



TEATRE NACIONAL
DE CATALUNYA



Generalitat de Catalunya
Departament de Cultura

TERRA BAIXA

(RECONSTRUCCIÓ D'UN CRIM)

Àngel Guimerà

Version by Pablo Ley
Directed by Carme Portaceli

The TNC goes on tour

For the first time the Teatre Nacional de Catalunya will take a theatre classic from Catalan heritage to Europe, and performed in Catalan. The play *Terra baixa (Reconstruction of a crime)*, by Àngel Guimerà, adapted by Pablo Ley, has been programmed for an international tour: on 19 and 20 May 2023 it will be performed at the KVS in Brussels, on 6 and 7 June 2023 at the CDN in Orléans, and on 7 and 8 July 2023 at the Hungarian Theatre of Cluj.

The TNC goes on tour enables TNC productions to tour Catalan-speaking and international towns, bringing theatre to new audiences and contributing to the decentralisation of culture (with the collaboration of the Catalan Ministry of Culture).

***Terra baixa (Reconstruction of a crime)* confirmed tour:**

International tour:

Brussel·les

KVS:
Friday 19 May
and Saturday 20 May

Orléans

CDN:
Tuesday 6 June
and Wednesday 7 June

Cluj

Hungarian Theatre:
Friday 7 July
and Saturday 8 July

Catalonia and Catalan-speaking territories:

El Vendrell

Teatre Municipal Àngel
Guimerà:
Saturday 11 March

Girona

Teatre Municipal:
Friday 17 March

Granollers

Teatre Auditori de
Granollers:
Sunday 19 March

Tarragona

Teatre Tarragona:
Friday 24 March

El Prat de Llobregat

Teatre L'Artesà:
Sunday 26 March

Reus

Teatre Fortuny:
Friday 14 April

Vilanova i la Geltrú

Teatre Principal:
Sunday 16 April

Vic

L'Atlàntida:
Thursday 27 April

Manresa

Teatre Kursaal:
Saturday 29 April and
Sunday 30 April

Olot

Teatre Principal:
Friday 5 May

Viladecans

Atrium Viladecans: Sunday
7 May

Sant Cugat del Vallès

Teatre-Auditori
de Sant Cugat:
Friday 26 May

Mataró

Teatre Monumental:
Sunday 28 May

València

Teatre Principal:
Friday 31 March, Saturday
1 April and Sunday 2 April

Palma de Mallorca

Teatre Principal:
Friday 21 April 2023

Manacor

Teatre Manacor: Sunday
23 April

Synopsis

A 21st-century perspective on the great classic of Catalan drama

Pablo Ley turns Guimerà's classic into a detective story and a magnificent thriller about class struggle.

Without losing sight of the origins or ignoring the essence of this universal play, Pablo Ley's dramaturgy sets *Terra baixa* in the 20th century and introduces two new characters: a journalist and a police superintendent called Vinagret. He will be in charge of investigating a crime: a worker has murdered his master. Manelic has killed Sebastià to free Marta (and himself).

A contemporary and exciting perspective that shifts from rural drama to romantic tragedy and culminates with "I killed the wolf! I killed the wolf! I killed the wolf!" The liberating shout of the working class fighting against oppression.

A story of intrigue and uprising that will keep you glued to your seat.





Terra baixa (Reconstrucció d'un crim)

Credits

Version
Pablo Ley

Dramaturgy
Pablo Ley
i Carme Portaceli

Direction
Carme Portaceli

Cast

Pepo Blasco
Tomàs

Laura Conejero
Journalist

Mohamed El Bouhali
Josep

Borja Espinosa
Manelic

Eduard Farelo
Sebastià

Mercè Mariné
Pepa

Roser Pujol
Xeixa

Manel Sans
Superintendent "El Vinagret"

Kathy Sey
Nuri

Anna Ycobalzeta
Marta

Set design
Paco Azorín

Costume design
Carlota Ferrer

Lighting
Ignasi Camprodon

Original music and sound design
Jordi Collet

Sound
Carles Gómez

Audiovisual screenings
Miquel Àngel Raió

Choreography and movement
Ferran Carvajal

Hair and make up
Imma Capell

Director's assistant
Montse Tixé

Set designer's assistant
Alessandro Arcangeli

Costume designer's assistance
Joana Martí

Institut del Teatre
Direction and
Dramaturgy internship
student
Mario Rebugent

Production
Teatre Nacional
de Catalunya

TNC technical and management teams

Performed in Catalan



Carme Portaceli

Taking on a play like Guimerà's *Terra baixa* is a great challenge. Guimerà writes very well. Like a well-aimed arrow the scenes reach the centre of our hearts. However, many years have passed since it was premiered in Barcelona in 1896. In order to achieve the level Guimerà demands, we have to make a version from the 21st century that can position it as it deserves outside traditional approaches and the complacency towards the bourgeoisie that reduced it to a rural drama.

Heritage is an essential asset for the memory of a group, and it is very important to recover it. We are memory. But theatre is a living art, and for heritage to have the value it deserves, it has to represent us in some way, it has to speak of us, and we can only achieve this by reading it from what we are today, in my case a woman of the 21st century, and with the greatest respect for the piece. And this is what we do. We do *Terra baixa*, from top to bottom, but from our perspective, from the vision given to us by the time that has elapsed since, with revolutions like feminism, wars, the arrival of fascism in Europe, the Russian Revolution or the Tragic Week.

And amidst all this, an ordinary story set in a village that ignores progress, where the future passes by without stopping, where the feudal heir has already lost everything but clings on to his privileges without knowing that he is finished. Politics hangs over our heads without us realising. This is what happens to Marta, who is unaware of what she is experiencing until a small thing opens her eyes: Manelic... And everybody subjected to a tradition that they find terrible but against which they do not dare to speak out or even imagine they could.

Our journalist, a real war correspondent with a conscience, will tell us what "really" happened there, at Mas Bordís, at a time that precedes our recent history and our present.

With the best of artistic and technical teams, we share with all of you a key piece of our literature that we hope reaches your hearts, as it reaches ours.

We have greatly enjoyed putting it together and hope that you will enjoy watching it.

Thanks for coming and sharing this moment with us. This is your home.

Carme Portaceli
Director of the play and Artistic Director of the TNC

Press material

**VIDEOS AND OTHER PRESS MATERIAL AVAILABLE AT:
WWW.TNC.CAT/PREMSA**



Book prologue

FONT, Jordi. “Terra baixa. Metàfora d’una societat esquinçada”. In *Terra baixa* by Àngel Guimerà. Barcelona: Edicions TNC.

Prologue to the TNC edition of *Terra baixa* providing the historical context on which Pablo Ley based his dramaturgy.

Àngel Guimerà had evolved from romantic tragedy to realistic drama, as occurred throughout Europe, under the influence of scientific positivism, particularly in the field of literature. The emphasis no longer stopped at the playwright’s feelings, but delved into social reality, with the desire to reflect it “as it is”, bringing to the fore settings and characters that had been hitherto neglected, particularly those that reflected harsh living and working conditions of ordinary people and social exclusion. *Terra baixa* is a clear expression of this new perspective, in this case referring to the rural environment and the oppressive conditions that existed there, harking back to medieval servitude. The “terra baixa” (lowlands) represents the ideal of goodness and truth, of naturalness and freedom, embodied by Manelic, who is honest, impetuous and candid. While the “terra alta” (highlands) is society corrupted by the rule of the headman, made of submission and vileness, selfishness and pettiness, and which pushes Manelic to “kill the wolf”.

The popularity of *Terra baixa* was immediate and grew over the years, until it became the most performed and read play in Catalan theatre (and also the most translated, into around fifteen languages). Ordinary people adopted *Terra baixa* with the strength with which they embrace symbols. And the rural “master” depicted in it, who capriciously manages land, cattle and people, was not far removed from the master of the urban factory or the industrial colony, where the exploitation of human labour reached extreme heights.

Dr Josep de Letamendi, an eminent physician of his time, spoke of “crushing” when referring to the exploitation to which workers were subjected, with protective regulations still some way off. The rural “wolf” that Guimerà made howl on stage was not very different from the industrial “wolf”, but it became its metaphor, a powerful metaphor.

Indeed, an abyss of inequality and lack of communication ripped society apart at the end of the 19th century. The “gold rush” (following the Restoration in 1874), with the expansion of the textile, metallurgical, chemical and other industries, had generated extraordinary revenues, with the bourgeoisie enjoying a period of unprecedented abundance, with new ways of doing things in the Parisian style, and new pleasures and luxuries previously unimaginable. Elegant horse-drawn sedans and phaetons

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paraded down Passeig de Gràcia, with those upright gentlemen and airy ladies from scenes in El Liceu opera house that the painter Ramon Casas would leave us. He would leave them to us, like the good chronicler he was, alongside the paintings “The charge of the police against the workers’ demonstration” or “Garrotte in the public square”. This bourgeoisie was closed to dialogue and agreement, oblivious to the fate of its workers, ignorant of the most disadvantaged. Joan Maragall would use it against them, in an article from 1909 entitled “La ciutat del perdó”, when he tried to persuade patricians to ask for a pardon for those condemned to death in the Tragic Week, “for our unfeeling brothers, who sought to use hatred to terrify this city that we abandoned out of selfishness.” And he asked accusingly: “Do they have to pay the penalty just because their action falls within a code, while our inaction is so base that it can no longer fall anywhere? Go and ask for forgiveness for them from human justice, which will mean asking for forgiveness from divine justice for yourselves, before which you are perhaps more guilty than they are.” The article was censored and no patrician lifted a finger.

We must remember the working and living regime to which workers were subjected. At dawn, long lines formed through the streets of Barcelona to the spinning and fabric factories in Sants and Sant Andreu or the workshops and foundries in La Barceloneta and Poble Nou, often with an hour or more to get there. A twelve-to-fifteen-hour working day awaited them, with no rest other than lunch. Accidents caused by machines and fatigue were frequent, with consequent deaths and mutilations. They were not helped by any universal welfare, either medical or social, and were paid survival wages. Some industries (particularly the textile sector) employed mostly women, with wages even lower than those of men. Infant mortality reached very high levels (it was common to hear comments such as “they had nine, and four lived”). Children started work at the age of six. Families were crowded into tiny homes, in neighbourhoods with narrow dirty streets. Malnutrition was their daily bread; only on Sunday did they eat meat or fish. Life expectancy was thirty years. The recruitment of soldiers for the colonial wars and, later, for the Moroccan war, fell exclusively on the working classes, while the well-to-do families “paid the soldier”. Those who reached old age, without any kind of pension, lived wretchedly at the expense of their children or alms...

In the last decade of the 19th century, while Guimerà was writing *Terra baixa* (1895) and it was being premiered in Barcelona (1897), things became much worse and the gulf between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat became even more pronounced. The phylloxera ruined the Catalan vineyard and accelerated the exodus from the countryside to the city, usually towards the final stage of unskilled peonage, known as “the wretched ones”. Moreover, the progressive emancipation of the colonies, which would culminate in 1898, brought about a notable drop in markets. Overall, it sparked a serious economic crisis, growing unemployment and a significant increase in desperation, labour mobilisations and strikes, to which employers would respond with the harshest lockout.

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In 1870, the Primer Congrés Obrer (First Workers' Congress) was held in Barcelona, called by the Centre Federal de les Societats Obreres (Federal Centre of Workers' Associations), which became part of the International Workers Association (AIT or First International). In 1890 the first "1 May" was held in Barcelona, which followed the call of the International Workers' Congresses of Paris (1889), in memory of the "Chicago martyrs" (the four anarcho-syndicalists hanged in 1886) and in defence of the eight-hour day ("We want eight!") and the "three eights of justice" (eight hours of work, eight hours of rest and eight hours of leisure or study). It would not be achieved until 1919. The workers' associations would be grouped into larger trade union centres such as Les Tres Classes de Vapor in 1869, the Unió General de Treballadors (UGT) in 1888 and the Confederació Nacional del Treball (CNT) in 1910. In the framework of the AIT, the Marxist current would promote the "workers' parties" and political and parliamentary action throughout Europe alongside the social struggle, while the anarchist current, opposed to the state, political action and parties, put its faith in spontaneous social revolution. In Catalonia, the anarchist trend had become hegemonic, more specifically the revolutionary anarchism or collective anarchism advocated by Bakunin. And the crisis of the 1890s brought the influence of Kropotkin's anarchist communism. Simultaneously, isolated direct action proliferated, as a way of social awakening towards the revolutionary general strike, involving terrorism, dynamite, the Orsini bombs, and so on. This is how it happened in Russia, France, Italy and Spain, with particular strength in Catalonia. Bombs in Rambla de Santa Mònica (1884), the Foment del Treball (1886), the factories of Sala in Terrassa and Can Batlló in Les Corts (1888), in Foment del Treball (1890) again, in Plaça Reial (1892), and in Gran Via in Barcelona against General Martínez Campos (1893), in El Liceu opera house (1893), Carrer Canvis Nous on the occasion of the Corpus Christi procession (1896)... Barcelona would become known in the world as "the city of bombs" and also, following the Tragic Week (1909), as "the rose of fire".

The bomb in Carrer Canvis Nous would unleash the so-called "Montjuïc trial" (1896-97), an offensive of extreme and indiscriminate repression. It was not limited to terrorists or revolutionary communists, but was directed against all kinds of labour leaders, libertarian authors, and secular school teachers. They were taking the opportunity to decapitate the labour movement. There was a total of four hundred arrests and those imprisoned in the castle of Montjuïc suffered torture and abuses of all kinds, without any legal support or knowing when they would be released, an endless hell, with an arbitrary result of revenge, with more scapegoats than anything else: five executions, nineteen convictions of between ten and twenty years in prison, and sixty-three acquittals with banishment. A powerful international campaign would condemn the arbitrariness of the "Montjuïc trial", and demand its review.

In this last decade of the century, while Terra baixa was being written, premiered and triumphing, another event shocked that torn society, particularly its working classes. It concerned the ordeal to which Jacint Verdaguer was subjected, Mossèn Cinto for

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the people, the great poet, the priest of the poor, who suddenly became the man to be defeated by the alliance of the Marquis of Comillas, Claudi López (“the first fortune in Spain”, inherited from his father, Antoni López, ship-owner, financier and industrialist, as well as slave trader, popularly and ironically nicknamed “el negro Domingo”), and the Bishop of Vic, Josep Morgades, the priest-poet’s superior. The Marquis had decided to get rid of Mossèn Cinto as almsgiver, that is to say, as a priest who administered the Marquis’ alms and brought them from the Palau Moja, to the other side of the Rambla, to the church of Betlem, where he distributed them among the growing crowd of poor people who flocked there. They accused him, in the end, of manipulating the devoted wife of the Marquis in order to get more and more money from her... for alms. Money that, as Mossèn Cinto said, in his defence, was nothing more than the scraps from the Palau Moja table. Since he resisted, they resorted to episcopal discipline and, thus, in addition to being dismissed as almsgiver, they deprived him of his priest licence, banished him to the sanctuary of La Gleba, and tried to lock him up as insane. But he got his own back and escaped from his seclusion, all the while preparing to live in the house of a humble family in Barcelona, who offered him shelter. There, the bishop, using the Concordat, tried to have him arrested by the civil governor. It was then that Verdaguer resorted to making a statement to the press asking for help: “...I ask for justice and protest before the law, before the honest people of Barcelona who know me, before heaven and earth and the same God who must judge everyone, for the iniquity of which this poor priest is victim, I know not for what purpose.” There was widespread consternation. The bishop had to withdraw, while Verdaguer prepared to write and publish two series of articles (1895-97), signing one as “A defamed priest” and the other as “A persecuted priest”, published in La Publicidad and La Opini3n respectively, as well as (the first series) in a short text published in L’Avenç. It has been said that they provide some of the most beautiful prose in the Catalan language. In 1896, moreover, he published his collection of poems Flors de calvari: a beautiful lament, both painful and resilient, which included these verses:

All the waves of the sea
have charged at me with the sound of war,
howling like lions,
like lions thirsting for prey.
All the waves of the sea
cannot break a grain of sand.

It has been said that the two series of articles by Verdaguer are the first episode of the great journalistic debates of the turn of the century on questions of justice and morality. In France, between 1897 and 1900, Émile Zola published the series of articles about the “Dreyfus Affair”, including the famous J’accuse, which appeared just four days after the last article, “En defensa pr3pia”.

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The countless poor who had received the help of Mossèn Cinto and, with them, all working class Barcelona followed these events dejected or outraged. They recognised in him a kind and compassionate priest, a friend of the helpless, now incomprehensibly betrayed by the economic and religious power, the dark coalition spawned by the anti-clericalism that many of them professed and that would end up exploding in the popular uprising of the Tragic Week. Other sections of Catalan society had also followed it, stunned, and could not understand how anyone, no matter how important, could mistreat the great national poet in such a way. When Verdaguer died, in 1902, Francesc Cambó, on the side of the bishop and the marquis, warned about the elements of the left that could appropriate the dead man and “turn him into a scandal” and pointed out by way of explanation that the people had seen him as “the persecuted of the powerful”. Ricard Vinyes explains how a grandmother who, as a young person, had lived through the revolutionary events of 1936, was asked by a historian about how it was that priests had teamed up and attacked Catholic targets, whereas the monument to Mossèn Cinto, which was so visible, had been left untouched. She answered him emphatically: “Well! It’s because Mossèn Cinto was one of ours!”

Verdaguer, let’s be clear, was not a left-wing man but rather more of a Carlist and had apparently had something to do with an exorcism (not so unusual at the time, given that the Pope himself, Leo XIII, had established the system). It is also true that the family that ended up sheltering him were involved in spiritualism, a trend very present among Catalan anarchists. In any case, in the end, Mossèn Cinto, during his ordeal, was nothing more than a priest upset about social inequalities, which led him to intensify his role as almsgiver, until he had a conflict with the marquis and the bishop, and to denounce the social irresponsibility of the economic classes that the marquis represented – “Cursed golden calf! How many crimes are you the cause of in our days!” (“En defensa pròpia”) –, which made him a reference and a martyr for the ordinary people of Barcelona, “persecuted by the powerful”.

A great deal of suffering, a great deal of despair and a growing spirit of revolt swelled the mighty and overflowing river at the end of the 19th century, while Guimerà was writing and premiered *Terra baixa*, and it became a resounding success. A river above the tumultuous waters of which Guimerà’s play became a powerful collective metaphor, a popular myth explaining a society tragically torn asunder, a symbol of the cause of the dispossessed against injustice, of good people against “the Wolf”.

Jordi Font Cardona

Patrons

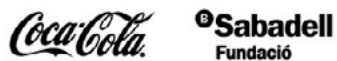
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