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The «cosmorama» of Barcelona: social mobility in la febre d'or

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THE «COSMORAMA»¹ OF BARCELONA: SOCIAL MOBILITY IN *LA FEBRE D'OR*

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By the end of the nineteenth century, the region of Catalunya was undergoing profound demographic and economic changes. During the 1880's large numbers of people migrated from the countryside to Barcelona in order to find work in the industrial and consumer sectors of the economy.²

Because growing industries and expanding railway networks required huge infusions of capital, investment banking itself gained enormous importance as a social and economic force. Speculation allowed a certain amount of social mobility as middle-class investors sometimes unexpectedly made fortunes out of a lucky venture. Gil Foix, the protagonist of Narcís Oller's *La febre d'or*, is the beneficiary of just such luck. *La febre d'or*, Oller's most famous novel, is an examination of the private and domestic consequences of class mobility as experienced by Gilet and his family.

At the time Oller published *La febre d'or* (1890-1892), several other novels about the stock market were in publication, such as Zola's *L'argent* (1890) and Julián Martel's *La bolsa* (1891). Indeed, Oller hurried publication of the first part of the novel so that it would appear before *L'argent*, and he would avoid accusations of plagiarism.³ Yet the focus of *La febre d'or* is significantly different from the other two novels. Oller's primary concern here is not the morality of speculation or the detrimental effect of speculators on the national economy. He does not question the assumptions about value, market commodities and money that form the foundation of speculation, as Dreiser will twenty years later in *The Financier*.⁴ Oller is certainly aware of the

¹ Te term «cosmorama» was coined by Josep Yxart in «*La febre d'or*, per Narcís Oller», *La veu de Catalunya*, #14, 2 abril, 1893, p. 160.

² A good summary of Oller's concerns with demographic issues can be found in Alan Yates' introduction to *L'escanyapobres* (Barcelona: Edicions 62, 1981), pp. 5-25. See also Jaime Carrera Pujol, *La economia de Catalunya en el siglo XIX* 4 vols. (Barcelona: Bosch, 1961).

³ Antònia Tayadella i Oller, «Narcís Oller i el naturalisme», pp. 650-651 in *Història de la literatura catalana*, eds. Joaquim Molas, Antoni Comas, Martí de Riquer, Vol. VII (Barcelona: Editorial Ariel, S.A., 1986), pp. 665-668. See also Carme Porcel Ramon, «*L'argent* de Émile Zola y *La febre d'or* de Narcís Oller», Master's Thesis, University of Barcelona, 1972.

⁴ See Walter Benn Michaels «Dreiser's *Financier*: The Man of Business as a Man of Letters», pp. 61-83 in Michaels, *The Gold Standard and the Logic of Naturalism*:

moral and economic risks of speculation and does not gloss over the dangers. In his earlier novel *L'escanyapobres*, as well as in *La febre d'or*, the failure of speculative ventures is responsible for setbacks to regional economy as well as the loss of personal fortunes. However, Oller's primary interest in *La febre d'or* is how the Foix family adapts to their new social standing. In describing the Foix's assimilation into high society, Oller represents consumer values in a new way within the context of public discourse about materialism and the display of wealth.

The promotion of consumer habits took on a special importance in Barcelona because of large numbers of people coming into the city from the *comarques*. Newcomers needed to observe and imitate fashions in dress and lifestyle in order to assimilate and, if they were lucky, become upwardly mobile. When Gil Foix is first married and starts a family he is a village carpenter. Later, desirous of building a fortune for the benefit of his children, he runs away to Cuba and learns the workings of the world of business and finance. On his return, the family relocates to Barcelona where Gilet gradually acquires a reputation as a shrewd investor and gains a following of persons who would not dream of making a move at the Stock Exchange without his guidance. Gilet has become a very visible and powerful person in a short period of time, and the family's dark, cramped living quarters are inappropriate to his new position. The family must quickly adopt a new way of living and learn new standards of urban taste and consumption.

The appearance of doing well is of paramount importance to Gilet's expanding business. The credibility of a speculator and his ability to attract new clients rests largely on the speculator's clear manifestation of having successfully predicted the turns of the market. As Gil says, «Cada posició porta les seves exigències...qui no es dóna importància està perdut.»⁵ Gil insists on new offices and a new and lavishly furnished home. He encourages Catarina to go shopping, to get out to the Liceu more often on the premise that not only are they now *able* to enjoy more luxury, but that they *must* do so in order to preserve the gains they have made and to strengthen their position.

Although the family must quickly adopt a lifestyle appropriate to their new wealth and social position, if this lifestyle is going to serve as an advertisement for Gilet's abilities as an investment banker, the display of wealth must in no way appear natural rather than earned. Gil does his best to make sure everyone gets the point of his display; whe-

American Literature at the Turn of the Century (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1987).

⁵ Narcís Oller, *La febre d'or* 2 vols. (Barcelona: Edicions 62, 1980), p. 51. All references hereafter will be given in the text.

never he receives guests at the new house on the *carrer Ample*, he shows a propensity for quoting the prices of the new furnishings. This habit may seem the height of bad taste, yet the practice is very useful to the rationale behind Gil's consumption- it demonstrates how far he has been able to come in a short time thanks to a combination of luck, drive and skill. His daughter Delfineta, however, is scandalized by the public mention of any object's price; to her mind, the best strategy for legitimizing the family's position is to carry on as if they have always been entitled to it.

Senyora Mónica, Gilet's mother-in-law, takes an even more extreme position than Delfineta. Delfina believes the family should conceal its *petit bourgeois* origins as a matter of decorum. For Senyora Mónica, the family's display of wealth violates the «readability» of society, the system by which each person knows his place in relation to others.⁶ On her first visit to the Foix mansion she scolds:

Tinc por que en feu massa: em sembla que això Déu no ho vol... A la gent del meu temps també ens agradava guanyar... però per a guardar-ho. Els comerciants vivien amb més senzillesa. Això que ara feu és per a marquesos. Si un negociant s'hagués plantat com tu, hauria espantat la gent. (FO, vol.I, pp. 54-57)

Senyora Mónica believes the traditional social order to be sanctioned by God, «natural» and inviolable. Any one individual's attempt to modify this order poses a threat to the whole group, making everyone uncertain of their position. On another occasion, while Senyora Mónica is fretting to her daughter about the hectic social and domestic life the latter leads, she exclaims «no entenc com pots veure a casa teva tanta barreja de castes...» (FO, vol.I, p.138.) Once again, Senyora Mónica is disturbed by the apparent neglect of the social forms that indicate a person's identity and rank. Her remarks reflect anxiety about class «impostors,» the fear that «anyone could pretend to be anything if he or she had money for clothes.»⁷

Senyora Mónica's assertion that a businessman will frighten away his clients by a display of wealth is particularly inappropriate to Gilet's situation. The entire enterprise of speculation is based on belief, for the most part, a belief in what is going to happen or what commodity is going to exist at some future date.⁸ It is often not possible to see the commodity or venture which is the object of speculation. This invis-

⁶ I have borrowed the term «readability» from T. J. Clark's work *The Painting of Modern Life: Paris in the Art of Manet and His Followers* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton Univ. Press, 1984), p. 47.

⁷ Clark, p. 47.

⁸ Michaels, pp. 64-68.

bility may be frightening for potential investors, so the function of being visible and believable devolves upon Gilet in his role as the principal speculator. Moreover, the clients are usually not interested in the commodities or industrial ventures so much as in the possibilities of fulfilling their desires for wealth. Gilet's spending serves the twofold purpose of bolstering confidence in his expertise by providing solid evidence of his financial success and encouraging the clients to keep investing by stimulating their desires.

Not only has the appearance of how the family fits into public society changed, relations within the family change as well. The Foix's new fortune and the necessity of re-making their image brings on modulations in the identity of each family member. The changes Gil tries to effect in the public presentation of himself and his home cause domestic tensions to mount considerably. Gilet experiences such a degree of resistance to change from his wife that it is no surprise that the greater part of fictional self-made men have no families at all.⁹ (When Gil first decides that he wants to change his profession and his place in the world he runs away to Cuba, far away from his family and anyone who knows him.) Gil's re-invention of himself as an important financier is curtailed by his family's recollection of the person he has previously been; their expectations of his identity are limiting to his vision of his possibilities. During one of the increasingly frequent altercations he has with his wife Catarina, Gil explodes:

Tu segueixes veient-me com al carrer d'en Gíriti, i, noia, el teu marit és tot un altre. L'home no és una essència pura, perennement *una, pura, invariable*: l'home és com una esponja que s'amara, es tenyeix i dóna de si segons les substàncies amb què la mulles. El medi ambient... Però, qué et conto, ara, si no ho entendries? (*FO*, vol.I, p. 244.)

How profound is the change that Gil claims he has undergone? Is the public image that he has created merely a «false» advertisement for public consumption, with his fundamental nature remaining unchanged? Catarina and, to some extent, the reader may prefer to believe that this is the case. Early in the novel, it seems that Gil maintains a private space apart from the public spectacle of his career. Even in his own home, in spite of the pleasure he takes in the lavishness of the public and family rooms, his private quarters are quite different. On entering them he experiences the «nou plaer en veure's rodejat de sos

⁹ Robert Shulman. *Social Criticism and Nineteenth Century American Fictions* (Columbia: Univ. of Missouri Press, 1987), p. 100. Shlman notes that «...embodiments of the upwardly mobile hero are imagined as orphans... for [Horatio] Alger the rising youth must be almost totally self-created and not burdened at all by the involvements of family.»

antics mobles de caoba; amics estranyets, però francs i senzills ...» (*FO*, vol. I, p. 51.) The passage seems to suggest that Gil has an intimate, original nature apart from what the public sees, a self that has nothing to do with the pretentious luxury of the purchases he has made for the rest of the house. Even so, the qualities of this posited original self are still expressed through the objects that Gil possesses. And eventually, the «honest» and «simple» furniture is banished from the house as Gil becomes more ambitious and forms a stronger idea of how powerful he can become in society.

It may be impossible to divorce the things Gil wants, the image he wants to put forth, from who he actually is. It may be true that Gil does not seek or derive much satisfaction from products themselves. But thanks to his own imagination and the models he has observed in «el medi ambient,» Gil has constructed a mental picture of a mode of existence that is appropriate to the position he now occupies. The actual goods that are purchased are props in the mental picture; they translate to reality the picture that Gilet has constructed in his imagination. Insofar as consumption of goods does serve Gilet's desires and imagination, the goods are an expression of his self.

But if Gilet's consumption is an expression of his self and of his enthusiasm for his new role, what can be said about the hopeless vulgarity of many of the things he chooses to buy? Oller makes it clear that Gil spends a great deal of his money on useless junk; he has filled his house with «rebuigs de taller i de botiga que només s'empassa la ignorància adinerada.» (*FO*, vol. I, p. 75.) Is the self de-valued because the merchandise it selects is inferior? The tastelessness of the objects the family buys is somewhat redeemed by the fact that they often buy out of charity, with the intention of «giving a start» to a friend or family member. An ethic of sincerity of consumption seems to replace any criterion of taste. Although they may be ignorant, Oller's tone is never so biting as to make readers feel that his intent is to humiliate the family for their attempts to rise. Oller's characters may make mistakes, but at least they are trying to learn how to fit into the urban society that surrounds them. Their taste may be vulgar now, but they are educable.

In his review of *La febre d'or* in *La veu de Catalunya*, Josep Yxart remarks that the characters of the novel are persons «amb educació apenas desbastada y barnissos d'un cosmopolitisme après en pocas horas.»¹⁰ Notably, Yxart does not contest the right of the characters to

¹⁰ Josep Yxart, «*La febre d'or*, per Narcís Oller». In *La veu de Catalunya*, #14, 2 abril 1983, pp. 159-161, p. 160. This article is a catalan translation of an excerpt from a longer review in the Madrid periodical *El imparcial*. Yxart used the catalan version of the review to inaugurate his monthly column on catalan literature for *La veu de Catalunya*.

lay claim to a higher social position. In addition, he attributes their missteps to an incomplete process of education rather than to a natural inability to present themselves in a «tasteful» way. Yxart's position is an important departure from traditional aristocratic concepts of taste. In the face of anxiety over the social mobility of just such persons as the Foix family, the aristocracy laid exclusive claim, on the basis of nature, to the possession of good taste, in aesthetic matters as well as in social behavior. According to the aristocratic stance, for those who did not possess taste naturally, as a birthright, any attempt to imitate the standards of the noble, or to forge new aesthetic standards was doomed to vulgarity.¹¹

Pierre Bourdieu, in his discussion of the «class-centrism» of the aristocracy with regard to the matter of taste, is not convinced, however, by the idea that any taste can truly be natural:

The ideology of natural taste owes its plausibility and its efficacy to the fact that, like all the ideological strategies generated in the everyday class struggle, it *naturalizes* real differences, converting differences in the mode of acquisition of culture into differences of nature; it only recognizes as legitimate the relation to culture (or language) which least bears the visible marks of its genesis, which has nothing 'academic', 'scholastic', 'bookish', 'affected' or 'studied' about it, but manifests by its ease and naturalness that true culture is nature - a new mystery of immaculate conception.¹²

In other words, no culture or taste is natural; one must learn the rules. As Yxart points out, the principal characters of *La febre d'or* are just not quite as far along in learning as others may be. Moreover, the Foix's method of learning is quite different from that which the aristocracy has enjoyed. The long-established upper classes have had the benefit of acquiring culture or taste domestically, by daily contact with fine things, by long «immersion in a world of cultivated people, practices and objects.»¹³ Such a manner of acquisition is so gradual and subtle that it is not difficult for the aristocracy to claim taste a function of nature rather than of learning. In contrast, Gilet must try to acquire taste through rapid and haphazard education, attempting to imitate, with countless errors, mere reports of how the «better» classes live, eat and entertain.

¹¹ Colin Campbell, *The Romantic Ethic and the Spirit of Modern Consumerism* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987), p. 159.

¹² Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, trans. Ricard Nice (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1984), p. 68. Bourdieu defines «natural» as being «both as a matter of course and based on nature». Bourdieu, «Outline of a Sociological Theory of Art Perception», in *The Field of Cultural Production*, Randal Johnson (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1993), p. 217.

¹³ Bourdieu, *Distinction*, p. 75.

Delfina is working through an older framework of beliefs about social place and taste than her father. Gil embarks on a program of consumption for the benefit of his business, never questioning his right to enjoy the luxuries he acquires. Delfina, on the other hand, is preoccupied with how her personal style measures up to the patterns of taste and behavior endorsed by her aristocratic acquaintances. Early in the novel Delfina's pretentious airs make her nearly insufferable; she constantly affects a show of having been born to wealth when everyone, including the reader, knows that she was not. Only after she breaks off relations with her «society» acquaintances and has no one she need pretend for does Delfina become an increasingly likable character. At first, after her failed romance with the Baron d'Esmalrich, she is in the mood for withdrawal from the world. Her depression and disillusion initially find expression in a rejection of consumerism and her life of luxury. She admits that she enjoys the pretty dresses and the amusements that wealth has made available to her, but she is slowly becoming aware that «felicitat i riquesa no són dues branques d'un mateix arbre...» (*FO*, Vol.I, p. 171.)

The symptoms of Delfina's distress take the form of her moping about the house, taking perverse enjoyment in simple pleasures, and avoiding any opportunity to go to the Liceu. After several days of reflection, however, she begins to re-think her objections to the consumption of beautiful things. She arrives at the conclusion that good taste can be natural without her social position being so.

Francesc, a painter and Delfina's uncle and husband-to-be, confirms her belief that she possesses natural taste. Francesc and Gilet are in constant opposition, the opposition between the emotional sensibilities of the artist and the utilitarian consumption of the businessman. Gilet wants to commission some pictures because he believes that not only would new paintings improve the decor and tone of the house but also that someone in his position should be patronizing an artist. Offended by the materialistic impulses of Gil's desires, Francesc firmly refuses to paint for the family. The only assistance he will give is to advise them to trust in Delfina's judgement; in his opinion, she has the sensitivity to recognize fine art.

In the picture gallery, Delfina does indeed prove to have the faculties necessary to make good choices. Yet while Francesc asserts that Delfina has charismatic taste, Bourdieu would point out that she has spent a great deal of time with people from the upper classes. Her so-called charismatic taste is actually a product of the training she has acquired in the company of persons such as the Llopis and the Baron. Out of his disdain for bourgeois values, Francesc, perhaps, simply does not wish to acknowledge how access to money and exposure to «society» have changed Delfina.

The gallery scene illustrates the precise level of education Delfina has reached and provides an interesting contrast with the relative lack of training of the older generation, who have had less time and opportunity to gain the knowledge required to complement their new social status. Because Catarina and Senyor Llasada are completely without any artistic competency, they are unable to enjoy any qualities in the paintings other than economic or utilitarian value.¹⁴ In fact, Senyor Llassada chooses his pictures according to the measure of space he needs to fill on the walls of his house. In contrast, Delfina agonizes over each painting, conscious of her lack of judgement, terrified of making a mistake. Despite her fears, Delfina is able to acquit herself well and impress the dealer with her choices. Her artistic competence is not such that she knows anything about schools, periods and styles, yet on some level she must be aware that part of her «taste» is the product of education, otherwise she would not be so self-conscious about her ignorance. However, she never goes so far as to articulate to herself the possibility that her taste is anything other than natural.

Delfina may possess the emotional sensibilities to appreciate art, but, unlike Francesc, she feels no discomfort in situating art in a market economy. When Catarina complains about the cost of the paintings Delfina has chosen, the latter pacifies her mother with the assurance that the purchase of art is a shrewd investment- that paintings «sempre són diners.» (FO, Vol.I, p. 213.) Later, Delfina comes to believe that the expressive value which she associates with art is also present in the choices one makes in personal effects and other consumer goods.

¿Per ventura el desig de les bones aparences exteriors no era tan seriós i delicat com el més delicat i seriós dels desigs? ¿per ventura revelava sempre vanitat, fum, frivolitat pura? Dins d'un militaret *curro*, polít, ¿no s'hi troba ben sovint un cor brau, un home de debò? ¿Es troben totes les ànimes distinguides, totes les persones de vàlua, dins de les levitotes estranyes, dels vestits mal engiponats, sota els barrets lleigs o les mantellines de dispersa?...No, de cap de les maneres...Presentar-se-li [al tio Francesc] malgirbada, com havia fet aquells dies, era un disbarat... (FO, vol.I, p. 208.)

Delfina arrives at the conclusion that the desire to have an attractive appearance is a legitimate desire, that outward appearance can show inner worth. Oller's representation of a *sympathetic* character reflecting on appearance and, by extension, consumer values in this way is new in nineteenth century literature. Pro-consumerist writers

¹⁴ See Pierre Bordieu, «Outline of a Sociological Theory of Art Perception», in *The Field of Cultural Production*, ed. Randal Johnson (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1993), pp. 220, 227.

take the logic of Delfina's conclusions one step further when they recommend the cultivation of a fashionable appearance in order to demonstrate to the public the order, harmony and economic stability of the family. Far from being in opposition to domestic duty, fashionable consumption is the bridge between domesticity and the public life. These are precisely the recommendations which the Foix family put into practice. But if consumerism can be the articulation of the individual's impulses and imagination, the means by which one shows one's self to the public, does this blurring of the line between public and private endanger family structure and social cohesion?

In order for the public and domestic spheres of family life to fit together in a seamless image, both Gil and his wife, Catarina, must to some extent enter the other partner's sphere. Since Gilet has seen more of urban middle-class life than his small-town wife, he cannot leave domestic arrangements completely in her hands if he hopes to make a good impression. To Catarina's annoyance, Gil undertakes the purchase and decoration of their new showcase home. Yet Gil is not stripping Catarina of her authority or responsibility in helping the family endeavors to succeed. He expects Catarina to master the new skills necessary to a social life carried on in the public eye. Foix hopes to soon be associating with industrial barons and government ministers; his wife will require the same skills of salesmanship and diplomacy that he uses at the banks and Stock Exchange.

Catarina's evolution as a consumer provides an interesting picture of assimilation into urban bourgeois culture. As the story opens, Catarina is the standard version of the domestic angel. She is constantly preoccupied with the containment of desire, especially the desires and ambitions of her husband. Catarina is especially frightened by Gil's plans to expand his stockbrokerage. Aside from her concerns that Gilet's ambition will take still more of his time and attention away from the family, she abhors any venture that carries a risk and believes that investment in real property is the only true safeguard of her children's patrimony. Catarina's tradition-bound approach to finance has its complement in her reluctance to spend money on so-called non-essentials for herself or for the family home. She persists in wearing the same simple clothing and hair styles that she did when she lived in Vilaniu. The events at the end of the novel seem to validate Catarina's caution in the matter of speculation. However, in the body of the novel, Catarina does learn to consume, to become a member of stylish urban society. Moreover, in accord with the logic of the editors of women's magazines, she justifies her transformation by means of the rhetoric of the domestic angel.

When Catarina grudgingly concedes to the new home and all its luxury, she explains to her brother Francesc:

Prou mortificada que em veig per tot aquest capgirell, i callo. A en Gilet i a la noia els agrada, i no els puc contradir si vull tenir pau. *Ademés*, si em diuen que els temps ho porten i que ho hem de fer pel nom de la casa, què vols que hi faci, jo: Si m'hi oposo i per casualitat s'estronca la sort d'en Gilet, diran que jo n'he tingut la culpa, que no m'estimo el marit ni els fills. (FO, vol.I, p. 52.)

Catarina justifies her concessions to this new lifestyle in terms of personal sacrifice for the sake of the business, of putting the wishes of her husband first, of having the economic interests of her children uppermost in her mind. She will become accustomed to the style of a great lady because it is her duty as a wife.

As the novel progresses, Catarina learns to become an urban consumer: updating her hairstyle, learning to appreciate the gifts of jewelry Gilet bestows on her, becoming habituated to the round of social calls and theatre evenings her husband's position requires. Catarina learns the ropes under the tutelage of Delfina, who, having spent time around people of a higher class, has learned superior taste and social skills. Yet we can see the measure of how well the mother learns her lessons when Catarina chides Delfina for a «phase» in which her daughter seems disaffected from the rituals of dressing up and being seen around town. On one occasion Delfina is rather sternly upbraided by her mother for trying to go out in only a housedress and a shawl (Catarina's usual public dress only a few months before). Delfina is violating standards of public decorum, is not being mindful of the family's interests. If Delfina intends to persist in her selfish, anti-social disregard for what other people think, Catarina exclaims, she might as well leave the public sphere altogether and withdraw to a convent.

Catarina's willingness to play the part of a cosmopolitan lady is not only important to the family's public presentation. It also has bearing on the stability of her marriage. Catarina does not always compare favorably with other women who, like herself, have recently come to Barcelona from the *comarques*. When one day Eladi comments on how elegant and entertaining Montserrat Rodon has become, Gilet grumbles: «Això, és el que jo voldria a casa, home! això, és el que jo voldria!... Però les de casa són un parell d'òlibes capaces de fer avorrir la família i tot el que vulguis.» (FO, vol.II, p. 96.) When Gilet does stray and take a mistress, he does so with the primary objective of enjoying himself with someone who will happily spend money, who will be seen with him in all the right places. Gilet vastly overestimates Catarina's tolerance in the matter of his affair, but in the end, *she* asks *his* pardon for not being a co-operative wife, for not being supportive of his plans or appreciative of his generosity when he gives her money to spend.

In the world of *La febre d'or*, the consumption of goods is expedient for public relations. However, Oller does fault his characters for their indiscriminate cultivation of people in order to feel popular and powerful. When Pauleta Balenyà and Montserrat Rodon go out on spending sprees, Oller offers no criticism of shopping as a recreational activity. Yet he ridicules the ladies' practice of inviting into their homes anyone they happen to meet on their excursions, be the person only someone they encounter on the stairs on their way to a shop or someone seated in the neighboring box at the theatre. The two women, like many other characters, have failed to learn the proprieties of social distance. In Oller's novel, anxiety over the consumption of goods themselves is displaced by anxiety over maintaining the integrity of the line between the public and private in a society in which everything must be on display.

Because of the nature of his business, and especially once he has entered into plans to build a railway line, Gil must give constant attention to cultivating relations with bankers, industrialists and politicians. Yet this necessity often comes into conflict with the duties he owes his family. At Senyora Mónica's funeral, for example, he violates the privacy of mourning by using the occasion as an opportunity to assemble contacts who might be useful to him. The places in the funeral procession which should be occupied by members of the immediate family are all taken up by Gil's business and political cronies. Even the act of grieving is supplanted as Gil begins to cry, not from sorrow, but out of gratification that millionaires, commercial figures, the foremost powers in Barcelona are paying homage to him by braving the many flights of stairs that lead to his mother-in-law's apartments.

In further efforts to boost his public image, Gilet violates even more intimate family bonds. Gil is planning a grand tour of European business capitals in order to diversify his investments and expand his clientele. He decides to take along a mistress, largely for business purposes, for the prestige it will give him.

En canvi, no faltarien, als *boulevards*, barcelonins que veurien el nou personatge de Barcelona lluint aquella *maitresse*, i a París i a Barcelona es parlaria d'ell amb el somris tolerant als llavis, l'admiració alegre als ulls. Promouria, en una paraula, una murmuració benèvola, d'aquelles que augmenten el prestigi d'un home públic engrandint les resplendors de ses des preocupacions, de sa virilitat: no l'escàndol que degrada i abat a un home per sempre més. (FO, Vol.II, p. 40-41.)

Gil acquires Mimi's companionship in a contract arrangement, believing that demonstration of his ability to afford an expensive mistress can only enhance his credibility in business affairs. In their private time together, Foix does not seem to derive much satisfaction

from Mimi; he misses the familiarity of his wife. Only when Mimi is showing off the gowns and jewels that have cost Gilet dearly does he actually enjoy her company. At these moments, Mimi is fulfilling the role for which Catarina has been inadequate. She is increasing his public prestige by helping to make his wealth visible, but, perhaps more importantly, her appreciation of his wealth and her desire to help spend it are a compliment to him and his power.

Gil eventually loses his investments, yet it is important to note that when the business fails, it is not because of any flaw in his logic that the family must orchestrate an appearance of prosperity in order to keep the business healthy.

Countless nineteenth century novels end with a family or personal enterprise coming to ruin because of a desire for ostentatious show beyond one's means. Oller, however, is very careful to frequently remind the reader that Gil Foix never, ever spends money he does not have on consumer goods. Neither does Foix speculate with his own family's money; his constant refrain is «treballar amb honor, amb lleialtat, amb honradesa.» (FO, Vol.I, p. 72.) In trying to claim more power and influence, Gilet may behave in a vain and ostentatious manner, but his principal motivation in business is devotion to his family. The problem lies in Gilet's having tried to apply an outmoded model of family enterprise to investment banking.

Gilet attempts to bring all the members of his extensive family into his business so that everyone may profit by his good fortune. Within the framework of a traditional economy, Gil's generous intentions might have been realized. An agricultural concern or a carpentry shop involve tangibles over which there can exist shared ownership among all the family partners. Yet in speculation, the funds which clients entrust for investment cannot be owned by numerous family members. Having failed to establish policies governing power and liability, Foix loses everything because trusted relations in his employ attempt a scheme involving unethical trading of stocks.

The patriarchal, protective system of family enterprise that Gil is trying to apply is not compatible with speculation. His unfortunate mistake in this issue is largely the result of his own vanity, his compulsion to be everyone's benefactor. Yet this vanity, much like Gil's bad taste, is not wholly characterized as a failing; judgement is tempered by the fact that Gil's motivation is devotion to the family. In addition, as his brother Bernat theorizes, this vanity has a *raison d'être* in terms of the laws governing the circulation of money:

No ho dubtin: hi ha una llei providencial que, de tant en tant, desperta l'afany de riqueses, i vénen aquestes febrades a enterbolir el seny el els ulls de la multitud desconfiada, i a llançar fins el mateix *avaró* pel mar de l'especulació.

Doncs això és necessari, perquè sols així es restitueix al comú allò que l'egoisme li roba. Sols així poden tornar-se al torrent circulatori les riqueses que la por havia empantanegat i les que la cobdícia de l'*avaro* anava entaforant. Sols així es concentren en mans intel·ligents i útils aquests grans capitals que la indústria, el comerç i el progrés general reclamen. (*FO*, Vol.I, p. 84.)

According to Bernat's vision, a cycle exists in which the two most important agents of the circulation of wealth and the achievement of progress are the egotistical miser and the ambitious and equally egotistical speculator/ entrepreneur. This theory contrasts sharply with the world of traditional economics, in which wealth is meant to stay in a family generation after generation and entrepreneurs are viewed as upstarts who are only able to move up if the aristocracy has not been watchful enough to keep money out of their hands. In *La febre d'or*, progress requires that money move through as many hands and egos as possible.

At the close of the novel, the family is forced to liquidate most of their possessions, but they have the means to survive thanks to Catarina's earlier caution in preserving some assets in real estate. Catarina and Delfina return to roles of pre-consumerist angels, carefully managing the family resources so that they can live «amb summa modèstia, però santament.» (*FO*, Vol.II, p. 177.) Yet this return to a former state need not be read as an inditement of consumer behavior. At no point in the novel is it ever suggested that consumerism is responsible for the Foix's eventual reversal of fortune, or that it has not indeed been necessary for the family to learn the tastes appropriate to their class and to consume goods according to their means. The women serve the family's interests in both their pre- and post-consumer incarnations of the good homemaker. Depending on the economic status of the family at the time, Oller quite flexibly employs a double usage of the figure of the domestic angel. Furthermore, the family does not suffer so complete a defeat that they are forced to return to the countryside. The family stays in Barcelona, and Francesc continues to paint. Who knows? If he were to attract the notice of the right people, the family would perhaps get a second chance to enter high society, and the women would once again need the consumer skills they have honed.

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