

LLÚCIA BARTRE: AMATEUR THEATRE IN
FRENCH CATALONIA DURING WORLD WAR TWO

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INTRODUCTION: AMATEUR THEATRE AND THEATRE HISTORY

Non-professional theatre and theatre performed outside major urban areas constitute two relatively neglected elements of what can be called, adapting an existing term (KERSHAW 2007: 15-16), social theatre ecology. When considered with due attention, they represent significant challenges for the writing of theatre history and the development of theatrical analysis. Before concentrating on the consequences of such attention from a Catalan perspective, it is worth comparing how British theatre, with an ostensibly more extended and easily defined tradition, can be reconceived in the light of amateur groups and (often connected) local theatrical productions.

At least four main points emerge from a focus on non-professional theatre. The first is the sheer variety of the subject. In the 1930s J. B. Priestley viewed Civic Theatres and People's Theatres as an imaginative escape from industrial depression and, by 1945, he thought they provided social cohesion because of the «combined effort» and «common purpose» involved (PRIESTLEY 1945: 29). Sybil Thorndike said, in 1953, there was «no longer any true distinction between professional and amateur, only between commercial and non-commercial» (COVENEY 2020: xvi). That may seem clear and defines the fact that the people involved are not being paid for their work, but it does not now encapsulate the nuances of different categories: *i*) amateur groups with a permanent venue or those without; *ii*) student theatre, from schools to universities; *iii*) community theatre, usually with some sort of social agenda; *iv*) companies recognized for their impact in working with specific sectors, such as prisoners (CROSSICK AND KASZYNSKA 2016: 47-49). Priestley's praise was for what would now be

classified as *i*) or *iii*), and a recent estimate of a total of 2,500 amateur groups in the UK (COVENEY 2020: 189) would probably not include *ii*) and *iv*). Yet boundaries are increasingly porous, with trained professionals working in the amateur sector, the use of unpaid extras (in, for example, well-known productions of *Julius Caesar* in 1992 and 2005), and collaborations between amateur groups and high-profile companies (such as the Royal Shakespeare Company) (NICHOLSON *et al.* 2019: 195–203, 290–293; COVENEY 2020: 185).

The second point, which derives from these definitions, is the way in which the detailed acknowledgement of amateur theatre can change our view of national theatrical history, whether it be the development of dramatic composition in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (ROSENFELD 1978) or the vibrant presence of theatre in Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland in the twentieth century (COCHRANE 2001). And the emphasis on activity away from a handful of familiar cities helps to maintain the local within the global and intercultural (ROBINSON 2007).

Once the non-professional field has been opened up for investigation, the discoveries reveal the backbone of British theatre. It is striking (and this is the third point) how many well-known performers and playwrights worked in amateur theatre. Kenneth Branagh, Anthony Hopkins, Ian McKellen, Ben Kingsley, Glenda Jackson, and Michael Gambon all started in local theatre groups (COVENEY 2020: x, 8, 106). Support from—and productions within—the amateur sector were integral to the writing careers of Harold Pinter, James Saunders, Caryl Churchill, and Tom Stoppard (NICHOLSON *et al.* 2019: 71–72, 98–99).

The fourth point is, in a sense, the opposite of underlining these sorts of links to the professional world. Although arguments have been made for the inclusion of popular forms, such as melodrama, in theatre history (BRATTON 2003: 5–14), just as much energy needs to be devoted to the participants in amateur theatre: the actors, directors, set designers, and—most obviously—the dramatists who write exclusively for the non-professional stage and whose plays are continually revived, but rarely granted critical attention. From a more historical angle, if we consider the closet drama of the Renaissance as

a kind of amateur drama, then a rich panoply of playwrights, many of them women, comes to light (STRAZNICKY 1998; and for Italy, BARISH 1994). The debate about whether or not these texts were intended for performance (in private) becomes less important in situations when all public performance was prohibited.

Needless to say, this discussion on British theatre cannot be applied wholesale to the case of Catalan. However, there may be parallels which could stimulate new areas of study. Certainly, the research on amateur theatre in the Second Republic and the Spanish Civil War re-adjusts our notion of Catalan theatre history.¹ When it comes to the period immediately after the Civil War, the collation of details on amateur, above all Catholic, productions in Catalan outside Barcelona gives a different impression from that of the total absence of performances in Catalan until 1946 (GALLÉN 2010: 114-122). By 1945—the same year as Priestley’s comments—the critic Julio Coll thought there were more than two hundred amateur companies in Catalonia, and, although he was disdainful of their achievements (COLL 1945), there is no overall, detailed idea of what they were performing. On the other hand, there is more information on the Catholic umbrella organization FESTA (1949-1972) and the numerous experimental—often quasi-professional—groups which were instrumental in bringing translations of non-Spanish theatre to Barcelona (GALLÉN 1985: 154-158, 188-245). Nevertheless, tracing the history of amateur groups across all Catalan-speaking areas is still a challenge.

Apart from the search for factual information, an analysis of non-professional theatre pushes the researcher into a realm where the usual methodologies are inadequate. Limited runs (of one to three nights) tend to single out the production as a unique event rather than a developing entity. But it is an event which often has no traceable reception in the press (especially before the start of new social media). This means it is difficult to find out how plays were performed, received, and the role they may have had within a given socio-political context.

1. On this period and Catalan amateur theatre in general, see DOVELLA 1998; FOGUET 1998; MEMÒRIA 1987.

Recent empirical research has provided insights into how audiences change according to the day of the week, how ushers can gauge an atmosphere and how people in the auditorium may feel part of a group they do not in fact know (e.g. HEIM 2016: 24, 121-123). Such studies are based on large-scale shows (with high ticket prices) and, in most productions, a physical and social distance between those attending and those performing (even when participation is encouraged). But the criteria for assessing a performance will be different if tickets are cheaper or free, audiences are smaller and well acquainted with the actors, just as the actors from a local community will know those who attend. This familiarity can encourage considerable audience loyalty to a local amateur group (CROSSICK AND KASZYNSKA 2016: 28), and so create a symbiosis whereby meanings arise because of the intimacy of the conditions for performance. Again, though, the lack of evidence for the reception of those meanings is a major epistemological hindrance.

REDISCOVERING LLÚCIA BARTRE (1881-1977)

These considerations are especially relevant when an entire geographically defined theatre in Catalan is mostly amateur, as is the case of Catalunya Nord (French Catalonia) (BADOSA 2011). Indeed, this is one of the reasons why these performances are largely ignored in histories of Catalan literature and theatre. Joan Fuster went as far as to deny that Catalan theatre existed in Roussillon in material terms (FUSTER 1972: 402-404).

Such dismissals make it all the more necessary to study the very real existence of the theatre produced in Catalunya Nord. By exploiting the potential avenues outlined above, we can extend the geography of Catalan theatre beyond the Spanish state and reveal an alternative, non-professional corpus of plays. Following a phenomenon in small-scale amateur production, it is no coincidence that we can recuperate a woman among the most active dramatists. The project becomes more interesting if we concentrate on an *œuvre* produced legally during the Second World War, after the Nazis had

entered Paris, at a time when Francoist hostility to Catalan was at its zenith and secular Catalan theatre was extremely rare in Spain.

It should be said at the outset that we are discussing a reduced system of production. Figures indicate that the Catalan speakers in Catalunya Nord numbered about 200,000 in the 1930s (BADIA [1951] 1981: 44, 46). Moreover, despite some touring shows, productions tended to remain local. The population of Illa (or Ille-sur-Têt in French), where Llúcia Bartre lived, had a population of just over 4,200 in 1947 (DELONCA 1947: 395), yet the town should not be considered a backwater. It is, for example, where the Catalan poet Josep-Sebastià Pons (1886-1962) was born and to where he returned. It is also the birthplace of the rugby player Jean Galia (1905-1949) and the song-writer Louis Amade (1915-1992). And Llúcia Bartre (or Lucie Bartre in her Gallicized, published name), penned at least forty-two plays, many of which were performed outside Illa. She thus became part of the repertoire of Roussillon, so that a dramatist such as Pere Guisset (1920-2000) from Ceret, who came to prominence in the 1970s, had acted in and read her plays, along with those of Un Tal (the pseudonym of Albert Saisset, 1842-1894) (VERDAGUER 2006: 12, 14, 16). Her dialogue may have contained grammatical errors and Gallicisms (VERDAGUER 1980), but her comedies remained popular.²

RIALLES (1942): THE NATURE AND STRUCTURE OF COMEDY

What features made Bartre's plays so appealing? Given the absence of performance details and a lack of recorded reception for the ten plays in *Rialles*, the main evidence comes from the texts.

The subtitle to the collection is *COMEDIES* (presumably *comédies*), but they have the reduced length of *sainets*, even when they comprise two acts: they could not have lasted more than half an hour

2. For outlines of Bartre's work, see VALLS 1997, and VERDAGUER 1997. In 1947 there was a cryptic reference to an unnamed female author from Illa who enriched the repertoire «d'un grand nombre de pièces prises sur le vif et écrites avec un sens profond des ressources de la langue populaire» (DELONCA 1947: 402).

each and some of them would be much shorter. Unlike the reduced cast in Bartre's play (of 1934), the two-hander *Lluna rossa* (BARTRE [1934] 2002), these comedies increased participation by having between five and seven characters, with a predominance of women. Noteworthy are roles for girls of between six and ten years old as well as school boys, given simple lines and doubtless encouraging family attendance (BARTRE 1942: 97, 109, 119, 151, 191). The social frame tends to be middle-class, although there is one aristocratic caricature and maids and servants have their parts to play. Sets are simple—a living room, a dining room, a kitchen, a street—and the delivery of lines is overwhelmingly dependent on a notional fourth wall, with little opportunity for rhetorical or gestural flourishes. In the rare instances when the characters address the audience directly, they do so alone on stage, *se girant cap el public*:³ for sentimental sympathy or for a joke (BARTRE 1942: 162, 175, 177). The most performative elements are the songs which are sung in four plays (BARTRE 1942: 95, 101, 107, 113, 117, 158-160). Occasional proverbs or aphorisms lend a familiar, jokey tone at the resolution of the stories: «Canviareu de moliner, canviareu pas de lladre»; «Qui té mossos y no els veu es mes pobre que no s'ho creu»; «No te riguis dels meus dols, perquè quan els meus seràn vells, els teus seràn nous» (BARTRE 1942: 35, 54, 149).

Bartre's plots are not complicated and their brevity does not allow for developed subplots. Besides some quite cheeky verbal exchanges, the main humour tends to derive from one central trick or misunderstanding. In *La neboda de la Cristina*, the niece in question is Odeta who is eighteen years old and awaiting the arrival of a fiancé chosen for her, but whom she has never seen. However, she is staying in a house the servants of which—Víctor and Anna—have mischievously rented out in their master's absence. So when Esteva, the master, comes back unexpectedly, Odeta takes him for the fiancé. Meanwhile, in comic play-acting, the servants invent a ruse to avoid telling the truth: Víctor pretends to have lost his memory (having fallen off a tree) and Anna pretends to have gone deaf. When Esteva

3. Throughout, I quote from Bartre's published texts as they stand, with their inconsistencies in spelling and accentuation and without normalization or correction.

calls a doctor who threatens to drill a hole in Anna's ear and open up Víctor's brain, the couple confess their trick. Yet Esteva's anger is mollified by the fact he has fallen in love with Odeta and wants to marry her.

A similarly whimsical view of love emerges in the course of *Peix d'abril* in which the thoroughly disagreeable Leonia is going to marry Albert. In what she considers a form of revenge for the way she perceives she has been treated, Leonia forges a love letter in the name of Josefina (aged thirty-five) addressed to the fifty-year-old doctor Sobraquès. This is to be the April Fool joke of the title. But when the trick is discovered it backfires: Sobraquès proposes marriage to Josefina who is delighted to accept. Moreover, Albert is disgusted by Leonia's behaviour and breaks off the engagement, saying: «Ara si veig que m'haví ben enganyat en te creguent dolça y bona» (BARTRE 1942: 148).

While these stories convey changing attitudes, others depend on something overheard and misinterpreted. In *Les dones y el secret*, a group of sixty-year-old women overhear the widower Delriu tell his friend how he accidentally killed his wife by giving her arsenic. Although the women think it may be a joke, they promise not to tell anybody about it. Nevertheless, soon everybody in the town seems to be avoiding Delriu and it turns out that the promise has not been kept. Eventually, Delriu clears up the mystery by revealing that he was talking about the local lawyer's dog, not his wife.

A parallel technique of hiding information and subsequently disclosing it occurs in the shorter *Xipots? Cap!* Madalena establishes a tone of comic hypocrisy from the outset as she comments on what she can see and hear from the kitchen window. She agrees that throwing rubbish into the gutter can block the drainage, but then adds: «Si tothom feya com jó. Jiti tot dins la clavaguera; es també prohibit, mes se veu pas» (BARTRE 1942: 196). So this mischievous attitude easily turns a conversation—again heard from the window—into a scandal: François Marty's husband returned home at two o'clock in the morning and was greeted by a battering. He is obviously having an affair and Madalena spreads the gossip. The trouble is that there was no subject for the verb to indicate who had been out late at night and François herself has to come on stage to explain it was her

dog. This time the canine evidence is palpable because the pet actually appears on stage. Bartre's skill in *Les dones y el secret* and *Xipots? Cap!* lies in keeping the audience in the dark along with the majority of the characters on stage.

Other devices for plot resolution appear more artificial, even within the artifice of comedy. In *Sogra y nora*, for instance, the predictable tension between Mme de Pelegrý and her daughter-in-law Marta is exacerbated by the former's snobbery, based on her aristocratic credentials. Fina (Marta's maid) does a good job of taking Mme de Pelegrý down a peg:

M^{me} DE PELEGRY: [...] Sabereu qu'un dels meus avis era a les croades.
FINA: Millor per ell si l'hi agradava d'hi anar. (BARTRE 1942: 178)

However, when Marta announces that she is pregnant, her mother-in-law suddenly says—in an apparently unstrained volte-face—that she is now too happy to be quarrelling with anybody.

For such cases, it could be argued that repartee and the accompanying minor intrigue (Mme de Pelegrý almost succeeds in losing her son a client) are the main content, that the journey is more important than the destination. In this context, it should be noted that some of Bartre's plays have no real plot. *Les xipoteres* and *Les bogaderes* could best be described as vignettes of local life. In the first, set in a street, Guideta emerges as the most honest of the gossips, while in the second, washerwomen complain about the wealthier ladies for whom they work. Here is where the less well-off find their voice.

ESCAPING, CONFRONTING, EXPLOITING OR PROMOTING SOCIOPOLITICAL REALITY?

A summary of some of the plays in *Rialles* thus gives no impression that they are located in the sociopolitical reality of France in 1942. No Nazis, or even Germans, are mentioned. There is no threat of military violence. Soldiers do not appear in these light-hearted dialogues. There is no discussion of Fascism or Communism.

No wonder, then, that critics favourable to Bartre should underline her accessibility, without any allusion to politics (GUITER 1973*b*: 23), and describe the plays in *Rialles*—following the title—as merely comic (VALLS 1997: 34).

The plays appear even more escapist given the circumstances in Roussillon in general and in Bartre's home town in particular. Twenty families in Illa lost sons at the beginning of the Second World War, 156 prisoners were taken, and 54 men were deported to Germany. Food shortages, rationing, and a subsequent black market were all part of daily life (DELONCA 1947: 426-427). *Rialles* was published in February 1942, and, by November of the same year, the region had changed from being in the *zone libre* (under Marshal Pétain) to being occupied by German troops; two hundred of them stayed in Illa till the end of the month and the town played its part in the resistance, suffering harsh reprisals until the liberation on 20 August 1944 (DELONCA 1947: 428-431).

That Bartre should be continuing the tone of her pre-war comedies—and doing so in Catalan—implies, as well, a refusal to acknowledge another form of Catalan identity which had recently overwhelmed Roussillon. During January and February 1939 between 500,000 and 520,000 refugees crossed the Pyrenees, thereby causing enormous humanitarian problems for a region unprepared to cope with such an influx. About 150,000 of them were detained in the Argelès camp in which many remained until 1942 (CAMIADE 2010: 55-58). Cold and hunger meant that stealing wood and food were often the only options. The local conservative press spread the word that the exiles were dangerous revolutionaries (MONTROYA 2016: 392) and there is evidence of considerable xenophobia (GONZALBO 2013: 27). For the most unfortunate Catalans who were fleeing the new Spanish regime, the final destination would be Mauthausen concentration camp. And yet, the Centro Español in Perpignan was a point of welcome and there are also reports of French Catalan assistance for Spanish Catalans (MONTROYA 2016: 393-394; CAMIADE 2010: 54). Illa is under fifty kilometres from Argelès and half as distant from Perpignan. Although it was forbidden to house refugees, several of them found protection in Illa (CAMPILLO 2019: 179, 285, 319-320).

Bartre and her audiences could not have been oblivious to this Catalan presence or ignorant of its causes. But whereas the Catalans fleeing Spain were victims of a centralized nationalism, *Rialles* should be seen in the light of a different attitude pursued by the Pétain regime. In a conscious attempt to reverse the tenets and effects of the French Revolution, the rhetoric of the Vichy government overtly promoted decentralization. Although the administrative consequences in fact strengthened state control (BARRAL 1974; CHATRIOT 2004-2005), there were exceptions in the realm of culture and, for a brief period, there was a favourable atmosphere towards so-called «langues dialectales» (CORCY 2004-2005: 59-61). Even if the teaching of these languages amounted to after-school classes of just thirty minutes a week at primary level (AMIT 2014: 65), it went hand in hand with the promotion of regionalist culture and folklore. Occitan, for example, was endorsed by Pétain's personal glorification of the poet Frédéric Mistral and reinvigorated by the publication of grammars and other texts.⁴

In Perpignan, Catalan classes started up (FAURE 1989: 206) and, in 1942, the University of Montpellier introduced a certificate in Catalan (GUITER 1973a: 302). A French version of Pompeu Fabra's grammar was published in Paris (FABRA 1941). It should be added that there is anecdotal evidence for the popularity of Pétain in Catalunya Nord (BEZSONOFF 2010: 22); hence, the expansion of provincial theatre under the Vichy regime (FAURE 1989: 135-142) could be seen as a natural, generous opportunity for cultural self-expression granted by a sympathetic leader. According to the published text, 512 copies of *Rialles* were printed (BARTRE 1942: 6), so we are not dealing with a large readership.⁵ However, it is worth remembering that Roussillon was one of the regions of France where book buying was lowest during this period (CANTIER 2019: 155-158), so performance would

4. On the promotion of Occitan during the Vichy regime, see CORCY 2004-2005; FAURE 1989: 68, 204-205, 242, 324 notes 18 and 20.

5. It is uncertain what happened to the majority of copies. One researcher, writing fifty years later, avoids discussion of *Rialles* because, she says, it has «not been located in major libraries» (ENRÍQUEZ 1994).

constitute the main means of transmission. Owing to their form, strictly limited by colloquial language (particular to the geographical area) and stylistic idiom (far from Parisian fashions), the plays in *Rialles* might correspond to what was developed much later for Catalan in Spain during Francoism, namely «regime-based folkloric regionalism» (DOWLING 2018: 385).

Bartre's texts can thus be viewed from a perspective of, on the one hand, the tense conditions (from the recent military conflict and the Spanish exiles); and, on the other hand, the conscious, if modest, promotion of Catalan (from the authorities who had just emerged from the war). Could a more detailed analysis beyond my previous summaries indicate an ostensible relationship with this context? Put in terms of the audience-actor intimacy of much amateur theatre, are there signs within the plays which would reinforce the «fun», «companionship», and «strength» seen by Priestley as the results of communal theatrical work (PRIESTLEY 1945: 29)?

Bartre's central themes do not shout out their relevance, but her dialogues do—in contrast to what her commentators claim—nonetheless allude to the harsher elements of their milieu. The notion of coping with financial challenges is a good example. Within the jokiness, there are recurrent allusions to money. The women in *Les xipoterres* mention rumours of how a companion did not have enough money to pay for clothes and how a daughter of one of their acquaintances is marrying a rich farmer (BARTRE 1942: 105-106). In *Les bogaderes* the women complain about the cost of things and regret not marrying wealthier men (BARTRE 1942: 115), while in *Xipots? Cap!*, Madalena mentions a marriage which seems to have been called off because the dowry was too little (BARTRE 1942: 195). Higher up the social scale, in *La Belota se casa*, the outcome hinges on whether or not a bride-to-be will have the inheritance of her aunt and uncle. In *Sogra y nora*, it is revealed that Marta has more money than her mother-in-law, Mme de Pelegry, and Marta has to deny that the wealth was acquired illegally (BARTRE 1942: 184-185).⁶ But money is

6. There could be a reference here to the fact that Glorianes, Marta's village, was known for its gold mining.

not a direct route to daily sustenance at a time of food shortages and rationing. A character in *Les dones y el secret* comments: «Amb les restriccions d'ara, la gent t'enen els pahidors alleugerits» (BARTRE 1942: 70). Moments later, another returns, worn out from having to queue for food:

LISA (*s'assentant*): Mira, encara que no me convidis, m'assenti, perquè èri cama recta. A quin temps venim!

ROSA: J'ó m'en malfiavi d'aixó. Ah! la gent s'en reyen quan deyi que mancarien de tot. (BARTRE 1942: 72)

In *Peix d'abril*, Josefina has to go off to the butcher's because, if she is late, no meat will be left (BARTRE 1942: 138).

It is easy to imagine how these precise references could act as an emotional safety valve for performers and audiences to acknowledge their contemporary circumstances. More general situations in the plays allude to the events which preceded the armistice of June 1940. The preponderance of female characters—in comedies such as *Les xipoteres* and *Les bogaderes*—reminds us of the fact that so many men had gone off to the war. And there are orphans and widows whose status becomes the basis for plots (even if the cause of the death of the men is accidental or unspecified). We find out that Lluisa's fiancé—in *Peix d'abril*—has actually died in the war (BARTRE 1942: 139).

Other accounts are more detailed. The ten pages of *Nit de Nadal* culminate in a surprise: having been banished because of his adultery, Henri returns home unexpectedly on Christmas eve, as if in answer to the letter his seven-year-old daughter Alice has placed for him in the Nativity scene. The sentimentality, melancholy, and anticipation mean that the play is not really a comedy at all. There must have been a sense of recognition and perhaps pride in a local audience, as they listened to Henri's narrative, after his wife asks him what he has been doing all this time:

Desseguida me vaig engatjar dins l'armada, vaig fer el meu devert, som estat ferit, decorat. Tant aviat curat, torni a me trucar y som fet

presoner. L'altre dia vaig trobar l'ocasió de m'escapar, ho vaig fer. Ara me posaré al treball, y me prendré la nina. (BARTRE 1942: 163)

While Henri succeeded in escaping, the whole gist of the dialogue is hardly escapist. Given the numbers of prisoners-of-war from Illa (DELONCA 1947: 426-427), one is left wondering if it could derive from a real-life story.

The phenomenon of a missing father and the contemporary situation of France come together most explicitly in *Un bon principi d'any*. The play recounts how the young and unstudious Marcel is forced to do better at school by his stern grandfather (Senyor Pujol). After Marcel's mother Regina has pleaded with Pujol, he allows his grandson to work on the land (rather than being an intellectual), with the compromise that Marcel will spend a year at agricultural college. The pressure exerted by Pujol is so great because Marcel's father is dead. As Regina says: «Quan el cap de casa manca, tot es desbarrotat!» (BARTRE 1942: 47). And Marcel phrases his argument (to his grandfather) for wanting to be a farmer as part of a wider policy:

Avi, vosté me perdonarà quan l'hi diré que dès d'ahir me som fet escriure «Compagnon de France» y aquet matí, amb alguns companys sem anats a sembrar al camp d'una pobra dona.

[...]

Es per respondre al desitj qu'el nostre Mariscal ha manifestat a la joventut de França. Y éri segur de la seua aprobació, padri.

[...]

Padrí, per una França nova, cal homes nous.

Haveu sentit com jó els vots d'el Mariscal: cal fer produir al nostre sol tot ço que pot donar. (BARTRE 1942: 49, 51)

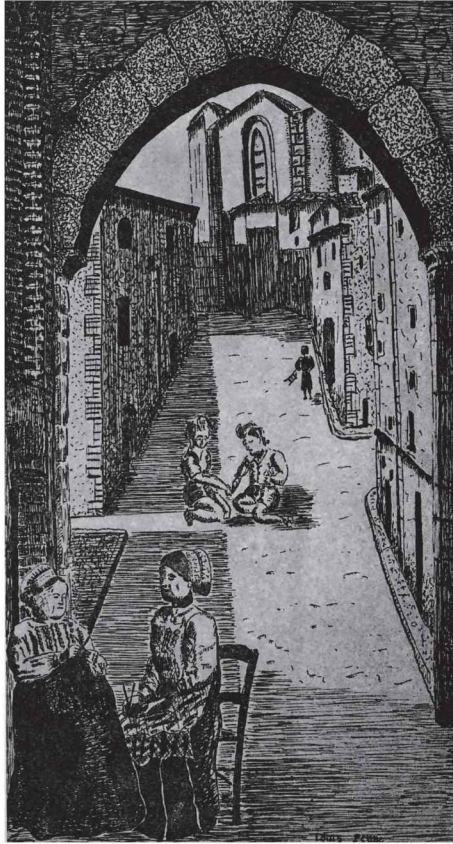
Marcel is not just becoming a member of a Vichy association, the Compagnons de France, founded in August 1940 (NORD 2012). He is echoing the rhetoric of Mariscal (Maréchal, or Marshal) Philippe Pétain himself. The idea of a «new France» was a recurrent part of official discourse. When Pétain praised Mistral, he did so by seeing in the Occitan poet «l'évocatour de la France nouvelle que nous voulons instaurer, en même temps que de la France traditionnelle que nous

voulons redresser» (FAURE 1989: 68). A central part of this identity was a «return-to-the-earth» policy to increase agricultural production and thereby help French families in need. A *service civique* could require all unqualified Frenchmen to do farm work, from Marcel's age, seventeen (FAURE 1989: 108-114). Marcel obliges by rushing to the job.

The references are extended in the next few minutes. When Pujol asks his daughter Regina «t'estimes mès qu'en Marcel sigui un pagès qu'un *intellectual*?», she gives a strong reaction: «Massa n'hi ha a França d'aqueixos mitg-sabis qui, dès que poden pas arribar a una alta situació com ho havien somniat, tornen agrits i son incapaços de fer un treball util» (BARTRE 1942: 53). Here there is an echo of the Vichy rhetoric condemning intellectual activity entailing analysis, rationalism, and narcissism (FAURE 1989: 98-99). The triumphant belief system of *Un bon principi d'any* is therefore not distant from the amateur propaganda plays of the time in French singing the praises of farmers and Marshal Pétain (ADDED 1992: 279-282). The title and the temporal setting of *Un bon principi d'any* indicate a new beginning for reconstruction, also common in the French plays. As in *Nit de Nadal*, the new beginning implies that national reconstruction is possible.

Besides a teenager involved in agriculture and a husband returning to work and family, are there characteristics of this reconstruction and its official values implied in other plays? Bartre coincides with Pétainist tactics by excluding any mention of the German Occupation (FAURE 1989: 17), but —with the exception of *Un bon principi d'any*— she does not make explicit the links with the Vichy ideology of *Travail—Famille—Patrie*. Bartre does, however, privilege the village in social terms (FAURE 1989: 118), simply because her plots tend to rely on a close-knit community where people bump into each other in the street or come into each other's homes, and where news travels fast. The visual illustrations included in *Rialles* tend to emphasize a homely atmosphere or recognizable external views in which the characters wear traditional clothes.⁷

7. The artists of the illustrations are acknowledged and referred to as M^{ma} G. Vigué, M. Ledieu, and M. Penne (BARTRE 1942: 210).



Louis Penne's illustration to Llúcia Bartre's *Les xipoteres* (BARTRE 1942: 99)

This community portrayed on stage is, though, curiously limited in its scope. It would, admittedly, be difficult to represent the full range of local professions, but a notable absence is the priesthood. Regina, in *Un bon principi d'any*, goes to mass every day (BARTRE 1942: 46), but we never find out more about this. In *Les dones y el secret* Lisa complains about a priest who has made her turn off the lights in the church and break two vases (BARTRE 1942: 61). Delriu tells an ironic fable about the priests in small towns and villages who had such a good

life that God had to create purgatory on earth by sending pious women to annoy them (BARTRE 1942: 63). Of course, the atmosphere is more religious in *Nit de Nadal*, especially in Alice's blind faith (asking Jesus to take the letter to her father), the carol she sings, and her message of Christmas peace for the family (BARTRE 1942: 165). But no priests appear in this play either and the impact remains sentimental.

Indeed, there appears to be a contradiction between what may be seen as an essential, traditional constituent of rural life in this region — Catholic practice — and what we see on stage. On the other hand, Bartre is using Catalan to portray a phenomenon which had become all too real by the time she was born. In Roussillon, Catalan was not promoted in schools and priests were, on the whole, not concerned with Catalan culture. This meant that religious practice was already low in the nineteenth century compared to other areas and French Catalans did not like the clergy to interfere in local affairs (BYRNES 1999). The attitude is summed up by Tineta's advice to Lisa in *Les dones y el secret*: «Fes com jó, estimi el bon Deu, faig els meus devers de bona cristiana, mes deixi el capella tranquil» (BARTRE 1942: 62). Yet the paradoxes remain: Bartre's financial aim in putting on her plays was to raise funds to restore the local chapel of Saint Maurice (VALLS 1997: 34).

If Bartre did not sympathize with clerical Catholicism in *Rialles*, she still must have been regarded favourably within the Vichy regionalist project, as demonstrated by the publication of two volumes of French translations of her plays (BARTRE 1943a; BARTRE 1943b). But what is the status of the Catalan language in *Rialles*? Accounts from Catalunya Nord consider Bartre's linguistic choice a natural extension of making audiences feel alluded to, just as actors were familiar to them as neighbours and local situations could be recognized (VERDAGUER 1997; VALLS 1997: 34). What these accounts omit is the tension between Catalan and French from which Catalan tends to emerge in a more positive light.

In *La Belota se casa*, the aunt narrates how a railway employee did not understand Catalan and then quotes the bad French in which she spoke to him (BARTRE 1942: 91). The other characters laugh, as we might expect an audience to. However, the value of Catalan as a vehicle for authentic emotions is conspicuous in a comparison of two letters. In *Peix d'abril*, Leonia's forged love letter in the name of

Josefina is in French (BARTRE 1942: 143), the formally learnt language of written communication. Alice's letter to her absent father in *Nit de Nadal*, in contrast, is in tear-jerking Catalan: «Vina aviat, papà estimat, així la mamà riurà com quan erets aquí» (BARTRE 1942: 162).

There is also a linguistic element of class snobbery, cleverly subverted. One of the washerwomen in *Les bogaderes* makes fun of her mistress by mimicking her: «(amb la veu punxaguda): Rose, je vous prie, faites bien attention à ma lingerie fine, n'asquitez pas les garnitures» (BARTRE 1942: 116). Predictably, the reaction is laughter. This is also the reaction to an anecdote related by Mme de Pelegry in *Sogra y nora*, but it is significant that her snobbish interlocutor, M. de Sequera, is the only one laughing. The anecdote consists of a priest who has just come to Glorianes (the tiny village from where Marta hails). He tells his congregation: «Je suis venu ici pour combattre la routine et, Dieu aidant, j'aurai raison d'elle.» Later on, a local greets the priest in a hostile manner, saying: «Que té a l'hi dir? Saberà que la Routina es la meua dona y jó som el Routi» (BARTRE 1942: 183). Although the story is not without contrived humour, its impact serves to reinforce Mme de Pelegry's air of superiority, later proved to be insubstantial in relation to Marta. The comedy is therefore diminished by the unpleasant character of the narrator and her immediate audience, as well as regional antipathy to the clergy.

On 31 August 1941 the «Gala de l'Unité française» in Vichy involved a parade of different provincial folkloric groups coming together in support of a united nation (BARRAL 1974: 928). In comparison, *Rialles* demonstrates how an important element of folkloric identity, in this case the Catalan language, is not totally subordinate to French in the way that the region is subordinate to the nation. In that small sense, several of the plays exploit cultural politics in order to privilege an aura of parochial authenticity above national community.

CONCLUSION: IMAGINING LAUGHTER

Although we may laugh at some of the French cited, we cannot really laugh at French speakers because they do not appear on stage.

This contrasts with the fun poked at characters speaking French in much earlier comedies from Catalunya Nord, such as *Amos y domestichs* (GRANDÓ 1912), as well as the more precisely satirical barbs against Parisians which would come in plays of the 1970s (LONDON forthcoming). Since there are no outsiders, Bartre does not highlight the notion of a peasant race which was part of Vichy ideology (FAURE 1989: 272). In fact, when the term «raça» does occur, it is the repulsive Mme de Pelegry who uses it to say that how awful it was for her son to marry «una minyona qu'és pas de raça» (BARTRE 1942: 182). All this means that *Rialles* presents no genuine outsiders. (At the end of *Peix d'abril*, there is even hope for Leonia to marry Albert, if she improves her behaviour.) So the plays do not meet the criteria of classic comedy in which the consensus of the group is ratified by successful opposition to a dehumanized external individual (MALACHY 2005: 14-21). And that implies that the «socially conservative face» of *Rialles* does not rely on «the hooting down of accepted targets» (WEITZ 2009: 192).

To a certain extent, an exception would be the targeting of women, or at least mothers-in-law and gossips. «Lluny de ta sogra cerca casa», sings Rosa in *La Belota se casa* (BARTRE 1942: 95), a statement confirmed by the action of *Sogra y nora*. We have seen how entire plots depend on rumours spread through the community by women, embodied by titles such as *Les xipoteres* and *Xipots? Cap!* Sententious phrases reinforce this trait. «Pensi que aquell que poderia impedir una dona de parlar, encara té de neixer», says Víctor in *La neboda de la Cristina* (BARTRE 1942: 16). At the end of *Les dones y el secret* the lawyer tells Delriu ironically: «saberàs que si vols un secret ben guardat, el cal confiar a les dones» (BARTRE 1942: 81). A similar tone pervades Guideta's song in *Les xipoteres*: «Nos dihuen que sem xipoteres, / Sabeu qu'a Ille n'hi ha pas» (BARTRE 1942: 107).

These portraits of women are at variance with the image promoted by Vichy of woman as a model of traditional values (FAURE 1989: 117). Yet the fun in these cases is relatively harmless and short-lived. This is not the world of Sheridan's *School for Scandal*. What triumphs in the end is a combination of the family home and the local community, as underlined by the harmonious plot resolutions and

the occasional mention of Illa itself (BARTRE 1942: 92, 107), a feature which also occurs in Bartre's more didactic post-war work (BARTRE 1948: 8). To return to the ecological metaphor I cited at the beginning of this study, Bartre's situations and her staid sets (her kitchens, living rooms and streets) convey a world intact, in contrast to the collapse of architectural structures in modernist plays (KERSHAW 2007: 64-67). So, if amateur theatre is an «élément fondamental de culture humaine» (DUSSANE 1951: 254), in the phrase of a French critic of the time (echoing Priestley's enthusiasm), it is one of order and security. These words —order and security— were used by Huizinga in the 1930s to describe the influence of sacred ritual play (HUIZINGA [1938/1944] 1970: 33), in an atmosphere, much like that of amateur theatre, where participants knew what to expect.

Is there space, then, in these orderly rooms for a different interpretation of humour? Writing during the war, Claude Saulnier argued that laughter was amoral and based on disharmony. When it came to comedy, his conclusion was striking:

L'indiscipline du jeu s'est associé ainsi à la discipline du luxe: sous cette forme quelque peu paradoxale et pleinement esthétique, le rire est le triomphe de la liberté consciente et joyeuse. (SAULNIER 1940: 168)

Maybe the joyous freedom provided by *Rialles* consists above all in the shared opportunity for self-expression, with references only locals would be able to appreciate fully, in a language unspoken by those who had encouraged its presence. It is a modest, but potent kind of performance.

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