

The *Jocs Florals* in Contemporary Catalan Literature*

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ABSTRACT

In 1859, the very same stimulus that drove the ambition to create Barcelona's Eixample ("enlargement") design by urban planner Cerdà served to "restore" the *Jocs Florals* in Barcelona, a symbolic complement which quite calculatedly evoked powerful arguments of historical legitimacy which the Catalans of the mid-19th century would harness for their latter-day aims. Under the authority of the Romantic gothic revival, in 1859 the *Jocs Florals*, were, in fact, a meteoric, sumptuous chapter in the operation known by its own instigators as the "*Renaixença*" (Renaissance), the diverse communicative movement with which the elites of the day set out to symbolically project and impose themselves. Since then, beyond the literary competition which they primarily are, the *Jocs Florals* have polarised the intense symbolic, monumentalising and civic activity that ended up shaping the shared code of the culture of Catalanism. At the same time, by vindicating the symbolic and heritage value of the Catalan language, they opened up a space for cultivated literary uses which, after being successively expanded, served as the seed of the contemporary Catalan literary system, independent of the fact that the literary norm that the *Jocs Florals* promoted soon entered into crisis and that they would be vehemently spurned. However, they remained intact as a civic platform and instrument of agitation and propaganda, as proven by their profuse replication around the Catalan-speaking lands and their infiltration into popular festivities, as well as their militant journeys around Europe and America in the 20th century, after being banned by the Franco regime.

Keywords: *Jocs Florals*, Barcelona, Romanticism, gothic revival, Catalan literature

THE RESTORATION OF THE *Jocs Florals* OF BARCELONA, 1859

The 1859 restoration of the *Jocs Florals* of Barcelona, a literary competition which aimed to be a continuation of similar mediaeval competitions, was held with fanfare at the Gothic Saló de Cent in the Town Hall, which had decided to perpetuate them.

This restoration should be seen as one of the most prominent actions in a calculated strategy of symbolic production by the emerging local elites. In the time of political stability and favourable economic prospects which is still called the Moderate Decade (1843-1854), these elites became the resolute agents of a decisive chapter in the process of imposing the liberal and capitalist order, in the field of symbolic representation as well: the *Jocs Florals* are a piece of singular value (a piece of high value, in view of their extraordinary legitimising effect) that fit within

that vast communicative movement around the concept of *Renaixença* which had just gotten underway then.¹

As a formula that carried on and updated the solid modern tradition of literary competitions, the *Jocs Florals*



Figure 1. Engraving of the seal of the Board of the Barcelona *Jocs Florals*, 1859 (Arxiu Històric de la Ciutat de Barcelona).

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had never ceased to be present in the mind of writers, scholars and the learned,² profoundly influenced by mediaeval culture since the onset of Romanticism. Now the *Jocs Florals* embraced the fashion of the troubadours (one of the most widely disseminated aspects of mediaevalising antiquarianism), which was also fed by scholars (the studies of Sismondi, Jeanrois, Raynouard, Fauriel, Manuel Milà, etc.) and by a literary industry that was extraordinarily active in the dissemination of the products of Walter Scott and his imitators (including Cortada and López Soler). They were also inspired by García Gutiérrez's *El trovador*, a perennial hit that was reincarnated with Verdi's *Il trovatore*, which premiered at Barcelona's Liceu opera house in 1854.

In any event, the interest in reviving the *Jocs Florals* as a fashionable private or public celebration could be seen everywhere. We know that in Catalonia, the initiatives aimed at organising public competitions using the *Jocs Florals* model or explicitly restoring them with the purpose (as Joan Cortada of the Acadèmia de Bones Lletres of Barcelona said in 1840) of "offering a stimulus to the poets of our century" could be found repeatedly starting in 1834. However, it was not until the stabilisation of the liberal regime during 'moderantismo', upon the emergence of a new generation of professionals and publicists on the front lines of the public debate (Jaume Balmes, Antoni de Bofarull, Joan Cortada, Mañé i Flaquer, Víctor Balaguer), as part of that "great unveiling of Catalonia in 1854" that Vicens Vives spoke of, that the project of restoring them found its proper fit and time. At that time, Barcelona (and I cite Fuster Sobrepere) was in the midst of "an experience of wholesale transformation to the industrial economy, and the generation that was raised in this context had to supply itself with the theoretical and political instruments needed to deal with this transformation", at a time, furthermore (as Fuster Sobrepere continues), in which "the economic expansion seemed unstoppable, and its social consequences necessarily manageable".³ In other words, at a time when it was possible to recognise the new reality of competition in a "global" setting (in a global setting of liberal triumph), the local elites could not help but notice the deficiency of the conditions with which they had to work (that is, the meagreness of the material and intellectual means which with they were supposed to operate). The time for the "restoration" of the *Jocs Florals* came when they believed that it was possible to react to this situation with certainty and were willing to do so. In this context, with the global authority of the gothic revival as well, the *Jocs Florals* became a suggestive intellectual instrument of representation and monumentalisation; it ceased being a simple craze among scholars and writers and instead became, properly articulated with the concept of "Renaixença" (another conceptual tool activated at that time which was decisive in the Catalans' self-representation), an instrument of broad consensus in the projection of the elites and collective meaning.

"The restoration of the *Jocs Florals*," noted Manuel de Lasarte in 1861, "is the best response we could give to

those who accuse us of being devoted solely to material interests, without thinking about cultivating the arts that uplift the spirit".⁴ In short, beyond their prolix anecdote, the *Jocs Florals* became a prized and pleasing tool to symbolically manage and transform the city, clearly in proper correspondence with the extraordinary metamorphoses that Barcelona's urban landscape was undergoing throughout the 19th century, now that the walls had been torn down, namely the spectacular *Eixample* of the city according to the Cerdà Plan, which was approved in 1859 as well, one month after the *Jocs Florals* were held. As noted in the "Prospectus" of the magazine *El Arte* (ca. March 1859), a key publication in capturing the representative and monumentalising nature of the 1859 "restoration", a publication which equally campaigned in favour of the "restoration" of the *Jocs Florals* and the proper management of the city's enlargement, "there is still a generation [...] capable by itself of intellectually transforming our land, as it is being materially transformed day by day". And the proposition closed with a tacit imperative: "We trust this generation".

The group that "restored" the *Jocs Florals* rose to this trust, and to this challenge, while also being fully aware that their venture was symbiotically related to the city's material transformations and to a change in the cultural and political scene. The *Jocs Florals* were restored (Antoni de Bofarull said in his speech as the secretary of the 1859 event) "*ara [...] que nos alenta una nova civilitació; que lo esperit vola libre; que lo desig d'aprendre renaix per tot [...]; quan en Catalunya, i especialment en esta ciutat, se veu desplegar cada dia més lo desig de fer regonèixer lo que fou, i, en produccions literàries i en obres públiques, se descobrix lo esforç del literat i de l'artista per a fer reviuire noms gloriosos que jeien en lo olvit*" ("now [...] that a new civilisation pushes us on; that the spirit may soar free; that the desire to learn may be reborn in everyone [...]; when in Catalonia, and especially in this city, every day we see more fervently the desire to make what it once was recognised, and in literary productions and public works one discovers the effort of the literati and the artists to revive glorious names that had fallen into oblivion").⁵

The "new civilisation" which broke free after becoming visible through the *Jocs Florals*, that is, through romantic antiquarianism, was nothing but an apparent contradiction. In view of the inevitable reproofs of "anachronism" that were immediately levelled against the *Jocs Florals*, the poet Rubió i Ors, one of the organisers, strove to clarify the event's meaning as "a memory of glorious pasts"; he said that the "restored" *Jocs Florals* became "a symbol for the present moment of literary rebirth".⁶ He stressed this in the speech he delivered at the event in 1861: the *Jocs Florals* were not an "unforgivable anachronism" or "a deed that was discordant with the spirit of the times".⁷ To the contrary, they were part of an ambitious programme to bring art to the urban and social landscape, to once again burnish collective life and its venues and events; a programme aimed at converting the old constrained, artisan city, which still bore visible traces of the destruction of

the Napoleonic invasion or which harboured the living memory of the penuries of the civil war, into the showy, competitive metropolis that the times required. They also accepted their fair share of its idealising or ennobling function, which demanded from artists and intellectuals the Petrarchan slogan displayed on the cover of the magazine *El Arte*: “*Leva di terra in ciel nostr’intelletto*”.

Just like the mediaevalising references of the battle-mented stone towers which served the spectacular new iron engineering of Craigellachie Bridge in Scotland (Telford, 1815), and the breathtaking gothicist outburst of the new Westminster Palace (Barry and Pugin, 1840-1852), the *Jocs Florals* accompanied a social corpus that was poised for administrative order, political efficacy and commercial and productive efficiency – the capitalist productive efficiency which the urban grid of Barcelona’s new *Eixample*, replicated ad infinitum, so strikingly evoked. Manuel de Lasarte referred to it in 1861: “It is a beautiful spectacle and a wonderful harmony to hear [...] the hum of machines intermingled with the stanzas of poetry, to contemplate a literary movement that is growing alongside the bustle of our industry, things which to some seem incompatible but which are naturally linked to one another”.⁸ The mediaevalising liturgy of the *Jocs Florals*, fostered by the incomparable setting in which they were held, the ancient and contemporary literary assets that they showcased, all of it together constituted extremely rich symbolic capital in that it displayed a noble and rich antiquity. It was under the aegis and with the legitimacy of history that contemporary Barcelona residents and Catalans projected their ambitions: history, Antoni de Bofarull said at that time, forged “a genre of superiority which verges on sovereignty”.⁹

And the *Jocs Florals* harkened back to that. They were, in short, yet another aspect (yet further conclusive testimony) of that “profound alliance between the ostensible archaism of identity-building and the more undeniable economic and technological modernity” to which Anne-Marie Thiesse referred to a few years ago.¹⁰

Starting in 1859, the “restored” *Jocs Florals* were a common space shared by dissimilar people and attitudes as to the civic value of the event: from the caution of Milà, who viewed the *Jocs Florals* as a mere ceremony of “filial memory” of ancient grandeur and as a unique “refuge” for literary Catalan,¹¹ to Balaguer’s notion of it as a tool for the “idea of restoration of nationality”.¹² In short, despite the reservations they aroused in the progressive sectors,¹³ in their first few decades the *Jocs Florals* became the veritable heart of literary life, an event with which the entire cultivated literary sphere identified.¹⁴ They became a successful formula: in 1863 Josep L. Feu noted, among the subjects that “offered an extraordinary broad field of study”, the phenomenon of the “old-fashioned enthusiasm with which the restoration of the *Jocs Florals* have been received”.¹⁵ It was a formula which all sorts of institutions over the century and the ensuing one reproduced around Catalonia.

LITERATURE AND CULTURE OF CATALANISM

Thus endowed with a heavy symbolic load (which included, as Marfany noted, the compensating gesture of the “absolute diglossia that the Catalan bourgeoisie adopted as an essential part of its class ideology, which aimed to guide the Spanish nation under construction”)¹⁶ and with the benefit of extraordinary public projection, the *Jocs Florals* were decisive in making cultivated Catalan literature visible. They ensconced Catalan in the repertoire of distinguished social uses, they become a sphere of basic interaction for writers, an instance of desirable enshrinement (as illustrated, for example, by the otherwise widely divergent cases of Frederic Soler¹⁷ and Verdaguer¹⁸), a setting to debate the overarching issues (the promotion of certain genres, the conditions of the literary language, the appreciation of the literary heritage) and, in their caution, a reiterated platform to vindicate the culture. And they regularly published a yearbook which eventually became “the backbone of Catalan culture between 1859 and the 1870s”.¹⁹ In short, they were a formula whose overall impact marked a boundary of which their contemporaries were even keenly aware: Gaietà Vidal saw them as the “real” and “truthful” representation of “the resurrection of Catalan letters”,²⁰ while Marià Aguiló regarded them as the transformative factor from the humble “cradle” in which the “literary renaissance of the Catalan language” had been slumbering to the “triumphal carriage”.²¹ Or, more generically, Jaume Collell said that they were the “first stone in the foundations of the new building that we are all constructing together, [the] roots of the lovely tree that has already begun to bear sweet, pleasant fruit”.²² Literature, therefore, as the cornerstone of the *Renaixença* which was gradually taking shape, or as the root that pumps the sap that makes the tree of collective endeavour bear fruit.

Likewise, the *Jocs Florals* came to guide literary practice primarily addressed at harnessing the *Renaixença* to forge the great contemporary texts, the modern-day literary monuments that were still lacking. The desire to emulate Mistral’s *Mirèio* (1859), with the extraordinary resonance it acquired, via Lamartine, was decisive in this sense, as Antoni de Bofarull so eloquently noted at the 1859 festival: the *Jocs Florals* paved the “way for the singers” and the “hope that their efforts symbolise” so that “by carrying on the cultivation of our language and poetry with perseverance, one day [...] a Catalan Jasmin or Mistral will emerge, whom all of Spain will be delighted to greet”,²³ just as France had been so pleased with Mistral’s success.

With this mandate in view, the strictly regulated competition that the *Jocs Florals* established fostered a dynamic of emulation, the promotion of excellence and social projection which in the matter of a few years became a consolidated frame of action and debate endowed with an aura of transcendence and sublime authenticity precisely in that they were situated beyond the demands of the literary market – and therefore were endowed in inverse proportion

with matchless symbolic value. In short, it was a tempting realm for the new generations of writers who viewed the *Jocs Florals* and the dynamic they fostered as a sufficient, and exclusive, realm of action. That is, the *Jocs Florals* offered them the possibility of joining what they were being proffered as a living literary system, regardless of how inipient it may have been. Thus emerged what Ramon Panella identified as the “Catalanist writer of the *Renaixença*”, a figure that stemmed from the impact of the *Jocs Florals* “in a small yet highly active sector of the bookish Catalan youth born between the 1840s and mid-1850s”. They perceived the possibility of working as a writer within the strictures of the *Renaixença* and at its due service according to the linguistic and literary paradigms that sanctioned the *Jocs Florals*, in which, as “lovers of the things of the land” (according to another of its formulas of self-presentation), they found sufficient justification of the job of writing.²⁴ The La Jove Catalunya society (1868-1875), a forum whose reflection on literature was one of its most vivid facets (and which considered the *Jocs Florals* an unrenounceable forum), is a telling crystallisation of this: it played an active role in the scene in which the vocations of the great authors of the last third of the century were born: the poet Jacint Verdaguer (1845-1902), the playwright Àngel Guimerà (1845-1924) and the narrator Narcís Oller (1846-1930), all three personally linked to the institution of the *Jocs Florals* in one way or another.

Broadly speaking, the *Jocs Florals* generated and nurtured a literary norm under whose aegis striking operations of collective legitimacy first arose, such as those derived from the long poems with which Verdaguer precisely attempted to rise to that demand for the *great* representative text of the Catalans, which the *Renaixença* corroborated, in his *L'Atlàntida* and *Canigó*. *L'Atlàntida* won the 1877 *Jocs Florals*. This ambitious poem, soon acclaimed far and wide, which certified the literary potentialities of contemporary Catalan, was a complex providentialist fable which definitively postulated the prominence (disguised with a redemptive mission) of Spain in the history of the world. In the expansive context characterised by the accumulation of power and capital by a bourgeoisie that was taking stances within the Bourbon Restoration which had just gotten underway, Verdaguer's poem forged symbolic baggage whose yields, in total harmony with the consensus on the reality of the *Renaixença*, did not go unnoticed among the economic elite, specifically, two good families, the Lópezes and the Güells, under whose aegis the dense amalgam of power, art and literature with which they sought to reshuffle the order that the revolutionary six years of 1868 to 1885 had upset prospered. Antonio López, then “the chief boss of Spain”, Verdaguer's patron and the owner of the Transatlàntica shipping company, eager for social legitimisation, received the dedicatory of that poem which precisely “set off” from the Atlantic “in perilous and terrible struggle”²⁵ and, closing a circle which was linked to myth, historical time and the immediate present, integrated the Atlantic fantasy and the very *Renai-*

xença prominence of the poet Verdaguer into a strategy of achieving dignity for himself and for his shipping companies.

Apparently, Verdaguer's Atlantic was claimed as the representative artefact with which Joan Güell aimed to gain recognition, specifically, the estate he owned in Barcelona near Pedralbes: the discourse of triumph and imposition which he wanted to be read into it incorporated, for example, the ornamental fountain in which, according to Gaudí's design, the dragon Ladon, vanquished by Hercules (*L'Atlàntida*, II), became the channel from which the water on the coat-of-arms of Catalonia flows permanently, and in permanent lesson.²⁶ Eight years later, the poem *Canigó* (1885) aimed to correct the Catalanist shortcomings of *L'Atlàntida*. Now the unequivocal subject was Catalonia, from which another myth of origin was tested (the forging of a nation in the struggle for the mediaeval reconquest against the Arab invasion), a providential design was postulated (that of becoming a solid spiritual reserve in the face of the risk of secular moral dissolution) and a modern repository was identified (the Catholic Church, in which Verdaguer was a priest, and which supported him in the militant action of re-Christianisation).

Secondly, and in a complementary fashion, the literature of the *Jocs Florals* devised and protected an imagery of solid community ties: essentialist, pre-capitalist, rural and Arcadian, which was wielded as the counterfoil to the obvious complexity of the world and *modern* mores, experienced as aggression and fracture. Similarly to the case of Austrian “pre-capitalist” literature, as Claudio Magris has called it (a “pre-capitalist” literature linked to a society that had just been characterised, like Catalonia's, by conspicuous capitalist economic development),²⁷ the *pairal* (rural) idylls of Gaietà Vidal, Riera i Bertran and so many other authors ignored a contemporariness defined by the fascination with money, action and change. They ignored, just like Adalbert Stifter's fictions, the fascinated attention the transformations that capitalism and liberalism had brought about, around which the canonically 18th century narratives of Balzac or Zola were built.

The topical question of the extemporaneousness of the *Jocs Florals* and the literature that prospered in them should be examined bearing in mind this symbolic productivity, that is, their spectacular usefulness in shaping what Benedict Anderson called an “imagined community”,²⁸ one that was solidly founded thanks to the yields of an incontestable historical and literary capital. In the *Jocs Florals* and its multiple outliers, all the laws of the poets, folklorists, grammarians, artists, publicists and their peers imparted doctrine and spread information; they forged a literary culture that acted as a sphere of recognition and as solid bond of cohesion. This cohesion, or solidarity (Anderson, again) emanated from the printed letter that was renaissant (*renaixent*) in Catalan – and from the possibility of *reading* in Catalan in a *Renaixentista* twist, so eagerly solicited, which the texts of the *Jocs Florals* delivered.

THE EXPANSION OF THE MODEL

The reality and full advent of the success of Barcelona's *Jocs Florals* (the rising success among the participants and sponsors and the social lustre that distinguished the event) ensconced them as a crucial identificatory exponent of *Renaixentisme* and as a key instrument in the strategies of spreading Catalanism. In 1868, ten years after their "restoration", in the magazine *Lo Gay Saber* (with its flawed title), the critic Josep Roca i Roca proposed to extend *Jocs Florals*-style events all around Catalonia, as they polarised the core of Catalanist activism and multiplied the production of new poets who could carry on the *Renaixença*²⁹ – who would become new Tyrtæuses, the exact role that befell them according to a poem by Torres i Reyató.³⁰ Whether or not these events which reproduced the pattern of Barcelona indeed proliferated largely remains to be studied.

In any case, these nuclei gradually gained ground, especially with the surge of membership in the associations that accompanied the Catalanist congresses (1880 and 1883) and with the founding of the Centre Català (1882). Trusting the mobilising capacity of literature ("the mission of the Catalan poets is to arouse the slumbering", proclaimed Roca in the aforementioned article), the actions they promoted spotlighted it: the *Jocs Florals* were thus "the best means of spreading the roots of the tree that yields such fine and flavourful fruit", the

perfect tool for spreading "our peaceful revolution for all of Catalonia". Even further, noted Roca: "What we say about Catalonia, we also mean for the kingdoms of Valencia and Mallorca, which like ancient brothers of our Catalonia feel the same blood from our parents coursing through their veins".³¹

In reality, Barcelona had never been the only place in the Catalan-speaking world where the literary fashion of troubadourism inspired events similar to the *Jocs Florals*. In 1859, a similar competition was also sponsored by the Liceu Valencià in the city of Valencia, driven by the capacities of Marià Aguiló, a Mallorcan educated in Barcelona under the aegis of the teachings of Milà i Rubió, at that time the librarian at the Universitat de València.³² The initiative, in theory scheduled parallel to its Barcelona counterpart, materialised months later (on the ensuing 23rd of October) through a new call for participation (by a literary and artistic academy that had just been created) and thanks to the enthusiasm of the university students who backed Aguiló, including the young Teodor Llorente, Vicent W. Querol and Rafael Ferrer i Bigné, future eminences in Valencia's early *Renaixencisme*. Valencia's 1859 *Jocs Florals* had enlisted the support of the Valencia Town Hall, and even though they were successful, they did not continue: simply put, in Valencia the demand for the symbolic *Renaixencista* capital that the *Jocs Florals* fostered did not exist at that time. In the recent words of Rafael Roca, not only was Valencian so-



Figure 2. Occitanian and Catalan writers on Montserrat on the 8th of May 1868, on the tenth anniversary of the Barcelona *Jocs Florals*. Top row, left to right: Celestí Barallat, Vicent W. Querol, unidentified, Pere A. Torres, Josep M. Arnau; middle row, left to right: Conrad Roure, Lluís Roca, Frederic Mistral, Albert de Quintana, Víctor Balaguer, Felip J. Sala, William Bonaparte-Wyse, Rafael Ferrer i Bigné; seated on the ground, left to right: Eduard Vidal i de Valenciano, Loís Romieu, Teodor Llorente, Paul Meyer. At the centre of the group, in a calculated pose, Mistral and Balaguer clasp their hands under the embrace of Quintana (Arxiu-Biblioteca Llorente, Valencia).

ciety at that time “not quite ready to be reborn”, but also “the followers of the *Renaixença* were viewed there with suspicion”.³³

The interruption of the event in Valencia encouraged the presence of Valencian writers at the Barcelona *Jocs Florals* in the ensuing years, along with the establishment of personal relationships that proved to be decisive in consolidating the idea of a literary space and a shared heritage between Catalans and Mallorcans. This was made visible not only by the Barcelona *Jocs Florals* but also by the series of major events and commemorative gatherings that *Renaixencisme* mobilised during the next two decades, including the tenth *Jocs Florals* in Barcelona in 1868, which was particularly fêted, the literary event in honour of Jaume I in Valencia in 1876 and the first Latin Festivals called by the Félibrige Academy in Montpellier in 1878.

All of this also served to consolidate the idea of Barcelona as the focal point of *Renaixencisme*. In fact, the Barcelona *Jocs Florals* became the spearhead of the model of Valencian literary events which followed the 1859 *Jocs Florals*: the immediate ones (which were not labelled *Jocs Florals*) and the ones held between 1879 and 1902 by the Lo Rat Penat society. In the founding speech of this society in 1878, Constantí Llobart precisely called on its members to “imitate” the “generous efforts” of the Catalans and Mallorcans.³⁴

Thanks in large part to their ability to become a sphere of intense personal and intellectual interaction among Catalan, Valencian and Mallorcan writers, there was broad consensus at that time on the value of the Barcelona *Jocs Florals* and their centrality to the *Renaixença*, as well as on the very formula of the event. For this reason, beyond all literary considerations, the *Jocs Florals* fell within the liturgies and strategies of Catalanism. Indeed, its expansion ended up establishing multiple replicas of the Barcelona competition in Lleida, Olot, Girona and more towns, which proved to be decisive in shaping the Catalan literary space.³⁵ Even further, in a laxer sense, the *Jocs Florals* throughout the 20th century, now rid of their cultish component, were accepted by the public as a genuine civic celebration – and, in consequence, depending on the political and social juncture, as an occasional platform of agit-prop, which was vulnerable to sanctions, persecution and vetoes such as the ones witnessed at the *Jocs Florals* in Sant Martí del Canigó in 1902, in Toulouse in 1924³⁶ and after 1939 in its long journey around America and Europe. Even beyond the reality of the market and the literary debates, this profusion of similar events made it common to identify Catalan literature with the characteristic repertoire of practices that gave rise to the norms and rite of the *Jocs Florals* – a perfect example of what Bourdieu called the *habitus* or the “*connaissance par corps*”.

THE CRISIS AND CONTINUATION OF THE MODEL

The *Jocs Florals*' early ties to mediaevalising antiquarianism were explained at the beginning of this paper. We have seen how the authority of the poet Rubió i Ors, nicknamed the “Gaiter del Llobregat”, one of the supporters of the early *Jocs Florals*, was applied to this. Five years later, another of those early supporters, Víctor Balaguer, appealed to the wisdom of a “new muse”, an alternative of form of poetry that he viewed as obsolete: what sense did it make, he asked, to “*tornar a les vellures, i els cants ressuscitar / d'una poesia morta que jau dessota terra?*” (return to the old ways, and resuscitate the songs / of a dead poetry that is buried underground?). Now that, as he claimed “*deserts estan los temples*” (the temples are deserted) and that “*los déus s'han esquerdat*” (the gods have been shattered), poetry must be “*estela [...] / que [...] als pobles mostr[a] la via del progress*” (the trail [...] / that [...] shows peoples the way of progress); it must thus be “regenerative” and take on “the cause of the people” as its own cause.³⁷

The 1868 revolution and the *Sexenni Democràtic* (Six Years of Democracy, 1868-1874) precipitated and consolidated this discourse, which would irreparably undermine the validity of the *Jocs Florals* among progressive writers. At that time, publicists like Pompeu Gener and Pere Estasén and artists like Ramon Martí i Alsina were also warning about and stressing the necessary and unshakeable authority of the *new* and the *modern* – the authority of the historically inevitable, according to Adorno's expression. Thus, ostensibly the ideological agitation around 1868 made the norms of the *Jocs Florals* and the deployment of Herderian populism on which the Catalanist writer had been built clash with the urgent requirements of a literature that is truly “of this century”. The memoirs of Pompeu Gener vividly recall this episode: on the one hand the “advanced intellectual”, attuned to Frederic Soler and the spaces of popular literature, and on the other those “archaic poets” and rustic enthusiasts of the *Jocs Florals* “who dreamt about reviving a past that was already dead”,³⁸ a veritable “school of innocent literature” as Balaguer labelled it,³⁹ or simply reactionary literature, as Güell i Mercader labelled it at the time.⁴⁰

The cartography into which historian Francisco María Tubino categorised contemporary Catalan literature in the late 1870s maintains this antinomy. That is, it confirms the vigour of a conventional (“classical”, Tubino called it) way of envisioning Catalan literature: the one in the *Jocs Florals* vein.⁴¹ Spanning the 1870s and 1880s, critics like Josep Yxart, Joan Sardà and Ramon D. Perés were on the frontlines of a process of modernising the *Renaixença* which heralded the idea of the “truth” in art and literature while also spreading the desire to uproot all principles of exception and patriotic protectionism for Catalan literature – precisely because it had already attained the “maturity” that the activity of *great* authors like Narcís Oller, Jacint Verdaguer, Àngel Guimerà and Apel·les Mestres proved. The condescending convention and routine of

the *Jocs Florals* remained visible. In the militant “modernist” magazine *L’Avenç*, coherent with the defiant slogan that guided it (“*Je dis ce qui est vrai*”), a section probably owing to Ramon D. Perés called “Figures i figuretes” (Figures and Figurines, 1883-1884) suggested stripping away the undeserved prestige that, in the writer’s opinion, discredited contemporary Catalan literature. It was clearly prestige that was largely forged by the machine of the *Jocs Florals* – and not even the patriarch Rubió i Ors or the celebrated Verdaguer epic remained exempt from condemnations.

Therefore, the *Jocs Florals* had become injurious. In 1884, Perés used the image of the Biblical plague to stress this: the *Jocs Florals* fell upon Catalan literature “like a swarm of destructive insects [which] have falsified [...] the true concept of the great, universal poetry”.⁴² This was similar to the vehement article that Yxart devoted to the *Jocs Florals* in 1891, “*La decadencia de los Juegos Florales de Barcelo*” (The Decline of the *Jocs Florals* of Barcelona): yet again, the literature of the *Jocs Florals* was denounced as “the true plague that dilutes and shrivels Catalan literature”.⁴³

However, in spite of the internal crises, the *Jocs Florals* carried on because they had successfully shaped a cognitive framework and rituals capable of imbuing the practical cult of Catalan literature with social meaning and value. They may have been the sphere of its *officialisation*, as part of the Spanish “official nationalism”, as shown by the 1888 event, which was held as part of the Universal Exposition of Barcelona with the presence of the Queen Regent Maria Christina of Austria, the head of the Spanish government, Sagasta, and the Castilian polygraph Marcelino Menéndez Pelayo. And at that point, the *Jocs Florals* were an unequivocal instrument of the “popular linguistic nationalism” that reflected the “official”.⁴⁴

Thus, besides the strictly literary considerations (and often despite them), in the last few decades of the 19th century and early 20th century, Catalanism brought the *Jocs Florals* into its repertoire of uses and symbols, along with excursionism and musical activities. The referential framework would remain *Renaixencisme* (historicism, Herderian populism) which many believed would be inextricably identified with contemporary Catalan literature by *antonomasia*, such that the *Jocs Florals* became a decisive factor in the phenomenon of the long survival of Romanticism in Catalan literature. All of this, I repeat, is apart from literary considerations. When in 1907 the poet Joan Maragall was asked to deliver the speech at the 1908 *Jocs Florals*, the edition that was supposed to commemorate their 50th anniversary, he decided to undertake a systematic reading of the yearbooks since 1859. Privately, regarding 1860, he noted: “Terribly trivial literary imitations. Not a single verse! All of it horrible!” Below that he noted the “overall impression” that he got from the first four yearbooks (from 1859 to 1862): “Timid provincial literary renaissance or poor imitation of another of a language between fearful literary claims and continuous protests of Spanishism”; in the entire first four years, “there is only one little Mallorcan poem, ‘Enyor-



Figure 3. Ramon Casas, poster for the 1908 *Jocs Florals* (Biblioteca de Catalunya, Barcelona).

ança’ ([by Maria V.] *Penya*) and a vast poem [...], *Mistral’s* message (1862)”.⁴⁵ However, in his speech the following May, Maragall celebrated the *Jocs Florals* as a splendid “communion of love of the land and the language which springs forth there” and as a “communion with the past and the future that forges the fatherland”.⁴⁶

Marià Aguiló and Francesc Matheu after him were two of the masterminds behind that perseverant continuity within *Renaixentisme*. At the age of nine in 1859 Matheu, one of the great contemporary Catalan editors, had attended the festival restoring the *Jocs Florals* with his father; he saw the entire literary and civic trajectory linked to them. He won a prize at the *Jocs Florals* at a young age and became a Master in *Gai Saber* in 1897. There he ex-



Figure 4. Commemoration of the 50th anniversary of the restoration of the Jocs Florals at Barcelona's Palau de Belles Arts, 3rd of May 1908 (Institut Amatller d'Art Hispànic, Barcelona).

erted effective influence in manoeuvring despite stumbling blocks like the government's ban, which led the 1902 Barcelona *Jocs Florals* to be held in Sant Martí del Canigó under the aegis of the Bishop of Perpignan, Juli Carselade, and despite the pomp and circumstance that commemorated the 50th anniversary of the contemporary *Jocs Florals* in 1908, and despite challenges like the very survival of the *Jocs Florals*, which resulted in the revamping of its bylaws in 1908.

Still, despite approximations and meaningful contemporisations, for the youth of the *nou-cents* the *Jocs Florals* were already irremediably an affair of the past – an affair of the staunch old *Renaixenços*. This could clearly be demonstrated by the control Matheu exercised over them, with the roster of old glories like Jaume Collell, Narcís Oller and Magí Morera: personages who were by then outside the spotlight. “It is no secret,” noted Eugeni d’Ors in his 1908 *Glosari*, “that most of our Masters in *Gai Saber* have not taught the *gai saber* (gay science) to anyone”.⁴⁷ Four years later, the conflict between Ors and the *Jocs Florals* regarding the submission of *La Ben Plantada* to the com-

petition revived that perception of a “rupture between two generations” (in the words of *La Veu de Catalunya*),⁴⁸ the young *noucentistes* versus the old *renaixencistes* ensconced in their *Jocs Florals* fiefdom. This perception was clinched by the *Jocs Florals*' refusal to accept the normative reform of Catalan spearheaded and sanctioned by the Institut d'Estudis Catalans in 1913.

In the autumn of 1933, when the *Jocs Florals*' isolation and residual air was fully evident in the autonomous Catalonia which had recognised the official use of Catalan,⁴⁹ an octogenarian Francesc Matheu, in a gesture that was as much capitulation as generous recognition of the authority of and patriotic interest in the continuation of the *Jocs Florals*, offered grammarian Pompeu Fabra the presidency of the *Jocs Florals* and finally accepted the norms of the Institut d'Estudis Catalans. In his speech at the 1934 event, Fabra celebrated the “atmosphere of collaboration” and consensus that made it possible to recognise and appreciate the contributions which 65 years of *Jocs Florals* from 1859 until then had clearly made in defining and gelling the literary language.⁵⁰



Figure 5. *Jocs Florals de la Llengua Catalana*, 1962 (Santiago de Chile) (Universitat de Barcelona, Biblioteca del Pavelló de la República).

Just like the dictatorship of General Primo de Rivera (1923-1931) before it, the Franco dictatorship (1939-1975) banned the *Jocs Florals* because it believed that it undermined its strategies for Spanish nationalisation. At that time, in the exceptionalism and emergence of the diaspora in exile, the *Jocs Florals* got a new lease on life under the deliberately delocalised name of the *Jocs Florals de la Llengua Catalana*: from 1941 to 1977 different Catalan colonies in exile organised 37 editions of the event, including in Buenos Aires (1941 and 1960), Mexico City (1942, 1957 and 1973), Paris (1948, 1959 and 1965) and Perpignan (1950 and 1964).⁵¹

To the young authors of the 1930s, the *Jocs Florals* were a mere anachronism, and as Agustí Bartra, a member of the younger generation, explained in 1946, they were the routine of “a poor, languishing life”. In contrast, he continued, “in exile, the *Jocs Florals* have taken on new value and meaning”: “The uprooted spirit of Catalonia” made them an “act of presence and existence”.⁵² In 1946, too, Rafael Tasis noted: “In a national culture that once again has possibilities for expression – publishing houses, official prizes, theatres, magazines, schools and newspapers – the *Jocs Florals* will perhaps once again become an anachronism. But in exile it seems impossible to criticise their mission”.⁵³ Indeed, for the colonies of exiles in America and Europe, more than a literary event, the *Jocs Florals* were a major social event in the articulation of the life of the uprooted, a platform for political protest and even an act with not negligible economic dimensions for the winners, who could win “compensation [...] that was at times

providential, which enabled them to move home and became a more decent subtenant”.⁵⁴

The *Jocs Florals* were all of this, beyond literature, or beyond the discretion of the literature that they often embraced. In his *Quaderns de l'exili* 1945, Ferran de Pol spoke about the “phantasmagorical Parnassus of the *Floralistes* in the Americas”.⁵⁵ However, over the years, the journeys of the *Jocs Florals* around Europe and American would give rise to extraordinarily eminent participants, such as Josep Carner, Joan Fuster and Agustí Bartra, not to mention Mercè Rodoreda, a Master in *Gai Saber* and in 1949 the author of a heartrending work of poetry whose immediate destination was the *Jocs Florals*.

The Barcelona Town Hall, which had refused to reinstate the *Jocs Florals* upon the centennial of their restoration, revived them in 1971 and continues to sponsor them even today in accordance with the pledge made back in 1859. Now they have metamorphosed into a diverse annual poetry festival. And beyond that, they have become an entertaining venue of unlimited usefulness: a poster I ran into in Barcelona in the spring of 2011 confirmed this: I saw that *Jocs Florals* had been slipped into a youthful end-of-year celebration of an untimely patronage society (El Bigoti de Nietzsche), with the required ska and rock concerts to close the festival.

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