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Jaume Vidal Alcover



Bio-bibliography Itinerary

Margalida Pons

Jaume Vidal Alcover (1923-1991) spent his childhood and adolescence between Manacor, his birthplace, Palma where he moved at the age of ten to start his secondary schooling, and Mal Pas in Port d'Alcudia where, at the age of thirteen, he learned that the summer of 1936 would be unlike any other. The imminence of war obliged the family to leave their summer house, the Salern of his fictional writings, and return to Manacor [...].

Jaume Vidal spent the years of his early manhood in the semi-clandestine, plush and comfortable salons of cultural life in a small city. His friend Martí Mayol [...] took him to the soirees of the Massot brothers where, in 1945 and 1946, Vidal read some of his first poems. He met some fusty old poets and a few younger ones like Miquel Dolç. As a result of these early readings, [Francesc B. Moll](#) asked him for a book of poems to be published in the "Les Illes d'Or" collection but the project never came to fruition. The volume is called *El ball del pensament* [The Dance of Thought] and brings together poems written between 1942 and 1948 (according to the manuscript) or up to 1950, according to the author's words. At the same time, Vidal had published some poems in Spanish in the weekly newspaper of Manacor. In sum, as he himself recognised, these are samples of a style "under the sway of school readings of "Siglo de Oro" (Golden Age) writers, of fable writers and Spanish romantics as well as his admiration for the great Nicaraguan poet Rubén Darío and the tastes of Mallorcan writers ([Costa i Llobera](#), [Joan Alcover](#), [Marià Aguiló](#), Tomás Aguiló, Pere d'Alcàntara Peña, Miquel dels Sants Oliver and Pere Orlandis...)". Vidal had begun to read these authors as a student of French language and Literature at secondary school [...]. Moll's offer to publish was, then, not at all surprising. However, Moll [as Vidal has it], whether out of distraction or lucidity "had the good taste to lose it [*El ball del pensament*] and not find it" until Vidal took him his second collection *L'hora verda* [The Green Hour], which came out six months after the finishing touches had been given "before the luminous waters of Port de Pollença".

Before the appearance of *L'hora verda*, and during the period of his tangential contacts with the insular literary circles, Vidal had spent some winters in Madrid, where he moved in the university year of 1941-1942 to start studying Law. In this city, towards the end of the decade, he joined a set of young people of the Congregación Mariana (a group akin to the Legion of Mary), the headquarters of which was in calle Zorilla. Here they organised all kinds of gatherings to which they gave the highly refined name of "Mañanitas del rey David" (King David's Serenades). These were the same years, more or less, of the meetings, in Mallorca, of the "Luïsos de Madrid" group, in carrer Savellà in Palma, where father Miquel Batllori founded the Mallorca Academy of History, a section of the Congregación Mariana, where such names as Edgar Allan Poe and [Rosselló-Pòrcel](#) started to be familiar to new writers. A third city, Barcelona, where the young Vidal moved in 1943 to continue his studies, and where he lived with an agnostic, bibliophile uncle who haunted second-hand bookshops, gave him the chance to read the authors and works distributed and discussed in the Estudi group, among them Rimbaud, Rilke and Valéry. Some of these writers clashed head on with the modernist education of Jaume Vidal. In Vidal's words, in Estudi circles, "sure rhyme and verses that were too well scanned were irremissibly discarded".

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One sees what he means. The French symbolist and post-symbolist poets (especially Rimbaud and Laforgue) were all for substituting the artificial rhyme of the strophe by the natural rhyme of intuition or thought and they used free verse to break up metric rigidity. The mastery of [Carles Riba](#) was accepted by most, although Jaume Vidal liked to define him as a tyrant, claiming that, "if Carles Riba wrote verses that creaked and if his prose was more abstruse than Gracián's, you had to learn to produce creaking verse and write conceptually" [...]. However, Jaume Vidal had found much more than new literary models in Barcelona. His arrival in the Catalan capital had all the power of liberation from the world that oppressed him [...].

At the end of the 1940s, Jaume Vidal had constructed many of his literary models. He had read, besides the inevitable stream of Mallorcan writers, the Spanish classics, Rubén Darío, the French poets, from Marie de France through to Les Parnassiens, by way of Charles d'Orléans and François Villon. The latter must have appealed to him because of his alternating academicism and vitalism. Villon's debates between body and soul were simply a reflection of his life as a bandit and cleric, thief and delinquent, frequenter of taverns and expelled from Paris in exchange for the commuting of the death penalty that hung over him. Verlaine interested Vidal, particularly after he had read Rubén [Darío], and his taste for classical themes must be an indirect inheritance from the Parnassian movement, of Leconte de Lisle and his *Poèmes antiques* [Ancient Poems]. In any case, there is little doubt that evocation of the Greek myths, so dear to the hearts of the Parnassians, did not come about, in Vidal's case, from education in a seminary (as was the case of [Blai Bonet](#)) and neither was it the result of the Mallorca School tradition (which took judiciousness and measure from the classical world while categorically rejecting paganism). Nevertheless, the influence of the symbolists in his work was indubitably more decisive than that of the rigid, marmoreal Parnassians. Behind the work *Igor Stravinsky. Le sacre du printemps* [Igor Stravinsky: The Rite of Spring], a set of poems published in 1978 but written in 1951, there is a subtle tribute to Verlaine's maxim, *De la musique avant toute chose!* [Music above all else!] and, in particular there is a taste for the blurry frontier, for the intangibility of Bécquer, for poetic yearning. [...] He discovered Baudelaire thanks to a fellow student in the residence, while his study of German had him reading Goethe and Schiller's *An die Freude* [Ode to Joy], from which he took the title of his first published book, *L'hora verda* [...].

His stays in Madrid set off another lot of reading. During the academic year of 1949–1950, in the University College of Santa María, Vidal became familiar with literature "of circulation prohibited by the Franco regime; the poets of '27, the French existentialist novels and the poems of the great South American writers, Neruda and Vallejo". The influence of the Generation of '27 and French existentialism on Catalan poets of the post-war years has been quite well documented but no mention has been made of the importance of the Latin American poets. Neruda and Vallejo are heirs of the avant-garde: Huidobro's creationism, the Ultraism imported by Borges in 1921 – one year after his Mallorcan bay – and surrealism left a deep imprint in their work. In 1933 and 1935 Neruda published the two parts of *Residencia en tierra* [Residence on Earth], his work of most intense surrealist imbuelement. *Trilce*, published by Vallejo in 1922 before he moved to Paris, and re-published in Spain in 1930 with a Prologue by José Bergamín, transforms syntax and calls into question the points of reference of poetic language. It would not seem that Vidal necessarily had him in mind when he wrote *L'hora verda*, but some of his poems from the early 1950s – especially "Café d'Eixample", dated January 1953 and written in Barcelona, in the volume *Terra negra* [Black land] – spring from avant-garde discourse.

The appearance of *L'hora verda* in 1952 caused something of an upheaval. Guillem Colom, recalling reading the book at home, speaks of the scandal the book represented for the mature poets and describes the poems as green and callow, although he finds a touch of pain that gives them dignity: in

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other words, he is trying to salvage the inevitable autochthonous legacy in them. Miquel Gayà writes that the publication of *L'hora verda*, along with that of Blai Bonet's *Entre el coral i l'espiga* [Between Coral and Wheat] and Cèlia Viñas' *Del foc i la cendra* [On Fire and Ash], besides consummating the public rupture with the Mallorca School, had the result of bringing about a rethinking of the collections published by Moll. With all this stylistic innovation there was a danger that subscribers of more classical tastes would melt away... Vidal himself has described, with ill-disguised satisfaction, the repercussions of the reading of his first collection in Can Colom, reverberations that, it seemed, reached virulent extremes. Phenomena such as the reception of *L'hora verda* confirm the existence of the unavoidable generational clash between the authors of the Mallorca School and the poets of the fifties and, perhaps because of this, they have been exaggerated. The fact is that Vidal also had his champions and not only among the writers of his own age [...].

Nonetheless, in 1951, before the publication of *L'hora verda*, Jaume Vidal had finished another collection of poems, *El dolor de cada dia* [The Pain of Every Day], which critics saw as being different from and complementary to the first. The new collection was not to be published until 1957 because of problems with the censors, who denied permission to publish on two occasions. The stumbling block was the poem "Elegia a Salvatore Guiliano" [Elegy to Salvatore Guiliano] which the censors deemed unacceptable since it was a threnody for a bandit. Vidal published it in 1952, in Spanish, in the Santander-based review *La Isla de los Ratones*. Finally, *El dolor de cada dia*, with the original version now expanded by the addition of several poems, appeared in an edition funded by Vidal himself, without much luck in distribution, reviews or popular acclaim, although defenders of the work attempted to present it, years after its appearance, as a forerunner of social poetry.

Also subject to erratic circumstances (censorship, impossibility of staging) were some of Vidal's first set of works for the stage which covered the period from the 1940s to the 1960s. It is difficult to produce a reliable inventory of these works because many of them were never published. It is possible that, as in the case of poetry, there were some attempts to write plays in Spanish. Whatever the case, one can establish a stage of rapprochement to regional theatre, the only way to get works staged, with plays such as *Els indiferents* [The Indifferent], *El solitari* [The Solitary Man], *Teatro regional* [Regional Theatre] and *El retorn del fill pròdig* [Return of the Prodigal Son] or *Els dos germans* [The Two Brothers]. To these titles should be added, now outside any attempts at closer ties with regional theatre, *Els whiskys del subsecretari* [The Sub-secretary's Whiskies], a work that was never performed or published; *El miracle de Fàtima* [The Miracle of Fatima], an unpublished play written in the mid-1950s and staged in 1974; and *Strip-tease per a un titella* [Strip-tease for a Puppet], a monologue also written in the 1950s but never performed or published. Vidal was handicapped by the limitations of a milieu dominated by regional theatre companies (the members of Artis asked him for plays, as did [Llorenç Villalonga](#), but the agreements did not prosper and the works he offered were rejected). On the other hand, the censorship was harsh, especially with works for the stage, perhaps because this was deemed the most subversive genre.

From this first stage of his production, fiction is the least-known area of Jaume Vidal's work, although it was not the least cultivated. Apart from his earliest works and a smattering of stories in publications of limited circulation which were not published elsewhere [...] or, if they were, it was much later [...], two works opened the doors of the genre to him. The first is the collection of nine short stories titled *Mirall de la veu i el crit* [Mirror of Voice and Cry], [...] while the second is *Esa carne mortal* [The Mortal Flesh] a novel originally written in Catalan and translated into Spanish in order to compete for the City of Palma Prize for the Novel. The material from *Esa carne mortal* was reworked once again in Catalan in the novels *Tertúlia a Ciutat* [Gathering in the City], written in 1948, and *La vida fàcil* [The Easy Life], written in the years 1954-55. He was not to publish any further work of fiction until 1969

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when his *Les quatre llunes* [The Four Moons] appeared, a collection of stories that had been awarded the Víctor Català Prize a year earlier. Some of the stories in this volume had been published in different reviews or distributed at readings or among literary circles [...]. Again, his short stories are not an alternative to the novels although they are often twinned with them or are their compressed variant. There are many coincidences of setting between the two genres (Salern, the mythical image of Mal Pas, which strongly recalls – perhaps because of the final combination of consonants – another mythical place, the [Bearn](#) of Villalonga) while, on more than one occasion the characters are the same [...].

The similarity between Salern and Bearn, moral spaces that act as refuges for the old skeletons of values in decadence is not remotely surprising. Time and again, Jaume Vidal invokes the mastery of Villalonga [...]. The specific coincidences, however, are not what brings the two writers together as much as the wish to create mythical realities. This is the form taken in the cycle *Els anys i els dies* [Years and Days]. After the publications *Tertúlia a Ciutat* and *La vida fàcil* came the works *Els intocables* [The Untouchables] (1987) and *Els Sants Innocents* [The Holy Innocents], which was published in 1989, although it is dated Palma, autumn 1964, while *Els darrers dies* [The Final Days], which closes the cycle, remained unpublished.

If thirteen years went by between the second and third prose works, there is a gap of eight years between the second volume of poems *El dolor de cada dia* and the third, *Dos viatges de mar* [Two Sea Journeys]. The latter collection was awarded the Joan Alcover Prize for Poetry in 1961 but was not published until four years later, in 1965. Surprisingly, its Prologue is something of a peace treaty with the Mallorca School, a reconciliation that, whether real or fictitious, left Vidal with his mind free for other battles. From now on the composite enemy was the Barcelona critics. There is also a major lapse of time between the genesis and publication of *Sonets a Eurídice* [Sonnets to Eurydice], which was started before 1955 and not published until 1967, after having been unsuccessfully presented for the 1959 Ausiàs March de Gandia Prize (won by [Pere Quart](#) *Vacances pagades* [Paid Holidays]) and the 1960 Joan Alcover Prize (borne off by Baltasar Coll), and eventually winning the Mossèn Alcover Prize, which was offered by the group Joventuts Musicals of Manacor. The move from poems in free verse to the over-structuring of a baroque collection was a brusque change of tack but the silence that greeted *El dolor de cada dia*, which attempted to be a simple work that, according to Vidal, partook of the spirit of social art, fully justified the switch to a more obscure poetry. This change of direction was continued with *Sonets alexandrins* [Alexandrine Sonnets]. More pliant in rhyme but equally constrained by the decasyllabic form, the suite *El fill pròdig* is a collection of his mature phase.

Vidal's move to Barcelona had immediate results in some parts of his creation, especially theatre: *Manicomi d'estiu o la felicitat de comprar i vendre* [Summer Madhouse or the Joys of Buying and Selling], which was staged at the Cova del Drac in 1968, provided the title for the second part of the novel *Els intocables* and is the first work in a cabaret cycle that Vidal wrote with [Maria Aurèlia Capmany](#). The cycle includes *Varietats 1* [Varieties I], an abridged reworking of the play *Dones, flors i pitança* [Women, Flowers and Charity] that was staged in 1969; *Varietats II o la cultura de la Coca-Cola* [Varieties II, or Coca-Cola Culture], staged in 1969; *Public relations (Varietats 3)*, staged in 1970 and *Varietats IV o a cadascú el que és seu i robar el que es pugui* [Varieties IV or To Each What Is His and Steal what You Can], staged in 1971. These works, performed in the Cova del Drac by the company Ca Barret! and directed by Josep Anton Codina, were collected in the volume *Ca barret!* [...]. It is true, as some critics have pointed out, this cycle of cabaret-style theatre bears some resemblance to Villalonga's *Desbarats* [Defeats] yet it is also a typical Barcelona product, the staging of which would have been unthinkable in island theatres [...].

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Equally avant-garde, the paths chosen by Blai Bonet with *Parasceve* or by [Baltasar Porcel](#) with

In contrast with what occurred with his works for the stage, Jaume Vidal's poetic output diminished in Barcelona. In 1970 he published *Terra negra*, which had been awarded the Carles Riba Prize in 1967; in 1978 *Quaderns de Foc Nou* in Tarragona brought out his series of linked tercets titled *Home* [Man]; in 1979, *Igor Stravinsky. Le sacre du printemps* appeared in a limited edition of two hundred copies; while *Tres suites de luxe* [Three Deluxe Suites] was published in Manacor. In 1981, his *Sonets alexandrins* was also published, once again in Manacor. However, most of these books contain work written in the 1950s [...].

Jaume Vidal's fictional output is completed with *Sophie o els mals de la discreció* [Sophie or the Evils of Discretion] (1971), *Visca la revolució* [Long Live the Revolution] (1974), *Dido i Eneas* [Dido and Aeneas] (1976) and *Dues rondalles farcides i altres narracions* [Two Crammed Tales and Other Stories] (1980) [...]. None of these works has been widely distributed and, thanks to the vagaries of their publication, subsequent studies on post-war Catalan fiction have not paid them much attention. Guillem-Jordi Graells describes Vidal's fictional work as "incisive, cosmopolitan, elegant, shunning experimentation and true to the realist narrative tradition", noting that "only in part (as from what we can know) can he be labelled "Mallorcan" because of his themes and even his literary language, which is a long way from dabbling in the picturesque or vernacular excess". I believe, unlike the critic, that in these works Vidal shows an acute awareness of linguistic varieties and registers: for example in the cycle *Els anys i els dies* many of his characters use the Mallorcan articles [es, sa, and ses] in their dialogues while, on the other hand, his connection with the realist tradition should be understood as following upon the model forged by Villalonga. One should also bear in mind that in Vidal's novels and in his plays, the milieu of ordinary people has a decisive influence for him. One only needs to think of stories like "Madò lluenta" [Shining Spouse] in *Les quatre llunes*, or the title *Dues rondalles farcides...*, or his *Antologia de contes, rondalles, llegendes, exemples i facècies* [Anthology of Stories, Folktales, Legends, Refrains, and Jokes] (1981) and his stage adaptations of Catalan folktales ("N'Espardenyeta" [Little Espadrille] - 1969 -, *L'amor de les tres taronges* [Love of Three Oranges] - 1970 -, etc.). As for insular themes, the nucleus of *Els anys i els dies* surely offers the most lucid literary portrait we have of post-war Mallorca.

Jaume Vidal is eclectic. His creative work takes in all genres, his criticism all epochs. Criticism and creation come together in his incisive, yet apparently not very methodical way of working. This fruitful disorder appears especially in his poetic work.

In "Jaume Vidal Alcover", *Poesia insular de postguerra: Quatre veus dels anys cinquanta*

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WEB: Ca barret!

La lletra d'algunes cançons dels espectacles de cabaret que va escriure en col·laboració amb M. Aurèlia Capmany, enregistrades per La Trinca l'any 1973.

<http://usuarios.lycos.es/latrinca/cabarret.htm>

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TXT: Correspondència inèdita

Tres cartes a Josep Vidal

http://lletra.uoc.edu/anterior/noms/jvidalalcover/html_especials/jvidalalcoveraltres1.html

Bio-bibliography

Biography



WEB: A la Hiperenciclopèdia

http://www.enciclopedia.cat/fitxa_v2.jsp?NDCHEC=0070417



WEB: Fitxa al "Qui és qui a les lletres catalanes"

<http://cultura.gencat.net/ilc/qeq/FitxaAutors.asp?nom1=vid&nom2=&cerca=Cerca&quiform=form1&NRegistre=7&idregistre=4855>



WEB: The author in the Catalan Encyclopaedia

<http://www.grec.cat/cgibin/heclangl2.pgm?&USUARI=&SESSIO=&NDCHEC=0070417&PGMORI=E>



WEB: The author in the Who's Who of Catalan Literature

<http://cultura.gencat.net/ilc/qeq/FitxaAutorsuk.asp?nom1=vidal&nom2=&cercauk2=Search&quiform=form1&NRegistre=7&idregistre=4855>

Bibliography



WEB: Què hi ha a la Biblioteca de Catalunya

http://cataleg.bnc.cat/search*cat/?searchtype=a&searcharg=Vidal+Alcover+Jaume&sortdropdown=-&searchscope=13&searchscope2=13&SORT=D



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<http://traces.uab.cat/search?f=author&p=Vidal%20Alcover%20Jaume&sc=1&ln=ca>



WEB: Articles sobre l'autor (Traces)

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<http://catalog.loc.gov/cgi-bin/Pwebrecon.cgi?DB=local&PAGE=First>



WEB: The author in the COPAC Catalogue (UK)

<http://copac.ac.uk/search?&au=Jaume+Vidal+Alcover>



WEB: Pàgina de l'AELC

Bibliografia, informacions, publicacions.

<http://www.escriptors.com/autors/vidalalcoverj/>



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Pàgina del col·loqui que el Departament de Filologia Catalana de la URV va organitzar amb motiu del desè aniversari de la seva mort.

<http://www.urv.es/centres/Departaments/fcatalana/colloquis/index.htm>



WEB: Llegat Vidal-Capmany a Tarragona

Web oficial del Llegat Vidal-Capmany. Inclou biografia i bibliografia.

http://www.urv.cat/biblioteca/biblioteques/lletres/llegat_v_c/llegat_vidalcapmany.html



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Informació sobre la representació d'aquest espectacle popular a Uldecona, el text del qual va ser escrit per l'autor.

<http://www.passiulldecona.org/>



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<http://www.premisliteraris.org/vidal.htm>



WEB: Literatura mallorquina

Text de la GEC que presenta de forma molt sintètica la literatura de l'illa.

<http://www.xtec.es/~lrius1/alcover/contextbaix.htm>



PDF: Literatura i música

"*Le Sacre du Printemps*: d'Stravinsky a Jaume Vidal Alcover". Article de Rosa Comes a la *Revista d'Estudis Catalans* (15, 2002).

<http://www.romanistik.uni-freiburg.de/pusch/zfk/15/comes.pdf>