbel, *Elsa Schneider*, Biblioteca Teatral, 62 (Barcelona: Institut del Teatre de la Diputació de Barcelona, 1988), pp. 25, 28, 57, 80.

63. Sergi Belbel, *La nit del cigne (L'impossible silenci)*, *Els Marges*, no. 38 (September 1987), 61-79.
64. Eduardo Galàn, 'Sergi Belbel: Artífice de la renovació escènica', *Primer Acto*, no. 233 (March-April 1990), 82-88 (p. 84).
65. Sergi Belbel, *En companyia d'abisme i altres obres*, *Els Llibres de l'Escorpí: Teatre/El Galliner*, 116 (Barcelona: Edicions 62, 1990), p. 25; trans. by John London, *Modern International Drama*, 26, no. 2 (Spring 1993), 5-24 (p. 7).
66. Sergi Belbel, *Dins la seva memòria*, *Els Llibres de l'Escorpí: Teatre/El Galliner*, 104 (Barcelona: Edicions 62, 1988), p. 35.
67. Pep Blay, p. 6.
68. For an insight into Belbel's working methods, see Sergi Belbel, 'Tàlem: Dossier', in Sergi Belbel, *Tàlem*, *Teatre Català Contemporani: Els Textos del Centre Dramàtic*, 1 (Barcelona: Editorial Lumen/Departament de Cultura de la Generalitat de Catalunya, 1992), pp. 115-26.
69. Sergi Belbel, *Carícies*, *Els Llibres de l'Escorpí: Teatre/El Galliner*, 127 (Barcelona: Edicions 62, 1992), p. 20.
70. Belbel, *Carícies*, pp. 26, 38, 39<sup>^</sup>0, 64.
71. See Joan Orja, *Farenheit 212: Una aproximació a la literatura catalana recent* (Barcelona: Edicions de la Magrana, 1989), pp. 103-06.
72. A public awareness of these affinities was voiced following the premiere of Casas's *Nus (Naked)*. See Joan de Sagarra, *Review of Nus*, *El País*, 4 February 1993, p. 33. For the text of Casas's work, see Joan Casas, *Nus*, *Biblioteca Teatral*, 75 (Barcelona: Institut del Teatre de la Diputació de Barcelona, 1991). The title simultaneously means 'naked' (as an adjective in the plural form) and 'knot, bond, core or crux (especially of a play)' (as a noun in the singular).

## Chapter 4

# Performance Groups in Catalonia

Mercè Saumell

### **I: An Overview**

From 1960 onwards, a succession of performance groups evolved in Catalonia. This theatrical phenomenon may be understood both as a reaction to the specific political situation of late Francoism, as well as part of a wider international aesthetic context which revolutionized European and North-American theatre in the 1960s and 1970s.

### **The Independent Theatre (1960-1980)**

The so-called Independent Theatre arose as a reaction against the conformist theatre of the period. It began as an amalgam of university, local and amateur theatre and, although it was not a homogeneous theatrical current, the groups which constituted the Independent Theatre had in common an anti-Establishment, and, above all, anti-Francoist ideology. For the purposes of this study, the groups with a predominantly visual style are the most relevant. Outside Catalonia, examples of such groups are: TEI, Los Goliardos and Tàbano (in Madrid); Akelarre, Bekereke and Geroa (in the Basque Country); and La Cuadra de Sevilla, Esperpento and Teatro Lebrijano (in Andalusia). In Catalonia, Els Joglars, Comediants and Dagoll-Dagom are well-known examples.

The importance of the Independent Theatre in the last years of Francoism and during the transition to democracy was ultimately to create a different kind of professional theatre. The groups which emerged during these years did not reproduce the hierarchy of commercial companies, but initiated a new system of management in which the actors had to make the sets and costumes. (The precarious economic standing of the groups determined, to a large extent, the aesthetic result of their projects.) The Independent Theatre formed part of an alternative culture while at the same time attempting to create a new audience from a 'non-audience'. A new touring circuit was developed on 'stages' that commercial companies never reached: universities, factories, village halls and

squares. Other small-scale venues where the groups performed became equivalent to the 'fringe' or 'off' circuits in other countries. Outside official theatres, particularly among university students, a strong sentiment was nurtured against bourgeois theatre. Determining (clandestine) influences were thinkers like Antonio Gramsci, Herbert Marcuse and Wilhelm Reich.<sup>1</sup>

Although much cultural opposition within Spain was traumatized by the repression it had experienced, in Catalonia a nationalist (Catalan) consciousness was being affirmed as the 1960s progressed. An obvious example is the *Nova Cançó* (New Song), developed by singers like Joan Manuel Serrat, Lluís Llach and Raimon who sang in Catalan, thus challenging Francoist censorship which banned the use of Catalan in certain public contexts. Indeed, there exists a direct connection between the *Nova Cançó* and *Els Joglars* for, at one time, they both used to perform in the same venue—*La Cova del Drac* in Barcelona.

*Els Joglars*, founded in 1962, are the oldest Catalan performance group. Their appearance followed the international success of Marcel Marceau's mime shows. Mime could avoid Francoist censorship by being classified within variety theatre or music-hall, genres in which the censor was merely concerned with the propriety of the costumes. *Els Joglars* also incorporated popular culture into their shows. Their first productions therefore had elements of farce, revue and television serials. It is a postmodern style which includes self-reference and political, irreverential aspects, all in accordance with the provocative personality of Albert Boadella, the director of the company since 1966. The objective of the group was to entertain, but at the same time criticize the most absurd aspects of Francoist society, as well as asserting Catalan national identity.

If *Els Joglars* emerged unscathed from Francoism, having gained a reputation for their anti-Francoism and innovative style, their political problems came after Franco's death in 1975. In 1977, when censorship was apparently over, *Els Joglars* decided to perform a satire against torture. The show, entitled *La torna (Left Overs)*<sup>2</sup> was a homage to Salvador Puig Antich, the anarchist executed by the Francoist government in 1974. The production caused the imprisonment of some members of the group (including Albert Boadella) and the enforced exile of others. These events generated a mobilization within the theatrical profession all over Spain. (Since 1975, the Independent Theatre had insistently demanded the dismantling of censorship and access to the subsidies granted by the state to conventional, text-based theatre.)

Following a period of intense activity at the end of the 1970s, Independent Theatre groups felt the need to discuss their aims after the end of the dictatorship.

The discussions at El Escorial in 1980 marked the official dissolution of the Spanish Independent Theatre, to which the Catalan groups Els Joglars, Comediants and Dagoll-Dagom were attached. Yet by 1979, a new generation of groups had arisen in Catalonia. Sèmola Teatre, La Fura dels Baus and El Tricicle, for instance, were more interested in aesthetics than politics. Faced by the new democracy under the constitutional monarch, King Juan Carlos, and given the rising institutionalization of culture, many groups from the Independent Theatre (such as Tàbano, Los Goliardos, Esperpento and Akelarre) disappeared. Others survived by making their shows more spectacular and thus more appealing to international festivals (Els Joglars, La Cuadra de Sevilla and Comediants) or by veering towards the commercial circuit (Dagoll-Dagom).

### **Links with International Theatre**

It would be no exaggeration to say that post-1968 European and North-American avant-garde theatre eliminated many of the psychological barriers of the conventional stage (such as bourgeois structures and traditional genres). Likewise, it attempted to reduce ticket prices and incorporate clowning and catchy music. Embodied by companies such as Living Theatre and Odin Teatret, it was a form of performance which altered the habits governing relations between actor and audience. Above all, it increased the visual and figurative elements of productions at the expense of the text, and thus evoked a whole tradition of pre-verbal theatricality. Just as Antonin Artaud had asserted in the 1930s, this new theatre appropriated the voice, together with the mythical and cathartic aspects of the stage, while at the same time recuperating a sensory space for actors and audience. Thus, a more direct relationship was established with audiences. Actors frequently addressed the audience directly or performed within it. There was a kind of anti-illusionism, partly derived from Brechtian epic theories, but more playful and witty. Many of the shows had songs which, on a structural level, had a function similar to Brecht's songs. The important thing at all times was to underline the theatricality of theatre.

This theatre often used popular forms to provoke a sort of laughter which would make people think. Gramsci's theories on bourgeois supremacy and its suppression of popular art and language (by considering them inferior) were decisive; one of the most important aims of this underground theatre was to subvert cultural repression by reviving popular forms linked more to oral than written literature. Genres manipulated included farce, satire, *commedia dell'arte*, popular songs and stories, puppets, shadow theatre, giants and carnival figures

with huge heads. (The names of Els Joglars—meaning minstrels, jongleurs or jugglers—and Comediants—(comic) actors—are significant in this respect.) These groups rehabilitated old traditions while simultaneously emancipating minority values whether they were national, ethnic, racial or sexual (Catalan theatre, Chicano theatre, black theatre, feminist theatre or gay theatre). This theatre also employed more recent popular culture such as vaudeville, operetta, rock music and films to provide cultural references for audiences without any theatrical awareness.

These features of the post-1968 avant-garde changed during the following decade when, in Europe, regular subsidies from institutions converted underground and fringe circuits into venues frequented by young urban professionals. This meant that groups concentrated more on their own aesthetic merits than on the ideological content of their productions. In Catalonia, companies like Els Joglars and Comediants began to receive support from the state to ensure their financial stability. By the end of the 1970s, these groups had become big businesses involving many people. Without financial aid, they could not exist. (Nothing could be further from the original ethos of the Independent Theatre.)

On an international level, from 1985 onwards, radical theatre began to re-define its objectives in order to become more pragmatic and competitive. While many companies such as the San Francisco Mime Troupe have disappeared, the ones which have survived have done so through an ability to adapt to new technology and extend their products beyond performance to records, books and the organization of pedagogical activities.

### **Mime**

Alongside conceptualism (such as *Arte Povera*) in the plastic arts, the aesthetic climate in the 1960s gave rise to a 'dematerialization' of the stage. Jerzy Grotowski's *Poor Theatre* and Marcel Marceau's mime, for example, represented an opposition to technological and consumer optimism. Indeed, the influence of mime (the most 'depersonalized' presence of the Western actor) was important for a whole theatrical generation in Catalonia. Apart from the indirect influence of Marceau, the teaching of two mime artists was crucial: that of the Chilean Italo Riccardi and the Frenchman Jacques Lecoq.

Italo Riccardi, a disciple of Etienne-Marcel Decroux, gave a series of classes in Barcelona in 1962. Among those who attended were Anton Font, Albert Boadella and Carlota Soldevila (founding members of Els Joglars). Riccardi taught them about the most refined techniques of mime in the domain of gestural abstraction.

Lecoq's school in Paris soon became a point of pilgrimage for many Catalan actors. Among the first who went there are Albert Boadella (future director of Els Joglars), Joan Font (director of Comediants) and Albert Vidal (an individual, unclassifiable performance artist). Boadella acquired his almost scientific interest in movement from Lecoq. The analytical spirit and the symmetry of the choreographies devised by Boadella for Els Joglars are elements inherited from Lecoq's 'Cartesian aspect, the interest in and desire to analyse movement'.<sup>3</sup> On the other hand, the *in situ* observation—a method used by Lecoq's students in hospitals and religious communities—also formed part of the training of the actors in Els Joglars. Joan Font, for his part, concentrated on the teachings of Lecoq with regard to the dynamism of forms and colours, along with the manipulation of objects by actors.

### **Ritsaert ten Gate**

In its early stages, Els Joglars contacted one of the most important centres of theatrical experimentation in Europe, the Mickery-theater. Its leader, Ritsaert ten Gate was keen to encourage young artists and invited the Catalan group to spend a period at the Mickery, near Amsterdam, in 1971. One of the most audacious shows by Els Joglars—*Mary d'ous (Egg Mary)*—began life there.

### **The Nancy Festival and North-American Companies**

Although many European groups have outlived their American counterparts, their origins are often to be found in experimental theatre from the USA. An important factor was the exile of the Living Theatre in Europe. Bread and Puppet Theatre, the San Francisco Mime Troupe and the Teatro Campesino (of Luis Valdez) also had a considerable influence, particularly through their performances at the Nancy Festival and the Venice Biennale.

The Nancy Festival, directed by Jack Lang, revealed the best examples of contemporary theatre to Catalan groups. Bread and Puppet Theatre was especially important. In 1966 the American company performed *Chicken Little*, a show with masks and puppets made by children from the Bronx. Nine years later, *Moros i cristians (Moors and Christians)* was performed by Comediants in public squares in Catalonia. The participants in the show also made their own masks and puppets. Later, the relationship between the two groups became more intense when the Bread and Puppet Theatre spent time with Comediants at their home base in Canet de Mar (in 1977) and then, during the following year, performed several street shows in Barcelona.

Bread and Puppet did not use the spoken word, but bare images (in motion) formed by actors and puppets. Founded in New York by the German Peter Schumann, the group developed one of the most aesthetically interesting lines of radical theatre. Although Schumann produced many protest shows, he also evolved a poetic and provocative form of performance. These aesthetic premises were assimilated into the style of Comediants.

### Other European Groups

Comediants' relationship with Odin Teatret (which also spent time at Canet de Mar) led to the participation of the Catalan company in the theatre festival in Bergamo in 1977. The event constituted a meeting of theatre groups from around the world under the guidance of Eugenio Barba, the director of Odin Teatret. Subsequently, the links between Comediants and Italy intensified. The support of the director Maurizio Scaparro meant that the group was invited to the carnivals in Venice (1980) and Milan (1981), and the Maggio Angelino in Naples (1981). All these performances were highly successful and won Comediants an international reputation.

On a European level, there are also similarities between Catalan performance theatre and groups like Lo Teatro de la Camera, founded in 1969, headed by Marie-Hélène Bonafé and based in Aries. Lo Teatro de la Camera promoted Provençal regional sentiment against a centralist (French) model, drawing on legends and folklore, as well as the Provençal language. (Similarly, La Cuadra de Sevilla drew on symbols from Andalusian culture.)

Another important group for Catalonia was the theatre collective La Comune, founded in 1970 by Dario Fo and Franca Rame. If Fo and Rame recuperated older methods of acting (such as *commedia dell'arte*), Catalonia, which had no specific tradition of this kind, rediscovered its admittedly confused links with Mediterranean farce and the *sainet*.<sup>4</sup>

### The 1980s

The 1980s were characterized by a high degree of eclecticism. Thus a group such as La Fura dels Baus could be classified as Theatre/Action, Post-Avant-garde or the Theatre of Catastrophe, terms which derive from the extension of the concept of theatre during the 1970s. La Fura dels Baus is comparable to groups like Royal de Luxe and Stiicken Baden, which combine elements from installation art, rock shows and the ritual nature of theatre. There are also similarities between the Neo-Circus (of groups like Archaos, Zingaro and Skinning the Cat) and Catalan groups such as Sèmola Teatre and Zotal.



## II: Catalan Performance Groups

### Els Joglars

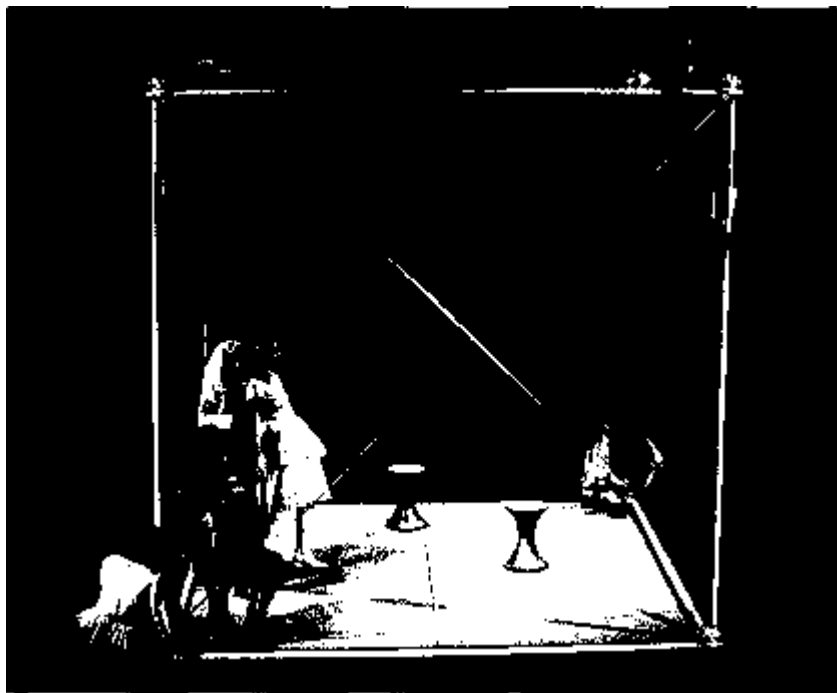
Along with mime, Brecht's ideas have had a considerable influence over this group since Albert Boadella became its director in 1966. Boadella was an assistant in the 1960s to the foremost Catalan Brechtian, Ricard Salvat, and began to use certain Brechtian techniques such as narrators or commentators in his own work.

By the 1970s, mime was emerging from its ghetto in Catalonia and beginning to interact with theatre, dance and circus. Els Joglars' show *Eljoe (The Game)* (1970) is a good example of this tendency. On a sloping circular surface, bare-footed actors wearing leather trousers carried out six sketches or games of an abstract nature. Although the actors' physical gestures dominated the production, the company had started to integrate the human voice through shouting and onomatopoeiac noises.

The value placed on abstraction and empty space in *The Game* influenced the renewal of stage design in Catalonia through the Independent Theatre, a renewal itself conditioned by necessarily reduced economic capacities and the need to use material which could be easily set up and dismantled. Another example is *Egg Mary* (1972), a show constructed like a musical canon. The four actors, clones of an engaged couple (John and Mary), evolved by repeating and varying the same actions, in a minimalist aesthetic. The production created a series of musical forms, based on some metatheatrical gesture (which could be operatic, melodramatic or tragic). Without following a plot, this gestural lexicon was organized in a series of repetitions, in which the same everyday gesture, such as beating eggs or shutting a door, was tirelessly reproduced.

Iago Pericot's set for *Egg Mary* consisted in the metallic skeleton of a cube, each of its edges measuring three metres (and designed to fit into a small van when folded up). This structure could be used just as well in circular spaces as in traditional theatres. It became a prison, a love nest and a piece of gymnastic apparatus.

Besides Pericot, Els Joglars collaborated with another important Catalan set designer during the 1970s—Fabià Puigserver. He was responsible for the sets of *Àlias Serrallonga* and *M—7 Catalonia*. *Àlias Serrallonga* (1974), a production based on the mythic figure of a seventeenth-century Catalan bandit, involved the only use of what can be termed 'simultaneous space' in the thirty years of the group's existence. The action of *Àlias Serrallonga* took place in



Els Joglars, *Mary d'ous (Egg Mary)*, 1972. Set designed by Iago Pericot.

three separate spaces located in the audience. There was a little theatre (the space for the Spanish monarchs, transformed into puppets), a metal tower (the bandits' forest) and a platform (the scene for the fights and the capture and execution of Serrallonga). The audience was therefore physically surrounded by the performances.

But this formalist experimentation did not lead to abstraction. The show was also highly political, through its use of legends and symbols which still had a currency in Catalan society. The absolute monarchy of the seventeenth century was compared to Francoism, and Serrallonga became an emblem of opposition to dictatorial power. The whole work relied on the impossible dialogue between the people (who spoke Catalan) and those in power (who spoke Spanish). Yet Boadella's view was not Manichaeic. Through an anachronism he showed just how materialist the 'people' could be: at the end, a contemporary Catalan sells his 'national conscience' to tourists in exchange for dollars.

In 1978, Els Joglars began a new period, characterized by 'borrowed' dramatic situations. Boadella established a paratheatrical situation as the nucleus of a future performance, and then violently parodied the conventions of such performances. *M-7 Catalonia* (1978) presented a lecture given by two scientists from the twenty-first century in which the audience is shown residual peoples of the Mediterranean. M-7 corresponds to the coordinates of the Catalans, who are cruelly parodied through four specimens—two decrepit old couples.

*Laetius* (1980) is a catastrophist parable of great formal beauty, set in a hypothetical future in which human beings have changed into strange mutants after a nuclear war. It is a mordant, pessimistic vision of humanity which has a sequel in *Bye, Bye, Beethoven* (1987). *Olympic Man Movement* (1981), on the other hand, became a provocative public meeting of an organization designed to promote healthy living, which defends totalitarian and racist values through sport. This production included questions directed at the audience as part of the recruitment of acolytes for the sect of 'Olympic men'.

The 'borrowed' dramatic situation of *Teledium* (1983) is an ecumenical service which has to be broadcast on television. Composed of monks, Catholic chaplains, Protestant ministers, Jehovah's Witnesses and Mormons, the show caused considerable protest amidst the most conservative sectors of Spanish society. Christianity came under fire again in *Columbi Lapsus* (1989), in which the internal intrigues of the Vatican are attacked through a supposed report carried out by impertinent paparazzi. A journalist from the gutter press insists on clarifying the real reasons for the sudden death of Pope John Paul I.

*Virtuosos de Fontainebleau* (*Virtuosi of Fontainebleau*) (1984) begins with an exquisite chamber concert, performed by a French group, a paradigm of Cartesian, European civilization. But the members of the orchestra start losing their composure when they come into contact with Spanish folklore. The violinist is an exhibitionist, the viola player a nymphomaniac and the bassist a megalomaniac who thinks he is Napoleon.

The world of madness has attracted Boadella a good deal because of its capacity to alter established values. Psychoanalysis served as the theatrical source for two shows directed by him: *Operació Ubú* (*Operation Ubu*) (1981) and *Gabinete Libermann* (*The Libermann Laboratory*) (1984). Madness is also present in *Yo tengo un tío en America* (*I Have an Uncle in America*) (1991), designed to coincide with the five hundred years celebration of the discovery of America. The patients of a lunatic asylum identify with the Paquis, an imaginary American tribe, while the psychiatrists and nurses become, in the minds of the patients, the Spanish *conquistadores*.



Els Joglars, *Virtuosos de Fontainebleau* (*Virtuosi of Fontainebleau*), 1985.

According to Boadella, the actor becomes the key element for theatre and, in general, the actors of Els Joglars are distinguished by the precision of their gestures. Boadella develops actors with a mechanical body, capable of astounding transformations. They also have to be cunning enough to captivate the audience with their movements. Learning how to persuade and provoke are an important part of their training. The actors have to be able to invent new ways of performing. For *Laetius*, for example, Boadella made them study videos on insects so they could transform themselves into post-nuclear larvae and avoid any human gesture. In other pieces, the actors had to reproduce very precise human behaviour, such as the finger movements and facial gravity of the members of a chamber orchestra in *Virtuosi of Fontainebleau*.

Among its work for television, Els Joglars devised a parody of the documentary genre for TV3 (Catalan Television), entitled *Som una meravella* (*We Are Simply Marvellous*) (1989). Each programme reproduced the same pattern: firstly, an offscreen voice introduced viewers to some social problem (such as unemployment or pollution); there then followed a series of comical scenes related to the topic. Boadella himself acted as interviewer in these programmes.

One year later, Els Joglars made a similar series for Spanish Television, called *Ya semos europeos [sic]* (*Now, Let's Be European*). In 1991, Spanish Television

offered the group another slot. This time they decided to produce short programmes, five minutes long, making up a series entitled *Orden especial* (*Special Order*). In each of the forty programmes Els Joglars presented a hated archetype of social life: the contemporary painter, the sensationalist reporter, the honest tax-payer, the hypochondriac, the forty-year old seducer, the progressive priest, the gossipy hairdresser or one of the 'beautiful' set. As with most shows by Els Joglars, the impact was not merely aesthetic, but social as well.

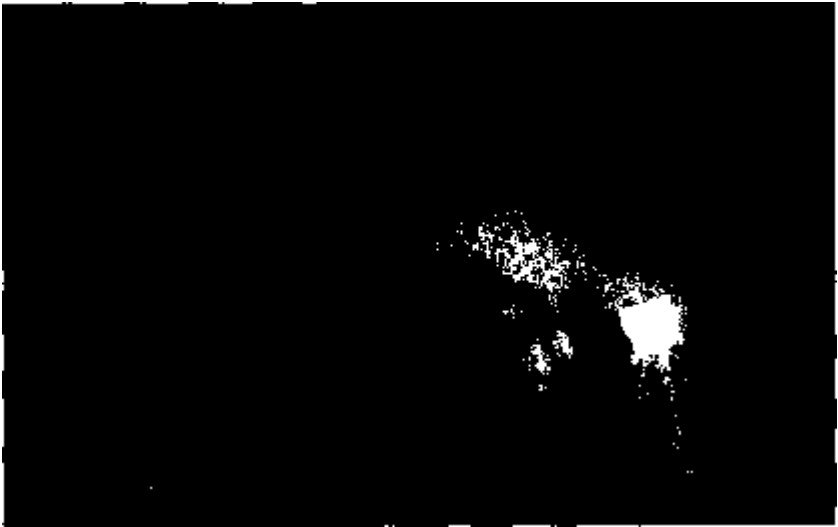
### Comediants

At the beginning of the 1970s, the amount of collective theatrical activity increased greatly. Faced by the imminent political change, a period of popular excitement provoked the appearance of street theatre and the recuperation of traditional festivals banned by Francoism. Catalonia thus rediscovered carnival and the Festes Majors,<sup>5</sup> which, for a long time, had been central events for the Catalan people. Comediants, formed in 1971, is the most representative group within the categories of festival theatre and open-air theatre. The company has evolved a style which combines rituals and paratheatrical manifestations with ultramodern technology. Since their first public appearance in *Non plus plis* (1972), a bumptious gathering of giants and carnival figures with huge heads, Comediants have concealed an element of transgression beneath an outwardly candid appearance. The first production revealed the methods that would be used in subsequent shows: provocation, open-air performance and work with masks.

Headed from the outset by Joan Font, the first shows of the group—*Catacroc* (1973), *Moors and Christians* (1975) and *Sol, solet* (*Sun, Little Sun*)<sup>6</sup> (1979)—drew on traditional, popular techniques. They incorporated fireworks, shadow theatre and cardboard figures (techniques that were common in nineteenth-century Catalonia). *Sun, Little Sun* had as its main figure a sun king (an immense mask) and comprised popular songs and stories, in line with the lively, Catalan, festive nature of the show. The obverse to this show was *La nit* (*Night*) (1987), devoted to the moon, dreams and the nocturnal world.

For a repressed society like Catalonia, the recuperation of the fiesta—understood as a pagan ritual—signified an act of national self-assertion. In this kind of performance, the encounter which takes place between actors and audience is real, not illusory. There is always a dimension which does not allow for the passivity of the spectator. Hence, fiesta-based theatre uses not realist, but archetypal images to stimulate an 'atavistic memory' still preserved by contemporary man.

This process occurred in the performance of a piece like *Dimonis (Devils)* (1982), a magnificent example of anthropological theatre. As in other productions, the group used material from the carnival cycle, along with its inversion of values, typified by cross-dressing. Joy, impudence, cynicism and a taste for the macabre all have their part to play in *Devils*. Carnival emphasizes a particular colouring—red. Thus this colour, which brings the vital, carnal component to the fiesta, is dominant in *Devils*. The infernal landscape of the show takes the form of a journey, derived from the Catholic *via crucis*, in which the charming devils show off their acrobatic skills in a series of parades. The notion of the journey allows a fictional content to surface, since it transports the audience to the kingdom of the diabolical fauna during the night. Spectators are jostled by devils amidst fire and music. As Bim Mason says of Comediants: 'they use the journey format and it shows how they manage to move large crowds as well as having a profound effect on them.'<sup>7</sup> Apart from the influence of carnival, *Devils* is also related to one of the oldest festivals in Europe—the Patum de Berga.<sup>8</sup> The presence of the dreaded devils or *plens* is especially important in this festival which was absorbed by Catholicism into the Corpus Christi celebrations.<sup>9</sup>



Comediants, *Dimonis (Devils)*, 1982.

After abandoning the traditional architecture of the theatre, the space chosen becomes transformed by the performance, as a new relation is established between the socio-historical nature of the space and the theatrical production. *Devils* was played differently at Avignon (where the devils assaulted the Papal Palace) from the way it was performed in Gaudí's Parc Güell in Barcelona (which exalted pagan and oneiric qualities) or on the snow-covered surfaces of Albertville during the 1992 Winter Olympics.

*Devils* became a model of street theatre for many Catalan groups, such as Xarxa Teatre, Bat and La Favorita. Indeed, street theatre was a kind of training ground for designers and actors who had to adapt to different venues not intended for theatrical performance. Performances took place in streets, squares and inside buildings.

Alongside the live shows it has produced, Comediants have developed other multidisciplinary projects. They had their first television programme, a children's show called *Terra d'escudella (Land of Stew)*, produced in 1976.<sup>10</sup> Two years later, Comediants took over the management of the Cafè-Teatre Odeón in Canet de Mar, a coastal village where the group eventually settled. From 1979 to 1981, the company organized several festivals and, in 1981, it started the Street Theatre Festival in Tàrraga.

In 1983, the LP of *Sun, Little Sun* was released. It included the soundtrack of the show of the same name, made up of popular songs. Material from the show was also included in a book-object with metal covers, fold-out pages and illustrations. The book won several international prizes. Comediants have made a film with Carles Mira entitled *Karnaval* (1985), which was shot in the Teatre Municipal of Girona. One year after the premiere of *Night*, Comediants produced two books based on the show: a box-book entitled *La nit (Night)* and a phosphorescent book to read in the dark, entitled *Somnis (Dreams)*.

The multidisciplinary emphasis of the group is encapsulated by the nature of their home base, the Centre de Creació La Vinya in Canet de Mar. It is used for theatrical work, but also as a film set, a venue for teaching and for organizing experiments like *Nit de nits (Night of Nights)* (1989), a participatory spectacle which lasted from dusk to dawn. In 1990, the group filmed a television series of thirteen programmes called *Teveo de noche (Night Comic)*" which re-used material from *Night*. Each episode introduced goblins who brought darkness to a block of flats which was the residence of the inventor of the machine for stealing dreams.

However, the company's most public work came in the 1992 Olympic Games. Comediants organized the closing ceremony in which the birth of life



Comediants, *La nit (Night)*, 1987.



was visualized through fire and the formation of the solar system. It was a pyrotechnical *tour de force* which made planets, stars, the sun and the moon appear in a magnificent dance of the universe. This large-scale spectacle in which 850 people participated is probably the best example of Comediants' ability to organize macro-events where elaborate visual effects and technical perfection come together.

### **Dagoll-Dagom**

Dagoll-Dagom was formed in 1974 from a group of university students. Directed in its early stages by Joan Ollé, it produced one of the most representative shows of the Independent Theatre in 1977, *No hablaré en clase* (*I Will Not Speak in Class*), with a text by Ollé and Josep Perramon. Childhood memories of repressive Francoist education structured a show based on repeated set phrases and images. It was a 'show-puzzle' which rapidly became one of the theatrical hits of the Spanish transition to democracy. From the night of the premiere, so many Spanish contracts were offered that the members of the company had to give up their other jobs and turn professional.

Later, under the direction of Joan-Lluís Bozzo, Dagoll-Dagom devised its own form of musical. *Antaviana* (1978), based on the stories of the Catalan writer Pere Calders, was the first time an Independent Theatre company had produced a show without any political reference or theme. 'Antaviana', a mysterious word invented by a child to escape the boredom of homework, becomes, whenever it is pronounced, a key to penetrate a world of fantasy. From that moment, the transformations control the stage which changes into a box of surprises, presided over by a playful Harlequin who facilitates the child's tender, poetic and ironic dreams. The success of *Antaviana* was so great that the critic and theatre historian Xavier Fàbregas did not hesitate in defining its premiere as 'the night on which theatre in Catalonia underwent a Copernican revolution'.<sup>12</sup> The galactic music of the composer Jaume Sisa initiated the group's steps towards the creation of a 'Catalan musical'.

*La nit de Sant Joan* (*Midsummer's Night*) (1981) was another foray into musical theatre. The theme was midsummer's night, the summer solstice during which, around the fire, the magic of goblins, stars and lovers intermingled. The production tried to fuse Mediterranean tradition with elements from modern life. This time Jaume Sisa performed his songs live. From *Midsummer's Night* onwards, Dagoll-Dagom has tended to produce more conventional works, such as Gilbert and Sullivan's *Mikado* (1986) or Àngel Guimerà's *Mar i cel* (*Sea and Sky*) (1988).

### Sèmola Teatre

Formed in 1978 within the realm of new circus, Sèmola Teatre is now fairly well known in Europe, even though its first international success did not come until 1988 with *In Concert*, a production performed indoors or in the open air. Sèmola Teatre, under the direction of Joan Grau, is characterized by its work with poetic images which lend themselves to symbolic readings. Starting not from any real plot, but from a soundtrack composed of fragments of classical music, *In Concert* is located in a circular space (derived from a circus arena) and involves dangerous, suggestive images, such as a man throwing himself from a great height into a tub surrounded by fire. The actors' work in Sèmola Teatre is based on circus acrobatics.

Following their line of research, Sèmola Teatre premiered *Híbrid (Hybrid)* in 1992, a production of impossible, unreal and absurd actions based on everyday man and his relations with other people and domestic objects. It reflected the humanist collapse of post-industrial society with strongly poetic images. *Hybrid* was less connected to the circus, reflecting rather the influence of Surrealist aesthetics. One of the most striking images of this dream-like, morbid atmosphere was a woman, wearing a long, red dress, making love to a body which was hanging amidst big sacks filled with sand.

### La Fura dels Baus

There can be no doubt that contemporary theatre has evolved a new definition of performance by extending the dynamic interaction of theatrical languages. Some theatrical groups can thus be called groups of 'interdisciplinary creation', in which theatre, dance and performance combine with other visual sources from the history of art, cinema and television, together with jazz and rock. La Fura dels Baus, founded in 1979, includes artists from various disciplines (art, performance, music and dance) and can be considered the most significant Catalan representative of this kind of new theatre.<sup>13</sup>

As products of street theatre and heirs to the 'boom' of Comediants, the nine members of La Fura dels Baus decided to subvert the optimistic values of festival theatre and opt for provocation. This attitude was typified in their first international success *Accions (Actions)* (1983). La Fura dels Baus's early period was also crucial for the acquisition of certain skills: tightrope walking, the ability to handle fireworks, physical domination over the audience and performance in open spaces. (A performance space was created in which actors and audience existed side-by-side.) Later, they invented new techniques (based on the relationship between actor and machine) and a system of intense training to build up physical stamina.



La Fura dels Baus, *Accions (Actions)*, 1983.

*Actions* was a collage of sensations that each member of the audience had to recompose. All the scenes of the collage, such as the scenes with the white man or the chrysalid-men, conceived theatrical space as an expressive element in itself. Through light and sound, the scenes camouflaged and transformed all aspects of space. Naked chrysalid-men, in a foetal position, covered by a plastic placenta, were thrown into the void by means of a pulley attached to a cable. Their bodies crashed against a wall covered with bags of red liquid. The impact burst the bags so that flesh, plastic and 'blood' came together symbolizing birth and death. It also formed a visceral, lyrical event reminiscent of Jackson Pollock's Action Painting, Yves Klein's *Anthropometries*, Viennese Neoexpressionism and Body Art.<sup>14</sup>

*Actions* had no central plot, but was rather centred on the physical alteration of a space. According to the group:

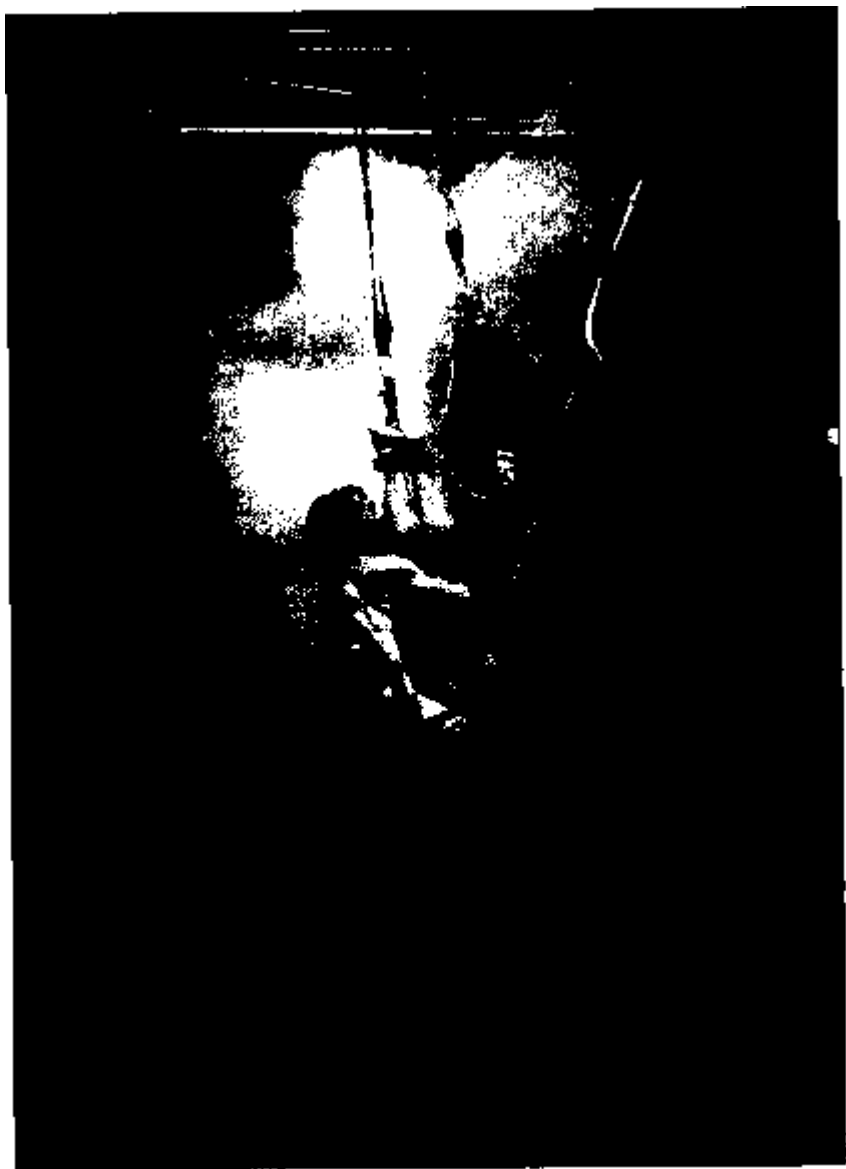
*Actions* is a game without any norms, a ball kicked right in the face, a noisy racket, a release of light and pyrotechnics; it is the best way of destroying a car, a sharp blow, a brutal succession of hammer blows, a sonorous execution, a chain of limit-situations, a plastic transformation in an unusual area.<sup>15</sup>

The 'physical' nature of contemporary theatre is encapsulated in the theatrical use of different urban spaces, such as markets, train stations and factories which have fallen into disuse. La Fura dels Baus's contribution to this theatrical counter-culture is a kind of post-industrial aesthetic. Through shows such as *Actions* and *Suz/o/Suz*, the group have adapted each performance to the characteristics of their chosen venue, thus varying the symbolism of the works. *Suz/o/Suz* in its performance in the Madrid morgue was more apocalyptic than the performance in a garage in Sydney.

*Suz/o/Suz* was premiered in 1985 in Madrid and consolidated the group's reputation for creating strongly visual, sensory performances accompanied by powerful music played live. The work is a ritual with a neo-primitivist aesthetic. It is not, however, a copy of any precise ritual, but an attempt to discover relationships between primitive and urban tribes, between ritualistic ceremonies and spectacular events. This aesthetic intermarriage is clearly revealed in the production. At the beginning, the actors wear only a white shirt with a black tie, elements which are emblematic of urban clothing, but which have become residual. They are two of the series of object-corpses of consumer society that are displayed in the show.

Throughout *Suz/o/Suz* we are reminded of the Artaudian necessity of returning to the roots of theatrical ritual. Hence, we witness actions with ritualistic resonances, such as the immersion of characters in a foetal position in enormous transparent cubes. This sequence, called 'the bathtubs', suggests a beautiful birth of initiation. Similarly ritualistic elements are contained in the fight with fire or the consumption of raw meat. In *Suz/o/Suz*, Rousseau's noble savage is perversely converted into the component of an urban tribe within a 1980s mythology. The presence of the actors' naked bodies oscillates between prelapsarian innocence and the sort of narcissistic exhibitionism more suited to a rock concert.

Indeed, in all the performances of La Fura dels Baus, a visceral kind of acting predominates. As a result, the actors' bodies are exposed to audiences as gestural and phonic vehicles, designed to create fields of energy between themselves and each spectator. In such sensuous theatre, the performers' bodies act as seismographs, registering the different states of tension throughout each production. If the 1980s were the period of bioenergy, Gestalt therapy, the nude-look and industrial music, there has also been a tendency on the stage towards a kind of individualism, in order to reduce action to pure gesture and dispense entirely with the word. Bodily communication and exhibitionism form an essential part of the neo-rituals of 1980s culture. However, La Fura dels



La Fura dels Baus, *Suz/o/Suz*, 1985.

Baus's style of performance can be termed 'behaviour-based', since each production displays diverse forms of human behaviour. There is also an evaluation of the destructive act as a critical reflex of an object-based society. (The best known scene from *Actions* is when the performers destroy a car with sledge-hammers.)

*Tier mon* (1988), the last title of the trilogy, deals with man as a fighting being.<sup>16</sup> It follows a sort of plot, even contains a notion of characters (such as the powerful man and the slaves), and indicates a change within the aesthetics of the group. As well as producing horrifying images (such as that of executed men swinging from the top of poles), *Tier mon* reveals the growing importance of technology as a creative language. Long-range spotlights, like those used in sports stadia, are employed to produce a dense atmosphere capable of sensuously creating space. The model for the acting space of *Tier mon* was a live cell, and the audience was supposed to experience a kind of osmosis when entering or leaving the space.

A scientific model was also used in La Fura dels Baus's fourth show, *Noun* (1991), based on a cybernetical concept. By eclipsing even the presence of human beings, technology became the protagonist of the production. This was not the only novelty: for the first time since 1982, women were reincorporated into the performance process.

Like Comediants, La Fura dels Baus have marketed products related to their shows. They have made a maxi-single *Ajoé* (1986) and two LPs, *Suz* (1988) and *Noun* (1990). (The LP *Noun* was produced before the show of the same name, in collaboration with the flamenco singer Ginesa Ortega.) The video *Ulelé* (1987), made by Francisco Montoliu, includes fragments of the production of *Suz/o/Suz* relocated in open landscapes. La Fura dels Baus's interest in machinery led them to organize *Automates* (*Automata*) in 1988, a dynamic exhibition of machines and sound contraptions used in *Suz/o/Suz* and *Tier mon*. More recently, Marcel·lí Antúnez, one of the members of the group, has, on his own and with another group called Los Rinos, organized an interesting series of installations/exhibitions.

La Fura dels Baus, a collective with no leader or director, also participated in the Barcelona Olympic Games in 1992 by organizing the opening ceremony, *Mar Mediterrània* (*Mediterranean Sea*). It was conceived as a spectacular cosmogonic fight, derived from the ancient Roman naumachia, between ignorant irrationality on the one hand (represented by animals and fantastical monsters like the hydra) and civilization on the other (represented by the sea, a ship and Hercules). This plot was introduced through a sophisticated, pre-recorded video portraying the movement of masses and set to music by

Ryuichi Sakamoto. The result was a kind of gestural 'score' which created a new conceptual and aesthetic precedent for Olympic ceremonies of the future.

### **El Tricicle & Vol.Ras**

One of the results of the vogue for mime in Barcelona in the 1970s was the growth of mime schools which frequently offered courses given by prestigious foreign practitioners. Lindsay Kemp, Jango Edwards and Stewy were among the best known of these non-Spanish visitors. Kemp exerted an influence through his aesthetic extravagance, whereas Stewy became known for his technical virtuosity and Edwards excelled at improvisation.

These visits had a Catalan counterpart. In 1976, a mime department was set up in the Institut del Teatre. Co-directed by two Poles, Pawel Rouba and Andrzej Leparski, both pupils of Henryk Tomaszewski, this department was responsible for training the majority of mime artists and gestural actors in Catalonia. The style it promoted was ludic and vigorous. As Thomas Leabhart puts it, Tomaszewski's expressive movement vocabulary is a hybrid of mime and ballet.<sup>17</sup>

Another important mime school was El Timbal, founded by Anton Font, the first director of Els Joglars. Font was director of the ephemeral Barcelona Mime Festival from 1979 to 1981, where El Tricicle, one of the most popular Catalan groups, made their debut. El Tricicle, founded in 1979, and Vol.Ras, another trio founded one year later, grew from the mime department in the Institut del Teatre.<sup>18</sup> Both are characterized by a kind of post-modern mime which is strongly eclectic in its use of sounds and objects. Their style is an indiscriminate mixture of techniques, such as the use of masks and clowning, combined to produce the desired comic effect. Their shows are popular and full of gags.

El Tricicle (Paco Mir, Carles Sans and Joan Gràcia) base their shows on sketches, often starting from a central theme. *Exit* (1984) was about airports and their bewildered inhabitants, while *Slàstic* (1986), one of their best productions, is a hilarious sort of journalistic report on sports and sports enthusiasts. *Terrific* (1990) reviews all the commonplaces of horror films. In their television series *Tres estrelles (Three Stars)*, a silent-screen style was employed to present the activities in a luxurious hotel frequented by outlandish clients.

Vol.Ras (comprising Joan Cusó, Joan Faneca and Joan Segalés) follow a similar line, although they are more influenced by film, especially the absurd elements in the cinema of Jacques Tati. *Insòlit (Unusual)* (1989) presents the



El Tricicle, *Èxit*, 1984.

ups and downs of three tramps with a 'sound track' very much like that of early American comedy films. *Pssssh . . .* (1992), their most recent show, narrates the adventures of strange nurses and jokey old terminal patients in a mad hospital.

As a consequence of the commercial success of *El Tricicle* and *Vol.Ras*, the comic trio form has proliferated in Catalonia. *Poca-Conya*, *Quin Pal*, *Xàpertons*, *Companyia ínfima La Puça*, *La Tal* and *Los Los* are examples of the genre.<sup>19</sup> They all have in common the fact that they are male trios whose work is humorous and whose style is predominantly clownish.

### **La Cubana**

*La Cubana* grew out of an amateur group from Sitges in 1980 and, from the very beginning, performed a kind of street theatre very different from festival theatre or carnival. Metatheatre soon became *La Cubana's* leitmotiv. Their first successful show—*Cubana's Delicatessen* (1983)—consisted of eleven actions performed in the street. 'Una trampa para Teresa' ('A Trap For



Teresa'), for example, was based on the adventures of a strange spinster who, travelling in the company of some female friends, becomes confused and ends up being trapped behind the bars of a department store. From this position, she begs help from her friends. The pedestrians/members of the audience react in different ways: some think that the action is real; others go along with the theatrical game. The members of the audience thus become the true protagonists of the piece. Street theatre was taken up again by La Cubana in *Cubanadas a la carta (Slices of Cubana à La Carte)* (1988), a catalogue of unusual actions. In one, eight brides dressed in white meet at the door of a church and quarrel as they wait for a bridegroom who has disappeared.

La Cubana have also re-theatricalized conventional spaces in their shows performed indoors, such as *La tempestad (The Tempest)* (1986), *Cómeme el coco, negro (Soft Soap Me, Black Man)* (1988), and *Cubana Marathon Dancing* (1992). In their version of Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, the text became a pretext for decodifying a series of theatrical situations inside a conventional theatre. At the beginning of the show, *The Tempest* is performed in a traditional way, on a proscenium stage. Gradually, however, the storm goes beyond the stage and invades the stalls, so that the performance has to be stopped. The theatre 'staff' (such as ushers and ticket clerks) try to help members of the audience, while the 'staff from the Red Cross arrive to organize a strange rescue operation. The result is that actors and members of the audience end up in the same space in this performance within a performance.

In *Soft Soap Me, Black Man*, the spotlight falls on the conventions of the revue—a popular theatrical genre in Catalonia. The show deals with the personal and theatrical goings-on of an imaginary third-rate revue company. *Cubana Marathon Dancing* reproduces a marathon dancing competition organized by a sect which attempts to gather acolytes among the most resistant competitors/members of the audience.

Jordi Milan, the director of La Cubana, pushes such theatrical games to their limits, by trying to cause the most uncertainty among audiences. The acting style of La Cubana, which has had a great popular impact, reinforces the recovery of a Mediterranean tradition of farce and caricature. La Cubana tries to portray characters from daily life (spinsters, village lads or fifty-year-old gay men) from a ludic perspective. On television, La Cubana has produced *Teresines, S.A. (Little Teresas, pic.)* (1991), a comic series about the lives of three sisters who are unmarried dressmakers, and their neighbours who live in the same building.

## Zotal

In recent neo-circus performance groups, such as Sèmola Teatre, Zotal and Circ Perillós, classical circus techniques combine with a good dose of theatricality. Zotal, founded in 1980 under the direction of Helena Castelar, stand out above all for their exploration of stage space. The stage device in *Zombi* (1988), their best known production, acts as a living being, changing visibly as the show progresses. On a proscenium stage, a sloping canvas surface moves like an immense epithelium, engulfing characters through small 'mouths' or making them slither on its slopes. In this production, centred on the fragility of human relationships and performed in a humorous style, the stage design plays a major role, becoming a kind of 'dramatic character'.

## Notes

1. For more on these influences, see Chapter 3 in Eugene van Erven, *Radical People's Theater* (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1988). Chapter 9 of the same book deals with Spanish Independent Theatre.
2. As well as meaning 'money returned', the Catalan can mean the amount of merchandise added to make up a precise weight measure.
3. Thomas Leabhart, *Modern and Post-Modern Mime* (London: Macmillan, 1989), p. 92.
4. The *sainet* is a one-act, humorous and often satirical play, the tradition for which dates from the seventeenth century.
5. The *Festa Major* (Major Festival) is celebrated by every town and village all over Catalonia (and other areas of Spain). These festivals normally take place in summer. They are a combination of Christian and pagan traditions. Sporting events and artistic competitions are an important part of the festivals. The emphasis is on popular culture, in which people of all ages take part.
6. A popular Catalan song runs: 'Sol, solet, vine'm a veure, que tinc fred' ('Sun, little sun, come and see me, I'm cold').
7. Bim Mason, *Street Theatre and Other Outdoor Performance* (London: Routledge, 1992), p. 49.
8. A *patum* is a figure representing a fabulous animal which is paraded through the streets during popular festivals, particularly in the small town of Berga, located about one hundred kilometres to the north of Barcelona. *Patum de Berga* is also used to indicate the short play performed in Berga on Corpus Christi and the following Sunday.
9. The devils or *plens* (an untranslatable term) are demonic figures linked to pre-Christian agrarian orgiastic rituals. They jump amidst pyrotechnical explosions.
10. While the singular 'escudella' translates as 'stew', 'terra d'escudelles' (the plural form) is a kind of scouring powder. A play on words is probably intended.

11. The Spanish title is a play on the words *TV* and *tebeo* (comic).
12. Quoted in Dagoll-Dagom, *Dagoll-Dagom: 1974-1989* (Madrid: Comunidad de Madrid, 1989), p. 17.
13. *Fura* means 'ferret' in Catalan, whereas a *bau* is a nautical beam.
14. For a performance context to some of these artistic genres, see RoseLee [sic] Goldberg, *Performance Art: From Futurism to the Present*, 2nd edn (London: Thames and Hudson, 1988), pp. 144-49.
15. From the programme for *Accions*, written in Spanish. The use of Spanish forms part of the provocative aesthetics of the group.
16. *Món* means 'world' in Catalan. 'Tier' has echoes of the French *tiers* (third)—as the third part of the group's trilogy —, and the German *Tier* (animal), stressing the primitivist nature of the spectacle.
17. Leabhart, p. 144.
18. *El tricicle* means 'the tricycle', whereas *vol ras* means 'flying low/almost at ground level'.
19. Approximate meanings of the names of some of these groups are: Poca-Conya (Stop Joking); Quin Pal (What a Pain); Companyia ínfima La Puça (Little Flea Company); La Tal (The So-And-So); Los Los (The The).

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