

---

International Symposium of *Estudis Escènics*

---

# Imagining the future? Catalan Dramatic Literature in Times of Crisis. 2008-2021

---

Institut del Teatre. 13th, 14th and 15th October 2021

Report by  
Anna Maria RICART CODINA

---

## Program

**DAY 1.** Wednesday 13th October 2021

**Reception and accreditation**

**Institutional welcome**

Sílvia FERRANDO. Director of the Institut del Teatre (IT)

Carles BATLLE. Director of cultural services. IT

Sebastià PORTELL. Association of writers in the Catalan language (AELC)

**Inauguration conference.** Raül GARRIGASAIT

**2008-2021: a personal viewpoint**

**Presentation:** Enric GALLÉN

Pause

**THEATRE AND GLOBAL CRISIS**

**Conference**

Sergio BLANCO

**Theatre and crisis: The pleasure of autonomy**

**Presentation:** Josep M. MIRÓ

**Activity**

THE SYMPOSIUM COMPANY

**Anatomy and pleasure**

Pause

**NEW PRODUCTION MECHANISMS**

**Presentation**

Jordi CASANOVAS

**Professional playwriting in a hostile context**

**Presentation:** Carles BATLLE

---

Pause

#### Round table

##### **THE ASSOCIATIONS' WORK**

Anna ALBADALEJO, Sònia ALEJO and Isabel MARTÍ. Valencia Association of Playwrights (AVEET)

**Weaving the pertinence of a resilient association movement: AVEET in the Valencian Community**

Aina DE COS. Association of playwrights of the Balearic Islands

Sebastià PORTELL

**The playwrights, writers? The case of the Associació d'Escriptors en Llengua Catalana**

Anna Maria RICART. Catalan Association of Dramaturgy

**Presentation:** Aïda AYATS

Pause-lunch

#### Round table

##### **PRODUCTION: IDEAS, PROJECTS AND COMPANIES**

Toni CASARES

Javier MATESANZ. **Teatre de Barra**

Núria VIZCARRO. **New production mechanisms or how to adapt to the situation**

Joan YAGO. **Against the culture of merit**

**Moderation:** Sebastià PORTELL

Pause

#### Dramatized reading

**Apunts sobre la bellesa del temps: Angúnia (2007) and Tovelles a la platja (2002), by Josep M. Benet i Jornet**  
under the care of THE SYMPOSIUM COMPANY.

**Presentation:** Enric GALLÉN

### **DAY 2.** Thursday 14th October 2021

#### Reception and accreditation

##### **TRADITION AND LANGUAGE**

#### Conferences

Albert ARRIBAS

**Specific theatricalities of a language in permanent crisis**

Helena BUFFERY

**Linguistic landscapes of contemporary Catalan theatre**

**Presentation:** Sharon FELDMAN

Pause

**Performative conference**

Jordi ORIOL

Pause

**Conferences**

Enric GOMÀ

**Language and theatre: the case of Catalan, from the 19th to 21st centuries**

Joan SELLENT

**Verse drama in the 21st century?****Presentation:** Enric GALLÉN

Pause

**Communications**

Bernat REHER

**Retour à**

Clàudia SERRA

**A divided culture? The linguistic policy of Valencian theatres based on a review of theatrical productions from 2008 to 2021****Presentation:** Aïda AYATS

Pause-lunch

**DRAMATURGIES OF THE REAL AND THE CALL FOR FICTION****«CASINO»****Free format communications and with repetition in various spaces of the IT**

Carles FERNÁNDEZ

**The Conquest of the South Pole**

Adriana NICOLAU

**I, mother: strategies of (self)representation of motherhood in contemporary Catalan theatre**

Ariadna PEYA

**Hybrid language, social impact and accessibility**

Carme PLANELLS

**The trilogy of exclusion**

Guadalupe SÁEZ

**Writing just like my mother cooks torrijas**

Helena TORNERO

**Bigger than life or reality overcomes fiction?**

LA COMPANYIA DEL SIMPOSI

**Scattered texts. I****Presentation:** Carles BATLLE

**DAY 3.** Friday 15th October 2021

Reception and accreditation

**PROCESSES, STYLES AND MODELS**

Conference

Ramon ROSSELLÓ

**On the analysis of current dramatic literature:  
the "Process" category**

Presentation: Sharon FELDMAN

Conference

Carme TIERZ

**Young theatre and non-text-based dramaturgies.  
New forms of dramatic writing**

Pause

«CASINO»

**Free format communications and with repetition in various spaces of the IT**

Sergi BELBEL

**Is it necessary to write theatre?**

LA COMPANYIA DEL SIMPOSI

**Scattered texts. II**

Aina DE COS

**Analog intimacy**

Denise DUNCAN

**Superpower**

Xavier PUCHADES

**Dissolutions**

Anton PUJOL

**Adapting Chekhov for the Catalan stage**

Victoria SZPUNBERG

**...I, I ... The most disgusting of all pronouns!**

Presentation: Carles BATLLE

Pause

**CLOSING CEREMONY**

Closing conference

Esteve MIRALLES

**Outbreaks of 2021. Rhetorics of anxiety (and piety)**

**RECAPITULATION AND CONCLUSIONS**

Anna Maria RICART

End of the Symposium

Anna Maria RICART CODINA

## Report

# Imagining the Future?

## Catalan Dramatic Literature in Times of Crisis: 2008-2021

English translation, Neil CHARLTON.

When I was asked to be the rapporteur of this symposium, I thought it would be a good opportunity to see if Catalan playwriting scholars and playwrights were optimistic or pessimistic beings by nature. And I initially thought that those who were optimistic were the organisers of the symposium. The question mark follows "Imagining the Future" and not "Catalan Dramatic Literature in Times of Crisis: 2008-2021". There is no question mark at the end of that last sentence, so they think the crisis ended in 2021. And I'm happy about that.

The symposium gets underway with a quote from Blai Bonet given to us by Sebastià Portell, on behalf of the Association of Catalan Language Writers: "Everything that is not prohibited is mandatory," an assertion that seems to us a good omen for the start of the symposium. A little later, Portell admits that: "We haven't always been at that point (as far as theatre is concerned) but we want to be." Thank you!

The opening lecture is delivered by Raül Garrigasait. He too, right at the start, tells us: "I don't know much about the theatre of recent years"... And he offers us what he promised in the title of the lecture, a personal view, although from the very first word he expands the context to talk about the transformation of the publishing world and the Catalan literary system, a story that we can apply to the theatre world. Garrigasait says that he has the feeling of being outside the time of history, on the border, but he immediately gives us a precise portrait of the era: he tells us of precariousness, weaknesses, but also the liberating effect on literature of the Catalan pro-independence "*procés*" (now we no longer have to portray the country), of the rereading of tradition (not only in academia but also in the public square) and emphasises the strength of continuity, maturation... He does mention the fact that our society is looking for young people to sell us the essence of eternal youth, but he adds that we should write as if none of this existed. There is a basically optimistic discourse in Garrigasait's words and, for example, he quotes the British political philosopher John Gray to tell us that the hyperglobalisation of the last few decades is coming to an end and that

liberal capitalism is bankrupt; that now the task is to build more humanely liveable societies than those that were exposed to the global market. Garrigasait's recipe is to go for the basics and continuity, and he assures us that books and theatre will have a place in the society to come. Garrigasait is optimistic. One-nil to the optimists.

Just afterwards, so that we don't get too excited, the symposium's Company, directed by Jordi Prat i Coll, shows us our frailties and reminds us that "we should pay." And without giving us a chance to recover, Sergio Blanco appears with a clear mission: to provoke us. Blanco begins by stating that theatre is profoundly apolitical and that it serves to produce, accentuate and invite us to the crisis. The role of politics is to combat the crisis, the role of poetics is to produce it. And he provokes us: Nietzsche? When he talks about the tragedy, he made it up. Aristotle? We must stop studying Aristotle's poetics. The origin of theatre? The citizens of Athens did not go to the theatre to debate but to attend an initiation rite: boys who became men under the auspices of Dionysus, and who, to achieve it, had to pass through the other, had to be an "other" in order to be "I". It is much better, Sergio Blanco tells us, to believe those who condemned theatre, who warned of its dangers. And he quotes Plato, Saint Augustine or Artaud. And it comes back again: theatre produces crisis because it brings us the experience of otherness, of the other (our identity, therefore, is in constant motion) and because it offers us the possibility of not being (theatre is a space where we are and are not). Why should reality and truth be more important than lies and fiction? Just before concluding he explains that, in Japanese, there are two signs for the word crisis, one meaning danger and the other meaning opportunity. And he addresses us directly: "I defend the Catalan cause and I believe that this crisis is what will confer on it its emancipation, it is an opportunity for emancipation." Two-nil to the optimists.

We have to say that, with this provocative discourse of "out Nietzsche" and "we don't need to study Aristotle", we are left with the idea that perhaps we need to revise this highly masculine discourse in the history of Western theatre and look at it from other points of view. We think this while listening to Sergio's feminist discourse in the corridors, after his lecture.

Immediately afterwards someone comes along to bring us down from this optimistic cloud and tells us: no, no, the crisis is not an opportunity, it's bullshit. This is Jordi Casanovas who talks about what we as playwrights should do in a situation like the current one. And he tells us that everything is terrible but there are cracks to move through and, if we get through them, we will gain the knowledge and resources to move forward. Of course, Jordi doesn't want us to think that the fault is ours, no: "the crisis, the pandemic has only made what already existed more obvious," and what already existed is: the ageing of the Catalan theatre circuit, nepotism in the public theatres and festivals, and a country with pathetic cultural consumption. "We have the sector we have and, possibly, one day someone will be able to change it, but ... it's a long way off." So, friends, it's not our fault but things are the way they are; and, most importantly, where are the cracks and how can we hack the system? Jordi's answer is precise: we have to produce ourselves, we have

to direct ourselves, and we have to find our own space; and he cites the Sala Flyhard as an example. The thing is that we are not all Jordi Casanovas nor do we have his ability to find the cracks to slip through. Although he believes that there is always a way to turn the situation around, the picture that Jordi has painted for us is basically... pessimistic. Two-one.

The morning of the first day ends with the roundtable of the associations of playwrights from the Catalan-speaking territories, who have introduced themselves: who they are and what they want. They go from talking about the crisis in the abstract to the crisis as a very specific fact that has affected we playwrights in a very specific way. And from table to table because in the afternoon it's time to discuss different types of production, different types of projects. We have seen the examples of the Sala Beckett, the Teatre de Barra in Mallorca, La Ravalera in Castellón and the La Calòrica company. And here, let us pause to consider La Calòrica because its playwright, Joan Yago, ties the game in favour of the pessimists when he says: "The crisis? The crisis has yet to begin!" Two-two. He then provides a very detailed description of what it was like to enter the theatre world, or try to, from 2008-2010: a story of ongoing precariousness. That's right. And a story of self-improvement. Who has stayed afloat in the precariousness and how? This has been possible for the privileged, for those who have organised themselves, for some institutional initiatives and the cultural press. The great absentees: the public authorities and the cultural policies. Yago reminds us that maybe one day this country will have to seriously address the issue of public money-private management.

To some extent, Casanovas and Yago tell us about the battle between young and old. And very opportunely, the dramatised reading of the two plays by Benet i Jornet, *Angúnia* and *Tovalloles a la platja*, have transported us from old age to youth.

## Second Day

On the second day of the symposium it is time to talk about language. A language in constant crisis according to Albert Arribas, who argues for the importance of the text (the text is memory, the text is one of the poetic spaces of theatre...) and illustrates the conflict associated with the Catalan language when he points out that in 2007-2008 the Sala Beckett put on a season of contemporary Catalan theatre and now, instead, we have to say "Catalan dramatic literature". And this subject, which seemed closed, really is not when two people in the audience ask why Catalan theatre must be in Catalan and not in another language. This question is left up in the air. No one enters the debate or answers the question; we don't know if this because people are tired of having to explain what seemed already obvious or to avoid an uncomfortable situation. If there is no debate, let's go back to Albert's presentation, who tells us: "The Catalan language does not designate (like French) but rather builds or suffers." Albert Arribas wanted to talk to us about diglossia, bilingualism, dialects, accents... about being aware of language as a reality in crisis that has, precisely because of the particularities that the crisis gives

it, important expressive potential. He wanted to talk to us about this but... ends up with a call for continuity, in Garrigasait's wake... in reference to the "Teatres Reunits" collection jointly published by the TNC and Arola Editors.

Helena Buffery talks about bilingualism and plurilingualism when she refers to the "linguistic landscapes of contemporary Catalan theatre". Helena speaks about the need to map the changes in the relationships between different languages that exist together in a territory, and argues that the phenomenon of bilingualism or plurilingualism can occur because of the social and political situation that this country is experiencing, but not only because of that... It depends, she tells us, on whether you look at it from the inside or outside, adding that we should not always fear the spectre of linguistic substitution. However, she also states: "Don't blame a minority space because it is not inclusive enough."

Helena's presentation and the topic of bilingualism and plurilingualism leads Raül Garrigasait to remind us of this question: "What do we mean by theatrical mimesis: a copy of reality or a representation of an autonomous world?" And Albert Arribas recalls how problematic verisimilitude is in theatre. These two questions about language could perhaps provide material for an upcoming symposium, since it was the most "inflamed" moment in a few days that have passed smoothly. Immediately after, to illustrate the crisis of the word, we are able to enjoy Jordi Oriol's performative lecture.

As this is the day of the symposium dedicated to language, it is the turn of Joan Sellent and Enric Gomà. Sellent reminds us that, if we talk about translation, fidelity and literalness are not the same thing and he reiterates the importance of theatre in verse because the rhythm, he says, makes the reception more pleasant and attractive to the audience. He gives us an example: a play written in iambic pentameter, a modern recreation of Marlowe's *Faust*, which was a hit with the audience (not in Catalonia), especially young audiences! The play's promotional material, he adds, did not mention that it was in verse because it doesn't sell. What comes from his words is perhaps a good recipe to help us emerge from the crisis: we do theatre in verse but we don't tell anyone.

Enric Gomà returns to the issue of bilingualism with a rather pessimistic discourse about the future. Three-two to the pessimists. Gomà gives us a portrait of the theatre and language binomial: Pitarra writes the Catalan that is spoken with maximum naturalness; the *Noucentista* writers turn theatre into a vehicle for extending Pompeu Fabra's norm and put the weight of linguistic normalisation on theatre; with Franco there was a cut off and, when the audiovisual emerged with strength, theatre was freed from its normalising function. Gomà also warns us about the predominance of Spanish in the listings and cites musicals as an example. Break, and time for young people.

Bernat Reher seeks to provoke us with the idea that "academia is dead". Yeah, okay, but we are left wanting to know what's next. The title of the lecture is "Retour à'. Return to what? To the classics? Autodidacticism?" Bernat, we were left wanting more. Then Clàudia Serra shows us the bleak panorama of theatre in Valencia. With the PP it was a desert, and with the government formed by the PSPV, Compromís and Unides Podem there was a strong



resurgence of productions in Catalan that have gradually been reduced and are being replaced by bilingual productions (this is the trend). And she reminds us of an observation made by Joan Fuster: “The official proposals for bilingualism undermine Catalan, and always will.” Back to bilingualism...

And we reach the first Casino where we have diverse presentations to talk about the dramaturgies of the real (testimonies and autofiction), introduced by Carles Batlle citing Lacan: “Truth is structured like a fiction.”

We are able to hear about the projects and experiences, for example, of Carles Fernández with *La Conquesta del Pol Sud*, Carme Planells with the trilogy of exclusion, Ariadna Peya with the project of *Les Impuxibles* or Helena Tornero and the dramaturgical projects that she and a group of artists conducted in Greece and Catalonia about refugees and based on their experiences. Let us pause a moment here, we seem to see a few cracks: the presence of themes that, because they are experienced or suggested by women or are “women’s themes”, still lack the category of universal, but autofiction or testimonies also belong to the half of the population made up by we women who seek and call for our place, and are beginning to find it. We talk, for example, about Guadalupe Sáez’s personal wound, through which, she says, she can speak. Sáez also says something we would like to emphasise, and which more or less goes along the lines of: “The intimate, the autobiographical was part of ‘female writing’, until it became important and passed into the hands of men.” We also want to highlight Adriana Nicolau and her study on the representation of maternity in contemporary Catalan theatre and how this topic, like many others that occupy/concern women, were eliminated, did not exist, and are now starting to emerge.

Perhaps these projects that we listened to in the Casino are the cracks, the cracks in a system, which will enable us to move forward, because they share the fact of directing their gaze towards a part of our society that we are not used to looking at from theatre.

### **Tercer dia i últim**

A day dedicated to processes, styles and models. Ramon Roselló begins by talking about the “process” category with regard to the analysis of literature. We have studied everything (contents, style, etc.) apart from the processes. Despite the rise in collective creation, we come from the idea of the solitary writer and we lack methodologies to study the processes. Roselló tells us that valuing the process also means taking a political stance, since in this way we don’t justify artistic creation by the result.

Young creation is specifically collective creation. The crisis has led them to create their own companies, in which hierarchical structures are questioned and horizontal work is advocated. Carme Tierz gives us a picture of “youth theatre”: they don’t use published texts but write their own. The text alone is outdated and they combine several languages. They don’t choose to be multidisciplinary, they are. Their plays are deeply rooted in real issues. Finally, she poses this question: why has this space been created between young creators and dramatic literature?

This question leads to another: do we need to write theatre? Sergi Belbel asks this on this final day. The economic crisis of 2008 and the world crisis experienced in 2020 due to COVID makes us aware of the fragility of our profession. Budgets are cut, royalties are no longer collected. What can we do? asks a Sergi Belbel locked down at home due to the pandemic. Look for another job? He looked for information: the Globe Theatre was closed four or five times due to pandemics, and Shakespeare wrote *Macbeth* during a pandemic. Yes, this is theatre: the need to call out in a determined moment. To write the call. And this is what he did. Thus, those of us listening to him answer the question he asks us at the beginning: yes, we need to write theatre. One more point to the optimists: three-three. A draw.

Before ending, Belbel introduces another burning issue: the debate about issues. In the 1980s it was quite frowned upon to talk about "issues". In the 21st century, if you don't talk about current issues, you won't be recognised.

With Belbel we start a new Casino which then leads us to listen to Victoria Szpunberg. The title of her lecture: "I, I... the most disgusting of all pronouns!", is a spoiler for what she will tell us, that in recent years the dramaturgies of the self and confessional practices have grown, as has the pressure to make activist theatre from an issues-based place. And that between the didactic tendency and talking about the self, imagination and knowledge have disappeared. Where is the fiction, the game?

Xavier Puchades tells us about his journey from solitary authorship to dissolution in collective projects, going through a process of overexploitation caused by the production systems that made him ill. And only illness allows us to stop and rest, he tells us. And we all feel reflected in it. And with a calm voice, of someone who has stopped and rested, he tells us: "I just want a little beauty."

There are more participants in this last Casino, but the organisers must enjoy seeing us decide who we are going to listen to, since it's impossible to take in everyone.

And now it is time for the closing lecture. It is given by Esteve Miralles and entitled: "Buds of 2021. Rhetorics of Anxiety (and Compassion)". Miralles quotes the anthropologist Lluís Duch: "compassion is an exercise of freedom", and also a critical activity; we must establish a human space and a human time. In this respect, and talking about the poetry of Jordi Llavina, he tells us we have the right to digression, to make a non-productive use of time as a tool of self-knowledge. So we're done! Let's stop here.

Just a moment. This right to digression is hard to apply. By way of conclusion, we could say that one day we will have to deal seriously with the issue of bilingualism, in all its aspects. It is a question that, in this symposium, when it has discreetly raised its head, almost everyone has looked the other way so as not to start a battle that needs its time. And another possible topic for a future meeting could also be, precisely, that of "issues", which was cited by both Sergi Belbel and Victoria Szpunberg, and talk about the current pressure to make theatre with social and activist content from of an issues-based place.

We were also able to verify that it would be good if there was more understanding and relations between all the Catalan-speaking territories. We need this, and what's more, it would enrich us.

Ah! And the Casino... we don't like not being able to listen to everyone (if you want to listen to everyone).

Finally, we will say that the referee may have been a bit clueless at times, but the result between the optimists and the pessimists about the future of Catalan playwriting has been three-three. This means we need another symposium as a tiebreaker.

