

# THE EARLIEST THEATRE OF EDUARD VIDAL I VALENCIANO: LITERATURE OF A NEW SOCIETY

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this article is to demonstrate that the Catalan literature of the 1860s, specifically in the theatre which was then beginning to be cultivated, reflected the profound social changes that were occurring in Catalan society, and more importantly in Barcelona, as a result of industrialisation and the introduction of the modern state structures. This paper examines the first dramatic works of Eduard Vidal i Valenciano, a writer belonging to the popular group of Frederic Soler and Josep Anselm Clavé, but also connected with the organisers of the Floral Games of Barcelona. This examination provides insight into the social impact of the new Catalan literature, and more specifically of the new theatre and Clavé's work; the emergence of a new social class – the working class – with its specific problems; ideologies such as republicanism, with its iconography and its own symbolic universe; and, more modestly, it records the concern for hygiene and for alternative medicine such as homeopathy. All of these plays were written before the September Revolution of 1868.

With the scant attention paid to 19th-century Catalan literature for nearly a century it is little wonder that the work of Eduard Vidal i Valenciano has not yet been the subject of serious and comprehensive study; writers of even greater calibre have also been ignored even though the body of work exploring 19th century Catalan literature has grown more than ever over the last twenty years.<sup>1</sup> This new awareness of 19th-century Catalan literature has managed to restore the reputation of the Floral Games of Barcelona, which for some considerable time were described with a variety of unfair and disparaging adjectives – anachronistic, reactionary, archaeological, of inferior artistic quality – and presents them as part of a vast undertaking to modernise of the city of Barcelona which decisively revitalised literature in the Catalan language and opened the doors to modernity (Domingo *Renaixença*). Likewise, the works of Jacint Verdaguer, Narcís Oller, Àngel Guimerà, Josep Pin i Soler and Josep Yxart, to name a few, are now much better understood and, in some cases, more widely published. But with the exception of the aforementioned book by Carme Morell, little attention has been paid to playwrights prior to Guimerà or his contemporaries. The purpose of this article on the early theatre of Eduard Vidal i Valenciano is not to add new information to his biography or to study

his works for the stage or the criticism they received, but to reveal the portrait they paint of the society of his time in the years before the September Revolution of 1868, when the great social changes that took place were to lead Barcelona, and contemporary Catalonia, into the beginning of a cultural cycle that would be ended by the defeat of 1939.

At the end of the 1850s and the beginning of the 1860s, the effects of industrialisation were becoming evident in Barcelona, taking the form of new social dynamics that were, in the words of Josep Maria Domingo (*Renaixença* 219), “les de l’estat liberal en construcció, les del capitalisme industrial, les del nou ordre urbà. Aquestes dinàmiques [...] duïen tant a l’interès per monumentalitzar l’eixample com per muntar un gran certamen literari (els jocs)”. It was at that time that social movements, ideologies, organisations and currents of thought were emerging and would have substantial repercussions on Catalan society: from Catalanism (initially literary) to spiritualism, from masonry to socialism and alternative medicine. Catalan literature, which at the time revolved around the Floral Games, only took any notice of those changes that made more or less explicit reference to literary Catalanism. However, these changes were important in the “popular” poetry and theatre that began to gather momentum after 1864. This poetry and theatre is inscribed in the tradition of popular Catalanism and has largely been undervalued because, in the words of Pere Gabriel (*El catalanisme* 11-12), “L’hegemonia que assolí a continuació el catalanisme conservador i la re-lectura —òbviament interessada— que aquest féu dels “antecedents” del moviment, afavorí posteriorment no ja la ignorància, sinó —el que fou més greu— la banalització i simplificació de tota una cultura catalanista popular laica i progressista, existent i llavors arraconada.” This article has no intention of eliminating the differences and discrepancies between one and the other, but prefers to focus on the fact that the two groups were part of this renewal, this modernisation, in the second half of the 19th century.

#### *Writer at a crossroads*

It is of particular note that Eduard Vidal i Valenciano has characteristics that clearly place him in the circle led by Serafí Pitarra, but which do not separate him from the platform of the Floral Games. According to his biographers,<sup>2</sup> Eduard Vidal i Valenciano was born in Vilafranca del Penedès in 1839 and died in Barcelona in 1899; his family was well-off and cultured (his father was a lawyer); he had two siblings,

Enric and Gaietà, a novelist and pioneering short story writer in the Catalan prose of the time; he acquired his first experience in the theatre of his home town and when he was fifteen or sixteen years old he moved to Barcelona to study industrial engineering, which he had to give up due to problems with his sight which would affect him for the rest of his professional life, first as a stockbroker, then in the theatre, and finally as he dabbled in politics in his later years. Towards the end of the 1850s he became part of the social circle of the baritone Adolf Gironella where he became friends with Guillem Forteza, who encouraged Victor Balaguer to publish one of Vidal's poems in *Los trovadors moderns* (1859). Possibly as a result of this relationship, he joined Victor Balaguer's social and between 1859 and 1862 he studied at the Conservatory of Barcelona, directed by Balaguer and Manuel Angelon, and located in the Sant Agustí convent overlooking the Odeon Theatre, where Vidal's first play was performed. During this period he joined Frederic Soler's backroom social circle along with Conrad Roure, Valentí Almirall, Gonçal Serraclara, Josep Roca i Roca, Rossend Arús and Josep Anselm Clavé, and he became an editor of the magazine *Un tros de paper*.

So, Eduard Vidal i Valenciano was introduced into the progressive ranks of Victor Balaguer (some of its members, such as Manuel Angelon, would lead the way towards Republicanism) and the Republican social circle at Frederic Soler's watchmaker's shop and the popular newspaper directed by Albert Llanas. All of this provides insight into his friendship with Josep Anselm Clavé (with whom he worked on the editorial staff of *Metrónomo* and *Eco de l'Euterpe* and who was, along with Josep Roca i Roca, his first biographer), his later theatrical collaborations with Roca and Arus and, more importantly, the fundamental ideology that inspired the texts analysed here. Essentially, Eduard Vidal was a Republican, at least during this period, after a short stint as a follower of Emilio Castelar, although he held the post of provincial Member of Parliament as a possibilist for the last twelve years of his life. We have no evidence that he became a freemason, in spite of his friendship with Rossend Arús and Conrad Roure.

Let us put to one side the details of his work at the Catalan section of the Romea Theatre, his supposed and later refuted rivalry with Frederic Soler (Morell, *El teatre* 211) in the 1860s, the impact and significance of his play *Tal faràs, tal trobaràs*, his plays at the Odeon, the Romea and Clavé's Camps Elisis, and let us analyse some of the aspects of the world that Vidal reflects in his first dramatic works. Specifically, our analysis will focus on the following plays (the date of the premiere is alongside the title): *A boca tancada* (13-6-1864); *Un beneit de Jesucrist* (October 1864); *Qui tot ho*

*vol, tot ho perd, o la festa de l'ermita* (8-10-1864) – an early version was performed in Vilafranca in 1859; *Tal hi va que no s'ho creu* (24-11-1864); *Antany i enguany* (with Conrad Roure, published in 1865); *Tal faràs, tal trobaràs* (4-4-1865); *Qui juga no dorm* (13-4-1865); *Tants caps, tants barrets* (13-12-1865); *L'ase d'en Mora* (31-1-1866); *Cadascú per on l'enfila* (13-4-1866); *Maria!* (29-5-1866); *La virtut i la consciència* (31-1-1867); and *Paraula és paraula* (29-12-1868). There is no record of whether *Contents i enganyats*, which premiered at the Odeon on 11-3-1867, ever appeared in print. The only play in Spanish during this period, *Delfín! Juguete cómico en un acto*, which premiered at the Circo Barcelonés theatre in April 1862, is of no relevance to this paper.

### *The new Catalan literature*

The first thing to be said about Pitarra's group is that they were opposed to the Floral Games and took great pains to use popular contemporary language which they referred to as "the Catalan spoken today". Vidal is largely excluded from this linguistic categorisation, although one notable exception is his authorship of the piece *Antany i enguany* with Conrad Roure, signed "Dos Gats dels Frares".<sup>3</sup> In the summary of the happenings of the time in the dialogue between Silvestre, the personification of the year 1864 that was coming to an end, and Manel, the representative of the year 1865 that was just beginning, several characters make an appearance:

S'ou una marxa de temes catalans tocada per instruments rústics i apareix lo quadro següent. 3 senyors vestits d'etiqueta amb casco i espadenyes, porten cada un un escut a on s'hi llegeix una paraula d'aquestes tres *Panses, Figes Ametlles*; quatre senyors amb barretina porten un túmbol a on descansa la sombra de *Clemència*. Detràs vàrios amb sacs de gemecs tots plens de ramellets, medalles i corones. (*Antany* 16)

The motto and the clothing of the Games are ridiculed; the participants are accused of being boring ("Qui són aquets tan formals? / Ia ho entenc van a un enterro" (*Antany* 16)), complicated ("Són uns jocs que és el que guanya / qui més estrany sap escriure" (*Antany* 16)), and the name of the contest is parodied ("Tants sèrios juguen? Fa riure" (*Antany* 16)). Even Clemència Isaura demands that they leave her alone and accuses her resuscitators of being anachronistic ("los homes avancen: les llengües transmuden / los únics sou valtres d'anar endetràs" (*Antany* 16)), and the response of one of the members of the Floral Games ("També cantem les glòries d'avui dia"

(*Antany* 16) receives a harsh reply from the shadow of Clemència (“però no amb lo llenguatge que parreu, / i si us penseu que aquet no té poesia / llegiu a l’Aribau i en trobareu” (*Antany* 16)). In other words, the Games wish only to resuscitate what has already died and offend Castile in some way. Silvestre, the personification of the old year, explains that Clemencia had Ausias Marc and Jordi de Sant Jordi as tutors and that shelater became the housekeeper for the Rector of Vallfogona. Thus they attempt to appropriate the most illustrious mediaeval literature (Marc, de Sant Jordi), the tradition claimed by Pitarra (Vicenc Garcia), the authors of the nineteenth-century (Aribau) and even the “floralesque” myth of Clemencia Isaura against the writers in the Games.

It seems that the text reinforces Carme Morell’s claim (213) that Soler and his friends had no intention of founding contemporary Catalan theater, but rather merely wanted to entertain and succeed on the stages of Barcelona. It must have been like that at first, but Vidal had a real interest in opening up space for the Catalan theater, beyond the widely acclaimed milestone of *Tal faràs, tal trobaràs*. It should be remembered that Catalan theater had been limited to short plays of a festive nature, and it was not until the second half of the sixties that it began to become more normalized on the stage, mainly through the activities of the writers in Pitarra’s group. Generally speaking, Vidal and his drama in three acts has been regarded as the driving force behind theater being taken more seriously and as the major influence on Soler to write *Les joies de la Roser*. In the same year as *Tal faràs, tal trobaràs*, Vidal introduced another play, a comedy in two acts, *Tants caps, tants barrets* with a letter to Robert Robert in which he states, presumably with pride, “ara ja podem dir los catalans que tenim teatro” (Vidal, *Tants caps* 3), and he describes himself as a pioneer in another aspect:

en lo estat en què se troba lo teatro català, puix ara ja podem dir los catalans que tenim teatro, hauria estat empresa formidable pretendre que de cop i volta s’hagués presentat una comèdia, o parlant amb termes tècnics un drama còmic, sens faltar-hi cap et ni ut ni sobrar-hi cap punt ni coma: una comèdia per exemple del gènere de les d’en Bretón, Serra o Cazorro; mes com això pot arribar a fer-se, he cregut que per força havia de començar un o altre.

Fins ara no havem vist en escena altra gent que la de gec, i com també n’hi ha a Catalunya que parlen català i porten levita, he volgut introduir-ne en lo teatro i per esta raó se desenvolupa entre persones de semblant modo vestides, l’acció de l’ensaig còmic *Tants caps tants barrets*. (*Tants caps* 3)

While there is no doubt whatsoever about the passage’s renaissance spirit, its desire to normalise Catalan theatre, it is even more evident in this introductory note:

“Bé que de poca importància, crec que amb això hauré ajudat a apilar una pedreta més per a l’edifici del Teatro Català.” (*Tants caps* 3). The dedication in *Cadascú per on l’enfila* to Albert Llanas also points towards this sense of renaissance: “Tu l’enfilares en què podia sostindre-se un semmanari català i lo públic t’és deutor de l’aplaudir i celebrat *Un tros de paper*.” (*Cadascú* 3). It is easy to see a clear intention in these words. Perhaps there was no real plan, but his eyes were firmly set on the possibilities that were opening up for Catalan literature in a variety of fields.

Moreover, Eduard Vidal maintained a seemingly fluid relationship with the Floral Games sector, possibly through his brother Gaietà or Victor Balaguer. He was one of the organisers of the excursion to Montserrat in which the *félibres* from Provence travelled to Barcelona to attend the tenth edition of the Floral Games, invited by Balaguer who was grateful for the welcome he had received during his recent exile; and he was also one of those who returned the visit to Provence in the autumn of the same year. His cordial relations with the conservative faction can be seen by the fact that he dedicated *Paraula és paraula* to the Valencian poets Pere M. Yago and Jacint Labaila. The latter of these was a member of the most refractory group in the politicisation of the Catalan Renaissance, and along with Teodor Llorente and Rafael Ferrer i Bigné as spokespeople, protested the combative prologue with which Víctor Balaguer had opened *Esperances i records* two years previously. Eduard Vidal addresses Labaila as “Dear Jacinto”; he gives him his condolences for the death of Yago and recalls a very interesting conversation from two years before:

Acabava de contar-vos l’argument del present drama per a conèixer vostre parer. Tu em digueres. —Me plau. —Ell me digué. —No conto pas veure-la. ¿Per què? —Perquè no la faràs. Tens massa dignitat, són ses paraules, per a sotmetre-te a escriure en català, quan hi ha un govern prou despòtic i sobrat injust, que ens força a barrejar lo castellà en nostres produccions, com per a segellar-les amb la marca de l’esclau, i si això no fos prou, ets sobrat escrupolós per a portar a son fi ta idea.

Respecte a lo primer, podries tenir raó, li diguí; mes te prometo que l’escriuré i subjectat a totes les condicions que imposa la famosa real ordre de l’odiat ministre González Bravo, per a demostrar a los que de mi dubten, que cap obstacle serà prou per a detenir-me en lo camí que m’he marcat, per a dur a terme la creació d’un teatre català. (*Paraula* 7).

The existence of a programme, albeit unwritten, to achieve the complete normalisation of the Catalan theatre is clear in the final sentence. “cap obstacle serà

prou per a detenir-me en lo camí que m'he marcat, per a dur a terme la creació d'un teatre català" leaves no room for misunderstanding. The renaissance resolve is explicit.

### *The new Catalan theatre*

Beyond these paratexts, the new Catalan literature – and particularly the new theatre – acquired a leading role in these plays. So the discussion on reading *La virtut i la consciència* in Catalan are of sociolinguistic interest. Manel explains to Andreu and Mariàngela, now well advanced in years, that he has been given the Working Class Association calendar in which the short story *Confiança en Déu* has been published (thus, Vidal provides some publicity for his brother Gaietà's short novel) and tells them that his daughter Angeleta can read it to them. The following conversation ensues: "ANDREU. Jo tot sol la llegiré. / MANEL. És català. ANDREU. Molt millor." (*La virtut* 11). On some occasions discussions of a philological nature arise. In *Cadascú per on l'enfila*, for example, one of the characters wonders whether "Dolores" is a Catalan word, and finally draws the conclusion that the common noun is not but the proper noun is.

One of the first comedies, *Un beneit de Jesucrist*, presents a character type that was common in preindustrial literature: the blind man who recites or sings ballads in exchange for a few coins. The author portrays the character, still present on the streets of Barcelona, with compassion:

Estos infeliços que privats de la vista, guanyen lo pa de cada dia cantant cançons i a voltes convertint-se en joglars de la civilisada societat del segle dinou [...] acompanyant-se amb un pobre violí o poètica guitarra, plora, en tant que amb ses agudeses o picants dïtxos, mou la hilaritat dels que l'escolten. (*Un beneit* 5)

But this popular literature that the dramatists of the Pitarra group felt so in tune with was already in retreat due to the introduction of new literary forms, such as the calendars that the old Silvestre mentioned in *Antany i enguany*: "*Lo tiburón, De Pagès, Lo d'en Brusi*" (*Antany* 11) or the publications of the Llibreria Espanyola d'Innocenci López (*Antany* 23). No manifestation of the Catalan literature of the period was left out; we have already seen how parody was used to refer to the Floral Games and we have also just seen how Vidal made the most of one of his plays to refer to one of his brother Gaietà's books. The primary focus is on the theatre, of which technical aspects are

commented upon in paratexts such as the letter to Robert Robert or the dedication to Jacint Labaila and Pere M. Yago cited above, in the annotations and body of text and in observations about the performances. A more interesting case is that of *Cadascú per on l'enfila*, because the comedy revolves around the vicissitudes of the rehearsal of a play, with a boycott by the actors, improvisation by an actress and a wealth of detail about the preparations. It is a play that is supposedly written by one of the characters, who declares “a Barcelona / vull veure si puc que en Roca / me la posi en lo Romea” (*Cadascú* 25-26), in reference to the actor Gervasi Roca. In *Antany i enguany*, an interesting parade of Barcelona theatres is described, each with its area of speciality: “El Liceo. Aquet dóna òperes, / quan pot bé, quan malament / però hi ha una part del públic / que tot ho troba mal fet / i tot ho critica i xiula. [...] Aquell és lo Principal, / per altre nom Santa Creu, / que per l’art es creu molt grossa / quan fa sarsueles” (*Antany*, 24). The character moves on to praise the Pitarra group: “MANEL. Ai ai! Aquet porta un gat. / PERSONATGE. Paga que és gata. Mia, mèu. (*Apartant-se de la gàbia.*) / MANEL. Dimontris. / SILVESTRE. És molt de broma. / MANEL. Doncs ja m’agrada, ell fa bé.” (*Antany* 24). And social criticism is also present when Art protests that it is often ridiculed. The response is: “La qüestió d’avui són quartos, / i si els mamarratxos donen / els teatros fan mamarratxos.” (*Antany*, 25).

This is not the only reference to the group for new Catalan theatre; they appear in dedications and in the text. The servant in *Tants caps tants barrets* reads *Un tros de paper*; Gumersindo in the same play is a regular at the Gata and writes farces; this is precisely one of the reasons why a mother considers him to be an unsuitable suitor for her daughter. However, the most passionate defence of Frederic Soler comes from the mouth of the blindman, Antonet, in *Un beneit de Jesucrist*, when Miqueló asks him who Serafi Pitarra is. The reply becomes a propagandistic rant:

Ai Miqueló!  
 ara conec que no ha vist  
 ni per un forat lo món.  
 És... com vol que jo li díguia,  
 és un feligrès d’humor  
 que escriu los *singlots poètics*.  
 S’ha impensat lo *Trencalòs*  
*La vaquera de la piga*  
*rossa*, el *Faust*, lo *Cantador*,  
*L’esquella de la torratxa*;  
*El Profeta* i què sé jo



quantes i quantes gatades,  
perquè sol singlotar molt.  
Fa riure per les butxaques  
i esquitllar alguns pinyons  
dels que escolten; mes és just,  
puig pel pa sols balla el gos.  
Cregui'm Miquel: vagi a veure-ho:  
al *Romea* i l'*Odeon*  
ne fan alguns i barato  
i que riurà de debò. (*Un beneit*, 10-11)

Vidal was a professional in the theatre for many years and took on a wide range of tasks, including writing in Spanish, which he did not look down on. As in the case of a dramatist who came long before him, Josep Robrenyo, the language had a decisive impact on the texture of the dramatic language. The Catalan in the works by Eduard Vidal i Valenciano, like that of contemporary dramatists, aimed at naturalness, at reflecting the language of the audience – and at reflecting the language used in the farces of the first half of the century – but did not deliberately include many of the Spanish-based words so characteristic of the living language and which were a feature of some of Frederic Soler's pieces of the period. Paremiological sensuality was sought through the use of locutions and sayings that must have produced a sense of belonging and complicity among the spectators. The titles are good examples of this – *A boca tancada [no hi entren mosques]*, *Qui tot ho vol, tot ho perd*, *Tal faràs, tal trobaràs*, *Qui juga, no dorm*, *Tants caps, tants barrets*, *L'ase d'en Mora*, *Cadascú per on l'enfila*, *Paraula és paraula*<sup>4</sup> – and the plays, usually structured very simply, are constructed on the basis of these common sayings, which are used copiously in the text in their natural form or somewhat modified to adapt to the metre or rhyme.

The paremiological richness is complemented by the intentional use of different languages such as English, which leads to misunderstandings in *Qui juga no dorm*, or French in *Cadascú per on l'enfila*. But above all, there is a play between Catalan and Spanish because, as mentioned above, there was a time that combining the languages was mandated by government ordinance. Only outsiders speak in Spanish (soldiers, assistants, foreigners) and sometimes the Catalans replied in Catalan, sometimes in Spanish. Soldiers use Spanish to comic effect in *L'ase d'en Mora* just as the assistant Cércoles uses Galician-contaminated Spanish with the same effect in the same play. This device, also with Galician, had already been used in the play written in Spanish *Delfín*. Similarly, the dialectal variants of Catalan also have a place, whether in the “boi

boi” of the Penedès region or in the carter Josep’s labiodental consonant *v* and the open vowels typical of the Camp de Tarragona, in *L’ase d’en Mora*, or the Valencian of Nel·lo in *Tants caps, tants barrets*.

*New times, new ways of living*

With the exception of *Maria!* in 1848, Vidal’s works are set in the present and reflect both the times and Vidal’s ideology. The tradition of the costume farce provided a series of clichéd topics commonplace in the theatre of other dramatists at the time. Almost inevitably, these plays were frequently based on amorous relationships and conflicts – entanglements caused by love triangles, opposition to weddings, plots to win over a girl or to prevent another man from having her, or a woman winning over a man. An exacerbated concept of honour, which depends on female behaviour, has a major role in these plays. In this respect, the focus tends to be quite traditional, as at the time the changes that more advanced ideologies were to encourage in personal relationships were still a long way off. Mere accusation was sufficient to tarnish a woman’s name, because it was still widely believed that women belonged to their fathers or their husbands and any offence against them or by them had an unimaginable impact on the man who was responsible for her (or who owned her). In this context the authority of the father is absolute, and if he reaches any sort of agreement on her behalf, the daughter must marry someone she does not love and cast aside someone she does love because she has no say in the matter. Her affairs are entirely in her father’s hands. In *La virtut i la consciència*, the wicked Jacundo’s plot to conquer Angeleta immediately makes her father suspicious of his daughter’s behaviour, despite the girl’s absolute goodness. In the celebrated *Tal faràs, tal trobaràs*, the burning love between a young couple is brought to an end because a daughter cannot go against the wishes of her father. In *Maria!*, the wicked suitor uses slander and rumour to his advantage. In *Paraula és paraula*, the man of the house defends the honour of a girl he is responsible for to protect her against what is regarded as the supreme offence: her suitor calling off the engagement. The conflict is resolved when the brother of the offender takes his place and repairs the wrongdoing. In these circumstances, women are in a very delicate position in the social context, but even the men, such as Eusebi, Angeleta’s fiancé, respect the golden rule of filial obedience. The first work by Vidal, *Qui tot ho vol, tot ho perd*, makes specific reference to the coquettish woman who postpones making a decision in order to be able to make a better choice and, to general applause, is punished

for this behaviour. It goes without saying that the girl who leaves home in pursuit of an amorous impulse – which is the situation in the working-class setting of *La virtut i la consciència* – is expelled from the family and considered dead by the clan. However, a determined girl who knows what she wants and has the support and complicity of her mother, such as Elena in *Cadascú per on l'enfila*, may challenge her father. In two of the longest of his 12 plays, *Tal faràs, tal trobaràs* and *Paraula és paraula*, this concept of honour dominates all other aspects, possibly because it is modelled on Spanish melodrama.

The impact of Costumbrism can be seen in the interest taken in showing or narrating celebrations (*Qui tot ho vol, tot ho perd* takes place during a gathering at a chapel; in *Maria!*, the youngsters plant a pine tree and dance around it on the first of May) and in the use of stereotyped characters (the blind man, the clean shaven soldier, the servant celebrating with the soldier, the French knife grinder, the simpleton). But, these plays also discuss changes in customs, which the older generation regards as being exaggerated or harmful. In *Qui tot ho vol*, Miquel, if he could, would make young people dance as they did in his youth; certain trades, such as tailors, are endangered by progress, as argued by Bernat in a monologue from *A boca tancada* (5):

Dels oficis que més penen,  
des que tot ha progressat,  
ben segur no hi ha un altre  
com lo sastre de portal.  
Jo recordo que l'any quinze,  
era un ofici, *com sa*:  
mes des que hi ha figurins,  
i baratos i basars,  
i en vesteixen per sis quartos  
amb capa, paltó i reglant,  
o bé un altre diablura  
de les mil que han inventat;  
los *sastrinyols*, com ens diuen,  
no podem ni menjar pa.  
I és ben vist! Qui no se'n gasta  
mitja dotzena de naps  
per presumir-la de Don  
passejant la rambla avall?  
Qui podent anar novet  
vol sortir apedaçat?

A constant source of satire is the sudden change in social status. This is the topic of *El burgès gentilhome*, which Marçel·l Busquets also dealt with in *Un poll resuscitat* to poke fun at the sudden wealth resulting from speculation in the district of Barcelona, the Eixample. In *Tants caps, tants barrets*, the maid reminds the very demanding and pretentious Conxa that she used to work as a shop assistant in Carrer d'Avinyo before winning the lottery, and she gets so angry she fires her; now alone, she launches into the compensatory monologue:

Qui no en té no en pot gastar.  
Això ja és més vell que el món:  
i a més: no dec enfadar-me  
amb qui no és noble com jo.  
¡M'ha retret que era adroguera!  
¡I quin agravi tan gros!  
Jo he llegit en una història  
que un Papa, o Emperador..  
no sé si era Carlos Quint  
o bé el gran Napoleion,  
abans de ser lo que va esser  
havia pastorats porcs,  
que compto que és molt més baix  
que vendre confits i arròs. (*Tants caps* 41)

As well as providing the characteristic Costumbrist still photograph, which allows for a whole host of variations on the familiar theme of the love triangle, these plays also focus on current events in the strictest sense. In this respect, the most complete of all of them is *Antany i enguany* because it reviews the most notable events of the previous year. In *Tants caps, tants barrets*, the characters gather in a thermal spa to escape the cholera epidemic which at the time was subject to furious satire in articles on customs by Robert Robert. *Tal hi va que no s'ho creu* mentions military recruitment and draw rigging. In *La virtut i la consciència* the out-of-control son goes off to the 1859-1860 Hispano-Moroccan War. And *Maria!* is set in the Second Carlist War.

#### *Progress, virtue and love*

In a politically convulsive 19th century marked by intense ideological polarisation, the theatre of the Republican Eduard Vidal i Valenciano not only reflected the changes that were occurring in society but also directly introduced ideological components. At the gates of the Revolution of 1868, references to representations of the

Liberal-Republican ideology to which Vidal ascribed are strewn throughout the text of these plays. The blind man in *Un beneit de Jesucrist* sings a festive version of the *Himno de Riego* because it is the holiday of Saint Baldomer, his grandfather Espartero's saint:

Si la pàtria perilla algun dia  
i li falta per sort un trompet,  
mentres trobi qui em faci de guia  
de segur que tindrà l'Antonet.

Tralarà, larà, larà,  
laralarà, lalarà, lalarà,  
tralarà, larà, larà,  
tralarà, larà, larou.

Més hermós que ric somni de glòria  
sé jo un nom que jamai hi olvidat  
nom preciós que resum nostra història  
llibertat, llibertat, llibertat. (*Un beneit* 7)

Music gives way to iconography: portraits of Garibaldi and Espartero hang on the walls of the house where the action in *Qui juga, no dorm* takes place. Images lead on to doctrinal definitions: in the same comedy, Titus announces he is liberal – he can't help playing on the meaning of the word and referring to marital relations – and discusses politics with the conservative Patrici (*Qui juga* 9-10). The young man in the comedy *Maria!* who fights for ideals and is admired by everyone for his generosity is clearly a Republican, although this is never confirmed.

While in *Antany i enguany* the motto of the Barcelona Floral Games is parodied with the grotesque “Raisins, Figs, Almonds”, the reaction that became a real alternative was the one that Josep Anselm Clavé converted into a verse in *La Maquinista*: “Progress, Virtue and Love”. This was the republican motto of the second half of the century which emphasised the course of history towards a more equal society with fewer internal differences or with the substantial equality that humanity must reach at the end of inexorable road it was following; it meant that humanity had entered a new cycle, spurred by the actions of the most humble classes defending their rights.

Eduard Vidal i Valenciano was a close friend of Josep Anselm Clavé.<sup>5</sup> They met in Frederic Soler's back room and became close collaborators in *El Metrónomo*, *Eco del Euterpe* and the open-air summer shows. Clavé and Roure were invited to the Sant Fèlix

de Vilafranca festival so that the former would be inspired to compose *Els xiquets de Valls*, and this anecdote reminds us that Eduard Vidal i Valenciano and Josep Roca i Roca were the earliest biographers of the poet and musician. Vidal's enthusiasm for Clavé is transmitted through his work. In *Qui tot ho vol tot ho perd*, the waltz is from Clavé's repertoire; in *Tal hi va que no s'ho creu*, Joan complains that Rafel has organised a Clavé choir, which has shattered the peace:

Si em desperto... *Bon matí:*  
postes de sol, *Cap al tard:*  
les *Nines* a migdiada,  
*Flors de maig* per esmorzar:  
i de nit, cantarà el dropo  
*Los néts dels almogavars. (Tal hi va 7)*

Later on, Rafel sings *Les nines del Ter* and Vidal heaps praise on him in a footnote. These are clear signs of complicity that go beyond mere admiration. The communion with Clavé is also apparent in the final chorus of *Un beneit de Jesucrist*, when the workers have listened to the blind man's song but the work bell rings and they intone this paraphrase of the final verses of *La Maquinista*:

Bé pel cego, bé pel cego  
que Déu lo guardi llargs anys,  
lo treball a tots nos crida,  
anem tots a treballar. (*Un beneit* 18)

The encouragement of spirituality and the argument against drinking, symbolised in the tavern (remember that years later Vidal and Rossend Arús translated and adapted the theatrical version of Émile Zola's *L'assomoir*, and included praise for Clavé)<sup>6</sup> is already present in Vidal's earliest work. Much of the action in *Un beneit de Jesucrist* takes place in the tavern where the factory workers spend their rest time at midday. *Qui tot ho vol, tot ho perd* confirms the changes that Clavé's regenerative effect has caused among young people. The reactionary Miquel yearns for the customs of his youth and is against the new lifestyle, and the monologue highlights the substantial change that the move from the tavern to the café represents, particularly because the former is a place of drinking and merriment whereas the latter is a space for ideological debate:

Recordo que, quan fadrí,  
 la diversió que tenia,  
 era, acabant-se el dia,  
 i això que apareix ahir,  
 anar-me'n a la taverna  
 de la Laia o d'en Joan;  
 i allí amb lo Pere Gran,  
 en Baldiri i en Pau Terna,  
 armàvem una manilla  
 que durava mitja horeta,  
 beviem una mitgeta,...  
 i alça nois... Viva Sevilla.  
 Vui lo jovent du altre nord:  
 ve la nit, cap al cafè  
 a disputar si va bé  
 el govern d'allà a la cort. (*Qui tot 8*)

Gambling as a vice that corrupts the working man is one of the main themes in *La virtut i la consciència* because it affects the son of the household, a good lad led astray by Jacundo, the only genuinely wicked character in this group of plays. Gambling leads to unacceptable losses and theft, a melodramatic spiral that drags the boy down.

While these plays present gambling as a source of inevitable decadence and downfall, they sing the praises of work. This is the true value of the worker, because it is a discourse born from left-wing ideology. In the words of Clavé, “los timbres més honrosos / són los timbres del treball” – work differentiates the worker from the boss and is the worker’s true heritage, along with honour and integrity. In this same play, Angeleta is praises work when she loses her job, and this sets off the emotions of her father, who may be the first figure of that “good man” who will become a character type in later Catalan literature, in the books by Ignasi Iglésias and Josep Pous i Pagès:

Jo em recordo haver llegit  
 que el treball és la riquesa  
 que deu matar la pobresa,  
 i a treballar sempre he dit.  
 I després pare que vós  
 heu sigut treballador:  
 jo vinc de vostra llavor  
 i el pit ne tinc orgullós.  
 Cada vegada que sento,  
 “l’Andreu! Com ell no n’hi ha!  
 tinc a fe tan gran contentó  
 que al punt exclamo: és lo pare  
 i encara treballaria

si son mal li permetia. (*La virtut* 15)

This exaltation of work as a legacy that workers must display and defend with pride will become one of the basic arguments of Republican and Anarchistic literature.

### *The beginnings of working class literature*

Some working class literature features the first “factory men” as leading characters in Catalan literature (*Un beneit* 5).<sup>7</sup> In this respect, the very melodramatic *La virtut i la consciència* is particularly interesting. We have already explored some aspects: we have seen how model workers (Manel, Angeleta, Andreu) and their counterparts (Jacundo, Vador) are presented and also that references are made to the Working Class Association. This play reflects the misery suffered by many workers, which is associated with the dignity of humble people: the family reaches the point at which they cannot pay the rent on their house; this does not stop the father, who is ill, from refusing to beg favours, he simply adapts to the consequences of his poverty: “Si té paciència / el senyor Arcís, s’ha acabat; / sinó, més remei no ens queda / que anar-nos-en al carrer” (*La virtut* 35). Economic emigration also appears when mention is made of an unemployed textile worker who has moved to Lyon: “Un amic que tinc allà, / que hi marxà perquè la seda / aquí s’havia parat, / i els bales no tenen feina” (*La virtut* 67). The reaction to the uncertainty of employment becomes an example of solidarity when Angeleta agrees to be dismissed because work is scarce and she feels that preference should be given to those women who have children to support. This is not the sort of play in which we can seek revolutionary alternatives; on the contrary, the figure of the employer is exalted as a model. This is what Badó tries to explain when his companion, Jacundo, encourages him to steal from his employee: “Però Cundo per favor: / ¿No penseu vós que robant / a l’amo, que ha estat tan bo / per nosaltres, cometem / un crim terrible?” (*La virtut* 56). The employer displays all the noble qualities that have been attributed to him because, after being robbed by Badó and Jacundo, not only does he understand why they did it, he also tries not to be too detrimental to them. Manel explains the boss’s belief in the only valid recipe for getting on in life: work.

L’amo del noi.  
¡Pobre senyor! Ha procurat  
per tots los medis possibles



aminorar els criminals.  
 Quan jo li torní els diners  
 dient-li quant feia al cas,  
 me digué: —¡Coses de jóvens!  
 Bogeria de pocs anys.  
 Busquen lo diner en los vicis,  
 i no miren que en ses mans  
 tenen la més rica mina  
 si la volen explotar.  
 ¡Lo treball! Aquí la té.  
 ¿Què era jo, no fa trenta anys?  
 Un pobre treballador  
 i res més; però filant  
 avui, demà, l'altre dia,  
 estalviant d'aquí i d'allà  
 i prescindint de taral·les,  
 he lograt fer un capital.  
 Lo primers cent duros, costen.  
 Los demés... no costen tant  
 tenint prudència i constància.  
 La riquesa sempre fa  
 com los nens, que sols s'acosten  
 a aquell que estimar-los sap. (*La virtut* 78-79)

This, then, is literature about workers, but it is not revolutionary working-class literature. The manufacturer is a worker who has worked hard and gone up in the world, but he has not lost the essential virtue of the working world. Angeleta's exclamation "¡I diuen dels fabricants!" is softened by Manel's conciliatory reaction, "De fabricants, com de tots, / n'hi ha de dolents i bons" (*La virtut* 79). These attitudes are certainly not the same as the ones displayed in the combative literature of later years, when the worker movement had evolved and the confrontations had become much more virulent.

#### *Notes on hygiene and alternative medicine*

Although they do not enter into a debate of any real substance, some of these plays mention topical issues of the time. The Barcelona that had broken out from the enclosure of its walls and had extended to take on a new dimension that would make it into a modern city was becoming sensitive to hygiene theories. It is no coincidence that in one of these plays there is an accusatory note regarding the dirtiness of such places as the Raval, where people urinate in the streets:

Entre això, les Colometes  
 que cerquen los caçadors

i que a voltes són caçades  
alborotant tot lo lloc,  
l'empedrat dolent i etcetra...  
allò sembla un altre món.  
Jo crec que l'Ajuntament  
deuria pensar-hi un poc:  
allò més bé que ciutat  
sembla un lloc de mala mort. (*Un beneit* 10)

Cleanliness, light, sun-filled houses, integration with nature were all concepts that helped to define the contemporary Barcelona that was being planned at that time. It is also a time at which new forms of spirituality were being introduced (not in these plays, but later work by Eduard Vidal i Valenciano refers to spiritualism (Foguet, *Vigència* 98)). Likewise, alternative medicine was gaining in popularity. While Frederic Soler jokes about the disputes between the allelopaths and homeopaths in *Si us plau per força*, Vidal, in *La virtut i la consciència*, presents homeopathy as a possible alternative for Andreu's illness:

MANEL. Tinc de dar-ls una notícia  
que els omplirà d'alegria.  
ANDREU. Digui doncs.  
MANEL. L'Homeopatia  
al pare de la Felícia  
lo ha curat del seu dolor.  
Si vostè la vol provar  
l'acompanyaré demà  
a un amic que tinc doctor. (*La virtut*, 40)

Andreu is often sceptical when faced with something new: "ANDREU. ¿I aquest remei volen dir / que cura? MANEL. Franc li seré. / Al principi jo no ho creia; / però he vist ja tantes cures... / MAR. Andreu, ¿per què no ho procures? / ANDREU. Si allò no és res." (*La virtut*, 40). Although not convinced, the sceptical patient agrees to try it: "MANEL. ¡Quina idea! / Si no és res, no pot fer mal. / MAR. Parla molt bé. / BADÓ. I té raó. / ANDREU. ¡Endavant! Provaré això! (*La virtut*, 40). The new medicine has a philanthropic side to it, because the doctor has no intention of being paid for treating poor patients: "ANDREU. I que visita per re. / MANEL. Essent pobre el malalt, sí." (*La virtut*, 40). This is not too far removed from the argument that the new social structures also contain the new values of the idelaists aiming to achieve a more equal society.

It has frequently been pointed out that the drawback of Catalan romantic literature did not reflect the reality of the country, which at the time was undergoing some decisive changes. On the other hand, the “lower-class” literary manifestations provided a literary means of access to the new lifestyles. Eduard Vidal i Valenciano was like other dramatists of his time but had some features all of his own. He clearly belonged to the group of writers producing popular literature, of whom Frederic Soler was the maximum exponent, but he also shared many of the interests of the Floral Games writers, and he reflected on the changes that were fashioning a different society and maintained some of the inertia of the Old Regime, but which also heralded and practised new ways of doing things. This energy that focused on new times culminated in 1868 in the September Revolution and the “Sexenni Democràtic” (the six democratic years). This article has aimed to make it clear that some of the ingredients were already being manifested to some degree immediately before the Glorious Revolution.

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<sup>2</sup> In the chapter on Vidal's biographers, in the widest sense of the word, Francisco M. Tubino, Francesc Gras i Elias, Jaume Aimà, Josep Maria Poblet and Manel Güell Barceló are all prominent in the books and articles relating to the bibliography. It is also clear that information can be found in the books by Francesc Curet (*El arte i Història del teatre*), Xavier Fàbregas (*Teatre català d'agitació política, Història del teatre català* and *Eduard Vidal i Valenciano*) and Carme Morell (*El teatre de Serafí Pitarra*). I am grateful to Silvia Amigó for providing me with a photocopy of the unpublished study by Josep Poblet.

<sup>3</sup> Xavier Fàbregas, in *Teatre català d'agitació política* writes a two-page discussion of this play.

<sup>4</sup> These titles translate roughly as: [Flies don't enter] A closed mouth; He who wants everything, loses everything; You shall reap what you sow; Gamblers get no sleep; So many heads, so many caps; The ass of Mora; Each to his own; A promise is a promise.

<sup>5</sup> The most complete and up-to-date study on Clavè, which contains references to the collaboration with Vidal is the thesis by Roger Canadell i Rusiñol.

<sup>6</sup> See Manuel Güell Barceló, *Eduard Vidal i Valenciano adaptador teatral de La taverna*.

<sup>7</sup> Josep Yxart (*Teatre* 292), after expressing initial surprise at the lack of comedies about workers and their aspirations, adds that “they have only been the object of melodrama until today, and shameful melodrama at that.” This may be an allusion to Vidal's work.

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