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Multilingual Mirth on the Iberian Page

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Abstract

With a focus on two works by writers from Catalonia, the present article considers the intersections of humour, language and identity in fictional narrative as a response to the deeply embedded cultural politics of Spain's multilingual context. Written in Mexican exile during the Franco dictatorship, Avel·lí Artís Gener's *Paraules d'Opoton el Vell* (1968) explores linguistic and cultural plurality in a comical while problematic transposition of Columbus's famous expedition of "discovery." Juan Marsé's *El amante bilingüe* (1990), on the other hand, takes Barcelona as its setting in order to offer a sardonic response to essentialist approaches to cultural and linguistic politics and policy. Although divided by their respective chronological and geographical setting, and even the language in which they were written, what unites these texts, and their humorous engagement with multilingualism is a tendency towards the transgressive. The humour in these fictional novels interrogates, and in many respects undermines, linguistic and identitarian limits by scrutinising, while elucidating, their very existence. In addition to their inclusion of Catalan and Castilian and several other languages, as this essay argues, these texts are also multilingual on account of their heteroglossic landscapes of diegeses, dialogic register, dialect and archaisms, as well as metalinguistic ruminations on translation, signification and neology. As such, the present article applies the concepts of Bakhtinian polyglossia and the carnivalesque to a humour theory lens in order to consider the presence of multilingualism in these two texts as a rhetorical device with which to effect humour and as a subject of humour itself. In so doing, the essay underscores the important role of humour in tracing diverse responses to the multilingual space.

Keywords

Humour; Exile; Multilingualism; Avel·lí Artís Gener; Juan Marsé; Bakhtin

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> Humour does not pretend, like carnival, to lead us beyond our own limits. It gives us the feeling, or better, the picture of the structure of our own limits. It is never off limits, it undermines limits from inside.
>
> Umberto Eco (1984, 8)

Introduction

Modern narratives within a plurilingual Spanish setting such as *Obabakoak* (Atxaga 1988), *O lapis do carpinteiro* (Rivas 1998) and the Pepe Carvalho series by Manuel Vázquez Montalban face what Meir Sternberg has termed literary art's "formidable mimetic challenge" (1981, 222): how to represent multilingual reality in an artistic landscape of hegemonic monolingualism. While the Babelian tower is reified by some as a utopia of linguistic freedom, for others it is the hellish site where meaningful exchange is drowned out by a cacophony of tongues. As such, attempts to bring a wrought plurilingual experience to life on page, stage and screen have often drawn upon lexical fields of distrust and metaphors of multiple personality disorders. Others, meanwhile, harness the hybridity of multilingual contexts as a source for irony and/or comic relief.

Far from a simple diversion, humour and language choice act as meaningful artistic interventions in questions of cultural and linguistic identity. With a focus on two works by writers from Catalonia, the present article considers the use of humour to negotiate and respond to questions of identity and cultural politics deeply embedded in Spain's multilingual context. Avel·lí Artís Gener's *Paraules d'Opoton el Vell* (1968) navigates issues of language and identity via a comical foray into the pre-modern world of conquest and "discovery," while Juan Marsé's *El amante bilingüe*

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(1990) offers a tongue-in-cheek response to the totalising approach of cultural and linguistic politics and policy. What connects a discussion of humour, multilingualism and their intersection within literary texts is an inherent tendency towards the transgressive. Undermining the limits from within, as the epigraph by Eco asserts, humour and multilingualism disparage the conventional monoliths of solemnity and monolingualism respectively.

Humour is a core constituent of human social interaction; and yet, misconceptions concerning its simplicity see it cast aside in favour of the putatively more sophisticated irony, parody and satire. Linda Hutcheon (1995, 26) has made moves to bridge this gap, noting that irony's "affective dimension […] (its link to fear, unease, superiority, put-down, control) and its formal dimensions (juxtaposition, incompatibility) is indeed apparent in many theories of humor." Nevertheless, acknowledgments of overlap do not attend to divergent taxonomies concerning make-up and function. In other words: what is humour? And what is it for? To that end, contemporary theorists have proposed the overarching categories of superiority, relief-release and incongruity.[2] At the heart of superiority humour is Thomas Hobbes' (1968 [1651]) contention that laughter is produced by the immediate sense of joy at finding ourselves in an advantageous position compared to those around us.[3] Building on these foundations, psychologists have demonstrated humour's effect on group identity via the study of the laughter of inclusion and exclusion.[4]

Humour as a relief or release valve was originally described by Freud (2001 [1905]), for whom jokes are both a means of assuaging the aggression that results from social control as well as being a tool of aggression themselves.[5] This model is particularly productive for an examination of humour's role of subversion and/or resistance under authoritarian rule. Finally, incongruity theory describes Cicero's discussion of laughter based on the unexpected or absurd.[6] Expanding upon this notion in *Le rire*, Henri Bergson (2008 [1908],

[2] Superiority theory has also been referred to as "aggression," "disparagement" and "degradation" theory (Banas, et al. 2011, 138).

[3] According to Hobbes (1968 [1651], 5) laughter is the result of "a sudden glory arising from some conception of some eminency in ourselves, by comparison with the infirmity of others, or with our own formerly."

[4] See for example, Zillmann and Cantor (1972; 2007) and La Fave, et al. (2007).

[5] For Freud, "a joke will allow us to exploit something ridiculous in our enemy […and] represents a rebellion against that authority, a liberation from its pressure" (2001 [1905], 103 5).

[6] Cicero observed that when "we expect one thing and another is said […] our own disappointed expectation makes us laugh" (in Morreal 2009, 11). Aristotle has also been linked with early recognition of the relationship between incongruity and humour in his *Rhetoric* (Mihalcea 2007, 412).

48) argues that "a situation is invariably comic when it belongs simultaneously to two altogether independent series of events and is capable of being interpreted in two entirely different meanings at the same time." Incongruity has thus become an integral component of the linguistic deconstruction of jokes.[7] The theories of superiority, release-relief and incongruity, then, can account for much of the humour embedded within irony, satire and parody and inform the present essay's two-pronged treatment of both texts, which consider on the one hand, self-contained linguistic jokes and on the other, overarching playful tones. Reading these approaches together, I argue, offers a more holistic examination of humour's interaction with multilingualism and politically charged questions of identity.

In her analysis of comedy and contemporary Catalan culture, Kathryn Woolard (1995; 1998) conducted a series of landmark sociolinguistic examinations that underscore the link between language choice and performative humour. Drawing upon Silverstein (1979), in these case studies, Woolard considered the codeswitching of her subjects to be deliberately deployed as a caricatured "metapragmatic commentary on contemporary linguistic practices and policies" (1995, 225). These findings are instructive for reading multilingual humour in cultural productions within the historical and linguistic context of Catalonia. Chiming with Woolard's focus on the performed aspect of multilingual comedy, in *El plurilingüisme en la literatura catalana* (2014), Albert Rossich and Jordi Cornellà assert that the most common type of multilingual usage and in particular its humorous variety is in theatre and television.[8] The concentration of multilingual output in these more performative arenas of culture can be easily explained by the prevalence of speech acts. Indeed, cultural works that deploy multilingualism as a tool for humour typically do so through translinguistic and/or codeswitching wordplay. Although Ana Zentella (1997, 99) has argued that "pinpointing the purpose of each code switch is a task as fraught with difficulty as imputing the reasons for a monolingual's choice of one synonym over another," it is often possible to determine whether the language shift denotes a deliberate

[7] By far the most influential in this domain is Attardo and Raskin's General Theory of Verbal Humour (GTVH), which classifies incongruity as a "script opposition" and considers it to be the most important aspect of linguistic humour.

[8] The authors offer a near-exhaustive account of occurrences of the three types of plurilingualism in Catalan cultural production, which they identify as: *alternança*, most typically found in novels and plays where a succession of languages is used to create the effect of verisimilitude; *amfilinguisme*, when there is a challenge in identifying the language of the text due to shared syntactical, lexical and/or morphological commonalities and *mixtilingüisme*, where languages are blended at the level of the word and therefore arguably pertain to neither one nor the other.

injection of humour or whether it instead represents an artistic expression of what Sternberg (1981, 222) has termed "heterolingual mimesis."[9]

In literary texts the appearance of more than one language on the page inescapably draws attention to itself and tends to interrupt the narrative flow. Regarding narrative in particular, multilingual moments typically require additional explication: a footnote, a parsing, a summary follow-on statement, and so on. Notwithstanding the potential disruption of such additional insertions, novels have long been recognised as a prime site for plurilingual dialogue influenced by Mikhail Bakhtin's *Discourse on the Novel*, in which he famously argued that "literary language becomes a dialogue of languages that know about and understand each other" (1981 [1935], 400). In this way, narratives that seek to explicitly engage questions of language and identity can draw upon the multivocality of novelistic discourse in order to elicit awareness of language itself. Such awareness is often at the heart of humour and its aforementioned connections with identity. Artís Gener's and Marsé's novels can be productively read in terms of what Isabel Álvarez Sancho (2017) has called an "Iberian Third Space," which unlocks "critiques of hegemony from both a regional and pluriversal locus of enunciation that touches on interior and exterior borders." Much like the relationship between language and identity itself, these borders are porous. In what follows, this article explores interstitial spaces adduced in Artís Gener's and Marsé's novels as they deploy humour to undermine the imaginative limits of hegemonic monolingualism.

Paraules d'Opoton el Vell: Iberian Pluralism and the Language(s) of "Discovery"

In his lifetime, Avel·lí Artís Gener's renown in Catalan cultural circles was more closely tied to the journalistic world of satirical cartooning, under his portmanteau moniker "Tísner." Nevertheless, the publication of *Paraules d'Opoton el Vell* (1968) conceived and written in Mexico as the author's homage to the country that had been his home-away-from-home during almost three decades in exile is perhaps his best-known novel and in many ways marks the apex of his literary maturation. Full of wit, while also permeated by a tone of serious commentary, Artís Gener's expansive novel challenges the established Eurocentric model of "discovery." It offers

[9] In works which he describes as representing a "polylinguistic reality of discourse," Sternberg (1981, 222) uses the term "heterolingual" to denote the presence of a foreign language or dialect other than that of the reporting speech-event.

an artificially and somewhat problematically constructed Aztec worldview that uses humour to engage in cultural relativism while exploring themes of universalism and particularism. Deploying the established model of the "found text," the introductory "Isagoge" – a possible nod to Boethius and his challenge to the idea of universality – takes the shape of a scholarly translator's note while also adding a transhistoric layer.[10] It introduces the fictional author as he describes the discovery of a sixteenth-century Nahua manuscript, of which the rest of the novel is the purported Catalan translation. Across the subsequent chapters, in a transposition of Columbus' historic expedition, we follow the recollections of the now-aged "*terrissaire*" Opoton, as he narrates the journey of Aztec explorers who – having been sent out in search of the deity Quetzalcóatl – stumble upon the Galician coast of Spain. Throughout this parody of the conquest epic, Artís Gener elicits deeper reflections on power and identity through an overarching engagement with the global importance of language and linguistic pluralism. A series of encounters with the local "other(s)" are humorously depicted via episodes of cultural and linguistic confusion as the visitors traverse the country's northern shores. By repeatedly pushing at fixed diegetic and linguistic boundaries, the text is a multilingual narration of hybrid identities, albeit within a Eurocentric frame.

Paraules produces a polyphony of voices across a multi-layered narrative structure. Typically told in the style of a series of stream-of-consciousness narrations, each episode is peppered with interventions from the fictional translator by way of detailed footnotes. In this respect, the text is multilingual not simply due to the presence of, and transitions between, languages of the Iberian Peninsula and Mexico, but also in its use of diegetic shifts; dialogic negotiations of register, dialect and archaisms, in keeping with Bakhtin's notion of heteroglossia;[11] and in metalinguistic ruminations on translation, signification and neology. So cast, the novel suggests that boundaries pertaining to identity are dynamic and malleable, porous and unstable. Humour is at the heart of the setting – and unsettling – of the novel's multiple borders. Artís Gener emphasises the multilingual context in the Isagogic introduction as well as in the recourse to an intradiegetic narrator, who persistently refers to a

[10] In his Latin translation, Boethius's commentary of Porphyry's introduction ("Εἰσαγωγή") to Aristotle's "Categories" became the main source of later questioning of the status of universals (Grossmann 1992, 18).

[11] According to Bakhtin (1981 [1935], 263), "the novel orchestrates all its themes, the totality of the world of objects and ideas depicted and expressed in it, by means of the social diversity of speech types and by the differing voices that flourish under such conditions."

multiplicity of languages and speakers. Opoton describes the territories of the Iberian Peninsula or, more precisely, "As Espanhas do Máis Alá," as being divided into various linguistic domains:

> Fala Castela, i la Fala Portuguesa, dita parenta de la Galega, i la Fala Arab, i la Fala Catalana, i la Fala Basca i la Fala Jueva, car aquests són els noms de les diverses tribus que poblen la terra i encara n'hi ha moltes més.
>
> (225)

Holmes and Marra (2002, 393) have argued that "humour can contribute to the on-going construction and reinforcement of inter-group boundaries by providing an acceptable means of objectifying or distancing the 'other' group." It is of note that the group distinctions are drawn, as indicated, along linguistic lines, conditioned by the notion of "fala." The novel lays bare linguistic as well as sociocultural hierarchies and draws attention to a multiplicity of otherness through language play, which reinforces a sense of in-group identity between the extradiegetic translator, the reader and the local tribes. In so doing, the novel constructs a pluriversal front against a shared authoritarian enemy. Artís Gener thus embraces the opportunities that a deterritorialised multilingual context presents through the incremental, if measured, use of word play and situational jokes, that is to say, through a sustained sense of humour throughout the novel.

According to Silvia Mas (2008, 164), by choosing Nahuatl as the source text language of Opoton's saga, Artís Gener draws direct – if at times problematic – comparisons with the officially repressed status of Catalan at the time of writing.[12] The novel's narrator is eager to underscore the shared plight of the Nahua and his "own" Catalan people, under Castilian dominance: "almenys, em semblaven dos idiomes germans pel que feia a llur capacitat de resistir els malfats" (15). Indeed, as the fictional translator repeatedly emphasises the "fraternitat lingüística" between the Catalan and Nahua tongues, it becomes clear from the outset that the question of language *qua* identity is a core theme. Moreover, the explicit framing of Catalan and Nahuatl as synonymous at the extradiegetic level is key to understanding the way in which much of the situational humour is

[12] In the third volume of his memoirs, *Viure i veure* (1991, 262), Artís Gener explains that his attraction to learning Nahuatl – something to which he dedicated many years – was sparked by a fleeting perception of shared morphological and linguistic characteristics with Catalan. Other Catalan writers in exile who have demonstrated an affinity for themes of indigenous cultures and languages of Latin America include Ferran de Pol (writing for the Mexican newspaper, *El Nacional*); Agustí Bartra (*Quetzalcoatl* [1960]) and Josep Carner (*Misterio de Quanaxhuata* [1944]) among others (Garcia i Raffi 2005, 33).

deployed in the embedded narrative to articulate identitarian boundaries. It is here that the novel's status as a satire written in exile accords with Charles Knight's (2004, 109) more general comment that the "shifting identity of the homeland corresponds to the multiple perspectives of the satiric exile, whose task becomes the discovery of cultural and political forces that control or transcend historical change." In this respect, *Paraules* explores the imbrications of humour and linguistic identity in both stand-alone joke encounters based on cultural clash and as part of a cultivated tone that engages language and group identity construction.

Within *Paraules*' polyphonic verbal matrix, an intertextual voice injects what Triezenberg (2008: 537-8) has termed "humour enhancers" to overarching parodic and satirical tones.[13] Opoton's narrative includes repeated apologies for artistic and linguistic lapses as well as remarks about his own narratorial inexperience and shortcomings: "la veritat sigui dita i respectada, jo no sóc escriptor […]. I si m'he embolicat a escriure tot això és perquè la nostra nissaga asteca s'està perdent i vull que quedi memòria de quan la nostra puixança era tan gran" (61). Here and elsewhere in the text, there are discernible echoes of Bernal Díaz del Castillo's *Historia verdadera de la Conquista de la Nueva España* (1568).[14] Artís Gener has in fact acknowledged the influence of Díaz del Castillo, whom he described as "un home molt senzill [...] que, com l'Opoton, no era escriptor i que es veu obligat a relatar els fets de la conquesta" (in Serra 1992, n.p.).[15] While the allusion through style, acts as an effective parody of the conquest chronicle, the resulting humour does not solely rely on the readers' ability to detect the pastiche of Díaz del Castillo's most famous work. Rather, the exaggeration and repetition of the fictional author's self-deprecation as a writer contrast incongruously with his arrogant declarations of his people's and his language's superiority: "Aistli imitava els estrangers dits galecs naturals, n'estrafeia la veu i deia *ca cousa, ca cousa* que era llur manera de manifestar admiració per nosaltres els asteques" (106). A paratextual interjection in the form of a footnote following this statement highlights Opoton's misunderstanding of that which he ridicules. As

[13] For Triezenberg (2008, 537–8), "a humor enhancer is a narrative technique that is not necessarily funny in and of itself, but that helps an audience to understand that the text is supposed to be funny, that warms them up to the author and to the text so that they will be more receptive to humor, and that magnifies their experience of humor in the text."

[14] In describing the inside of a temple, Bernal Díaz del Castillo (1568, 297) states: "Y si no lo dijere tan natural como era, no se maravillen, porque en aquel tiempo tenía otro pensamiento de entender en lo que traíamos entre manos, que era en lo militar y lo que mi capitán Cortés me mandaba, y no en hacer relaciones."

[15] Although he cites a wide range of influences, Artís Gener described *Historia verdadera* as "l'espina dorsal" during the writing process (Guzmán Moncada 2004, 96).

the fictional translator notes, the Galician phrase is in fact understood as "*Quina cosa?*, en el sentit de 'què és això?'" (106). The intervention from another narratological voice, undermines Opoton's adopted superior position and offers additional light relief for the reader.

Another intertextual voice in Artís Gener's novel is Cervantes's *Don Quixote*, which inflects the narratorial intervention: "sempre he cregut que aquest passatge era fantasia d'Opoton" (178).[16] Through this subtle nod, Artís Gener not only parodies the contemporary invention of chroniclers to authenticate fictional texts, but also offers by way of measured breaks through the paratextual voice the rhetorical device of humour through relief. Moreover, Opoton's narrative is shot through with specialised Nahuatl vocabulary as well as with archaisms and colloquialisms which, as the narrator repeatedly explains, he must preserve in his own translation if he is to achieve a true reproduction of the original text. Thus, intertexts, paratexts and the inclusion of the bibliography at the end confer on the text a sense of (pseudo)-authenticity, while offering relief from the long passages delivered by Opoton's unfettered stream(s) of consciousness.

From the constructed façade of accuracy and authenticity, Artís Gener indulges his love of language and wordplay in the form of self-contained jokes which function as "jab lines," while also contributing to the overarching humorous tone.[17] Beyond their jocular role, these jabs are often imbued with a subversive function as they covertly and derisively reference the Francoist regime. By way of example, the tribes of "As Espanhas do Máis Alá" are said to be "dominades per un Gran Senyor dit Tantomontamontatanto el qual amb la seva Senyora, els tenia tots ben dominats" (185). The playful designation of Tantomontamontatanto mimics and risks ridiculing Nahuatl nomenclature but is in fact a compound form of the infamous maxim "tanto monta, monta tanto, Isabel como Fernando." The reference to the Catholic Monarchs is not incidental. Not only were Ferdinand II of Aragon and Isabel I of Castille active supporters of colonial expansion, but their historical example also inspired the Franco regime's commitment to mononational unification seen in the suppression of linguistic, cultural and identitarian pluralism. Here

[16] In Cervantes' chivalresque epic, the fictional author Cide Hamete Benengeli is attributed the paratextual note, "no me puedo dar a entender, ni me puedo persuadir, que al valeroso don Quijote le pasase puntualmente todo lo que en el antecedente capítulo queda escrito" (*Quijote II*, XXIV, 734).

[17] Jab-lines "differ from punch-lines in that they can be found anywhere in a text but the end (the position occupied exclusively by the punch- line). The two also differ in function: a punch-line serves to disrupt the narrative flow, while jab-lines are fully integrated in it" (McGlade 2016, 67).

then, Artís Gener's text underscores not only the presence of multiple languages within the contemporaneous setting, but also conducts a transhistoric dialogue between past and multiple presents. Thus, the Castilian trace in the name Tantomontamontatanto is a far from innocent nod to historical accuracy and authenticity. Within the context of Artís Gener's exile, the repeated reference to the "diverses tribus" can be read as a more extensive derision of the monocultural, monolingual myth of "España, una, grande y libre" that underpinned Francoist ideology. As such, Artís Gener uses humour to reinforce diasporic in-group identity, while implicitly deriding its modern-day oppressor.

Stand-alone jokes in the form of episodes also play with language and amplify the humorous tone of the novel. An example can be found in the slapstick situation used to account for the naming of the "Sususes." As the Aztec explorers traverse Galicia, they encounter a group of local women washing clothes by the river. Before the visitors have a chance to make contact, one of the Aztecs sneezes, which Opoton explains was a result of the cold weather and the fact that he and the other men were "vestits a l'asteca, ço és, despullats, i solament dúiem el maxtlatl, el plomall i el tilmatli" (95). The women respond "Susús" ["bless you"], still unaware of their foreign company. Upon seeing the men an amusing scene ensues as the women flee shrieking. We are then told that, "els vam dir Sususes puix, si no criden o xisclen, solen dir susús, oi més quan algú esternuda" (95–6). On the one hand it is possible to read this passage as a neo-colonising, primitivizing strain in Artís Gener's writing, as the boundary between historical accuracy – emphasised by the explanatory paratext regarding the correct way to wear the clothing in question – and the ridiculing mimicry is emphasised by the recourse to humour. On the other hand, the humour in this episode, seems to reside more on the literary technique of dramatic irony – whereby the implications of a character's words or actions are clear to the reader but unknown to the character – rather than entirely dependent on the derision of the "uncultured savage."

The pervasive reflections on etymological codification throughout the text also serve to punctuate the narrative with identitarian boundaries. Opoton is quick to underscore the arbitrary nature of the place names used by the local tribes in their language, often erroneously dismissing them as lacking meaning due to his own misunderstanding: "poble dit Sanvicentedelabarquera que ningú no va poder saber que volia dir, si certament volia dir alguna cosa" (242). The name Opoton itself, when read backwards, playfully gives "no topo," which in the sense of "no donar" figuratively not understanding – is all the more apt in this tale of cultural confusion.

The mix-ups created by unfamiliar customs "i les menges tampoc no les posen damunt una estora, ans en fustes altes dites taules" (118) and languages "ell cop de dir-nos moltes coses amb la seva llengua estrangera i nosaltres els contestàvem amb el nostre nàhoa i, sigui dit amb perdó, ni els uns ni els altres no ens assabentàvem de res" (100) rely on the admittedly slippery and troubling concept of superiority for their humour. However, these moments are temporary, and typically benign in their outcomes, and as a result redress the balance, by way of contrast, with more aggressive *sensu* Freud moments of humour.[18] The disruption also acts as a counterpoint, a key aspect of Artís Gener's literary humour.[19]

Paraules is, in short, multilingual in multiple ways. Though written almost entirely in Catalan, the novel not only incorporates lexical items from Asturian, Basque, Castilian, Galician, and Nahuatl, but also includes a range of dialogic registers that are voiced across and/or through these languages. At every stage, codeswitches are marked; either by Opoton's direct acknowledgement of their presence, or in the extensive paratext provided by the fictional translator, who is keen to preserve indigenous nomenclature in the spirit of "authenticity." Together, the pseudo-translation and the polyphony of voices offer meta-critical considerations of the movement between languages and on the importance of languages per se. In so doing, the novel deploys incisive reflections on plurality both linguistic and cultural so as to condemn the repressive forces behind the author's real-life experience of exile in Mexico. The localised experience of Mexico, however, disappears in favour of the Iberian setting and as such, the text runs the risk of instrumentalising both Latin American and indigenous culture in order to platform the Catalan plight. Notwithstanding its focus on linguistic rather than ontological notions of alterity, *Paraules* masterfully and playfully conveys the confusion that obtains when colonizers impose their necessarily foreign words and visions of the world on others.

Not surprisingly, the connections with postcolonial criticism are all but unavoidable; since ventriloquised through his fictional translator, Artís Gener can be seen to actively conflate Spain's colonial past in the Americas with its contemporary context of Catalan repression. The author is not alone in his deployment of the semantic field of colonisation to describe Castile's approach to

[18] For an explanation of the emphasis on the temporary role-reversal outlined in superior versus subordinate group humour theory see Zillmann and Cantor (1972).

[19] As the author explains, "La presència de la ironia, d'aquest sarcasme, és un mecanisme defensiu [...] la ironia no es per provocar, ni per fer més digestiu un passatge sinó que té una finalitat molt concreta, de contrapunt, de balança" (in Poch and Jaén 1993).

Catalonia. Maria-Aurèlia Capmany, for example, speaks of a "colonització que hem sofert intensament aquests darrers 37 anys, àmpliament des del 1714," while Joan Brossa describes Catalonia as Spain's last colony (cited in King 2006, 255). Others, such as King (2006) however, have underscored the problems of such direct parallels, especially given Catalonia's protracted collusion in Spanish imperialism and the myriad ways that it has benefitted both directly and indirectly from Spain's colonial endeavours. A further point of contention, as Álvarez Sancho (2017, 65) argues, is that through Opoton, Artís Gener uncritically impersonates the Aztec other and "equates epistemologies." Indeed, although *Paraules* is a defence of the pluriversality of languages, it engages in a form of what Marlon James (quoted in Cain 2015) has called "cultural ventriloquism"[20] and highlights the issues raised by Linda Alcoff's (1991) "The Problem of Speaking for Others." Thus, an additional effect of the polyphony of voices in this novel of exile is that it reflects the potential instability of linguistic identity in ways that feed into the subject of our second text, Juan Marsé's *El amante bilingüe* (1990). Despite the shift from the context of trans-Atlantic exile to that of post-dictatorial Barcelona, the linguistic landscape proves to be no less complex, no less marked by shifting identities and the vagaries of alterity. Instead, as we shall see, *El amante bilingüe* also grapples with questions of linguistic multiplicity and plurality. Narrative structure, codeswitching, and the presence of external and internal variation all come into play once more, this time in order to chart, as it were, the porous boundaries between the long-standing Catalan-Castilian dichotomy, as linguistic hierarchies are derisively subverted, while also more complexly, reinforced.

El amante "multilingüe"? Juan Marsé and the heteroglossic cityscape

Over twenty years after *Paraules* had gone to print, when the dictatorship and the transition to democracy had become memories of the recent past, the fourth of Juan Marsé's novelistic works, *El amante bilingüe* (1990), was published in what had by then become an officially bilingual Barcelona. Language and class take centre stage in this no-holds-barred sardonic treatment of essentialist and reductive approaches to Catalan identity by pointing to the intersectional reality of what it means to "be Catalan." We follow the anti-hero, Joan Marés a non-too-subtle anagram of the author's own name

[20] For James, this term referred specifically to "white authors [who] write in a 'palatable' way about countries and cultures of which they have no experience."

in his "schizophrenic" drift between the languages and neighbourhoods of the Catalan capital.[21] The story charts Marés's life following a November afternoon in 1975 when his wife, the conspicuously-named Norma, a sociolinguist who works for the Dirección General de Política Lingüística, leaves him. In the wake of Norma's departure, Marés begins to pose as one of his childhood friends of Andalusian descent, Juan Faneca. Originally, the disguise functions as a ruse to re-establish a sexual connection with Norma, whose proclivity for "charnegos de todas clases" (11) is attested by her infidelity in the opening scenes. However, as the novel progresses, Marés becomes increasingly detached from his previous self. As he cedes to the ever-encroaching character of Faneca, the text eventually culminates in a quasi-Babelic ramble to signify the ultimate elision of the protagonist's personalities. Like *Paraules*, humour, language and group identity are imbricated, entangled even, in shifting and politically charged terrains; as *El amante* foregrounds linguistic plurality and humorous play in ways that challenge polarised, all-too-serious understandings of identity.

El amante cultivates an overarching playful tone by peppering the text with stand-alone jokes which act as a counterpoint to more fraught moments associated with the protagonist's decline in particular and, more generally, the complexities of migration and identity in the region, as explored in Francesc Candel's study, *Els altres catalans* (1964).[22] Like in *Paraules*, such "pepperings" takes the form of linguistic play via measured injections of codeswitching and heteroglossia; the choice of names; and neologisms within the text itself. However, whereas in *Paraules* humour takes the form of light-hearted, slapstick farce with moments of bathos, *El amante*'s delivery is bittersweet, often barbed in its tone and typically couched in the exaggerated and the grotesque. In its response to Vallverdú's absolutist assertions, *El amante* openly ridicules linguistic essentialism and is as a result widely identified as an exercise in ironic satire. Stewart King (1999, 75), for example, notes: "Marsé nos presenta una sátira grotesca que de ninguna manera es un reflejo 'real' ni intenta ser fiel a la situación lingüística en Cataluña." In that respect, Marsé's novel might well be considered to be following in the *esperpento* tradition as established in Ramón María del Valle-

[21] As Laura Connor (2012, 12) notes, Marsé's use of the term "esquizofrénica" as a way to adduce multiple identities and/or personalities within the same body, reflects the typical and erroneous conflation in popular culture of this condition with "dissociative identity disorder."

[22] Candel continued to engage many of the issues of identity and migration in Catalonia in the subsequent "updates" of his initial study in *Encara més sobre els altres catalans* (1973), *Els altres catalans vint anys després* (1985) and *Els altres catalans del segle XXI* (2001).

Inclán's *Luces de bohemia* (1920).[23] Joan Ramon Resina (2000), on the other hand, offers a strong indictment of those who do not look "beyond the fictional argument failing to analyze the sociolinguistic premises in a way that includes the writing conditions and the author's historico-political and professional conditioning." Disentangling the varieties of humour, their implications and how they take shape in Marsé's novel and how they shape the novel itself requires a close reading which attends to the multifariousness of humour and to nuanced understandings of the charged question of "language ideologies" at the time of writing and, of course, at the variegated times of reading.[24]

In its unabashed use of multiple-personality disorder as a figuration for the split sense of self reported by many bilinguals, Marsé's work effects a shrewd satire of purist and essentialising approaches to linguistic expression, as well as the uncritical positioning of language as the single most important and determinative sign of identity. To that end, *El amante* deploys humour to drive home its pervasive critique of those promoting the normalised use of Catalan over Castilian, a polarising linguistic polemic which was still in full swing in the wake of Norma's metafictional namesake; the 1983 *Llei de Normalització Lingüística.*[25] Indeed, the author stated that the novel was a way to "divertirme poniendo en solfa la cuestión de la normalización lingüística en Cataluña" (in Gutiérrez 1995, 36). Unsurprisingly, given the title of the novel, Marés's multiplicity is overtly tethered to the question of language. However, in truth, his rejection of Catalan, adopting instead Faneca's Andalusian dialect, is so as to align himself, linguistically *and* socioeconomically with those pejoratively designated as "xarnegos" (or "charnegos"). Although *murciano* is the geographical designation used interchangeably with charnego in the novel, Faneca's accent is always *andaluz*, since Marés's childhood friend originated from Granada. In addition to linguistic markers, destabilising the borders between where Marés ends and Faneca begins is likewise expressed through the physical, the sartorial and,

[23] According to the *Diccionario de la Real Academia Española* (DRAE), the term *esperpento* refers to a "concepción literaria […] en la que se deforma la realidad acentuando sus rasgos grotescos."

[24] In contrast to language attitudes, language ideologies focus on "how speakers' beliefs and feelings about language are constructed from their experience as social actors in a political economic system, and how speakers' often-partial awareness of the form and function of their semiotic resources is critically important" (Kroskrity 2016).

[25] The connection between the linguistic law and Marés's wife is clear. The legislation, which sought to reengage relationships with the language, supported by an initiative with texts written by Artís Gener, was popularly known as "La Norma" after Lluís Juste de Nin's cartoon girl of the same name who was the face of the campaign.

as we shall see later, the topographical. For Laura Connor (2012, 10), Marés's burned face and hands resulting from an altercation with "exaltados nacionalistas catalanes" (21) is a clear metaphor of identitarian erasure; since "the face is a major locus of identity" and "finger prints [are] another index of personal uniqueness." While wiping out these particular marks of identity could trigger a sense of loss, in Marés's case, it equally frees the way for a smoother transition between his personae. As such, with traces of the Bakhtinian *carnivalesque*, the inclusion of costumes and masks also becomes a pervasive indicator of multiple, performed, identities within the novel.[26]

Metaphors of personality disorder are far from new as artistic ways to convey the complexity of the multilingual writers' experiences. Tzvetan Todorov (1985), for one, challenged the acritical celebration of Bakhtinian heterogeneity, highlighting his own "linguistic schizophrenia" between his autochthonous Bulgarian and his adopted French selves. Although he felt he "should have been living in the euphoria of disharmony," Todorov (1994, 209) found himself instead experiencing "malaise and psychological oppression." Todorov's text sparked increasing academic interest in how the "drama of duality" is represented in literary culture, where, as Pavlenko (2006, 5) has observed:

> the dominant metaphors and tropes of […] border crossing, borrowing, bigamy, betrayal, bifurcation, fragmentation, multiplicity, split, gap, alienation, dislocation, and double vision reinscribe the feeling of duality and invoke the discourse of schizophrenia.

Notwithstanding the novel's basis on a genuine medical case of identity disorder shared with the author by a psychiatric specialist (Pérez Manrique 2009, 125), the text is more than an innocent narration of a living bilingual curiosity. In fact, *El amante* is a mordant reply to the criticism that Marsé's previous novel, *Un día volveré* (1982), had received from the sociolinguist Francesc Vallverdú. Accusing the author of showing insufficient mastery in rendering Barcelona's linguistic and cultural plurality, Vallverdú (1982) went on to call into question the feasibility of expressing Catalan specificity in Castilian. Marsé is one of a group of self-identified Catalans who

[26] Bakhtin outlined his initial concept of carnival in *The Problems with Dostoyevsky's Poetics* (1929) and later in *Rabelais and his World* (1940). According to these works, the carnivalesque is characterised by, among other features: a breaking of social taboos; incongruous combinations of the lofty and the low or the sacred and the profane; coarse language and parodies of modern times.

have "chosen" to write in Castilian.[27] For these authors, many of whom would go on to form the *Foro Babel* in the 1990s,[28] an education during the Franco dictatorship meant that it was in Castilian and not Catalan, that they had honed their craft.[29] Nevertheless, Vallverdú has repeatedly rejected works written in Castilian – regardless of the provenance of their author – as pertaining to a bilingual or Catalan literary field.[30] For Juan Goytisolo (1985, 35), whom Vallverdú also excludes from his bilingual register, the upshot is operating in a doubly marginal space:

> En el período actual de «normalización lingüística», mi situación […] es periférica y marginal por partida doble. […] catalanes en Madrid y castellanos en Barcelona, nuestra ubicación es ambigua y contradictoria, amenazada de ostracismo por ambos lados y enriquecida no obstante, por el mutuo rechazo, con los dones preciosos del desarraigo y movilidad.[31]

In Marsé's case, the sense of double marginalisation was a fruitful locus for the creative contestation of absolute, fixed forms of identity politics. Indeed, Marsé's self-positioning in the "in-between" – "yo soy fronterizo, para mí ése es el puesto del escritor" –, inspired critic Ana Pérez Manrique to coin the term "autores fronterizos," which she defines as:

> Aquellos escritores [de Barcelona] que se ubican en los intersticios […] quienes no adoptan ninguna de las dos posiciones nacionales/nacionalistas absolutas a uno u otro lado de la frontera, sino que juegan con ambas identidades, los que ofrecen más ricas posibilidades textuales o interpretativas.
>
> (2006, 34)

[27] Such writers in this category include, among others, Maruja Torres, Carme Riera, Eduardo Mendoza and Juan Goytisolo.

[28] *Foro Babel* was established in 1996 with a view to protect and support the use of Castilian in Catalan culture.

[29] According to Goytisolo (1985, 35), "la inclinación a una u otra lengua por parte del escritor potencialmente bífido no es producto exclusivo de una libre elección personal sino resultado más bien de una serie de coyunturas familiares y sociales posteriormente asumidas."

[30] According to Vallverdú (1996, x), Marsé was not a bilingual writer, but "un català (bilingüe) que com a llengua literària només cultiva el castellà (llevat d'uns esporàdics collages en català en algunes de les seves novel·les)."

[31] This quote from Goytisolo is also engaged in treatments of the novel by Berkenbusch and Heinemann (1995, 49) and King (2005, 49).

Speaking what sociolinguists have termed "castellano barcelonés,"[32] as another self-identifying *autor fronterizo*, Vázquez Montalbán, explains: "[en Barcelona] nos hemos tenido que inventar […] un castellano distinto, condicionado por el bilingüismo. Ese castellano es a la vez más pobre (en vocabulario, en sintaxis) y más rico, en la medida en que hemos tenido que recurrir a la imagen y a la metáfora" (in Basualdo 1989).

The structure of Marsé's novel reflects the linguistic reality of the moment. Oscillating chapters between the principal personae can be read in terms of a constructed Catalan and Castilian identitarian opposition and mapped to the author's anthropomorphisation of a divided Barcelona: "una ciudad esquizofrénica, de duplicidades diversas" (84). In fact, the addition of three intervening memoir-style *cuadernos*, adduces the presence of more voices, and destabilises the sense of a fixed chronology. The recourse to nostalgia, so-often associated with programmes of linguistic and cultural revival, is all the more telling in the flashback "El pez de oro." In this interpolated reflection, the young Marés is paid to perform Josep Maria de Segarra's "Sant Jordi, gloriós" to a clandestine group of the Catalan bourgeoisie. Thus, returning to Bakhtin's polyphonic verbal matrix, we find that in *El amante* multiple voices are in fact in play.

The presence of Castilian is marked not simply in its direct apposition and implicit opposition to the calculated smatterings of Catalan, but is itself dialectically divided. The decision to employ a phonetically rendered affected Andalusian variety of Castilian to voice Faneca, is shot through with socio-political significance and is in itself offensive. There is unmistakable humorous play in the scattered phonetic spellings such as the repeated "miraúzte" in a text that is in many ways *about* the unification, standardisation and normalisation of language. Performance and stereotyped phonetic play are also signalled in the childhood flashback to the magician, Fu-Ching stage name of Rafael Amat whose performance is accompanied by a Castilian inflected by stereotyped Chinese consonant "r" sounds: "Señolas, y señoles, glacias. Glacias" (42). Inaccurate sartorial mixing of the "kimono" and the "gorro chino" underscores the magician's identitarian illusion. The deployment of the coded language of the "charnego" and the Mago Fu-Ching in *El amante* is an example of Milton Azavedos's (2002) notion of "literary dialect," confronting us as it does "with speech forms that are excluded from the standard variety." For Azavedo (2002, 510), literary

[32] See for example; Vann (1995); Wesch (1997); Sinner (2004) as cited in Pérez Manrique (2006).

dialect foregrounds specific features of speech, "mimetically generating heteroglossic discourse to evoke orality, thus actualizing a bakhtinean view of the fiction text as a medium for bringing together a plurality of socio-ideological voices." Azavedo goes on to say:

> [A]s it uses socially stigmatized speech and subverts not only grammatical norm but also proper usage, literary dialect implicitly questions the purism that lies at the foundation of linguistic normativism, and in so doing it provides a voice for socially marginal characters, while creating the kind of parodic effect Bakhtin labelled "carnivalesque."
>
> (2002, 510)

Since both Fu-Ching and Faneca are shown to be acting their marginalised roles, the humour, at their expense albeit perpetuating negative stereotypes is achieved through its exaggeration and recourse to dramatic irony. While signalling the narrative transitions of Marés into Faneca, the *miraúzte* linguistic marker serves to incite humour and deterritorialises language by upending the reductive language binary through Castilian dialects from Barcelona, Andalusia and beyond.

In *El amante*, repeated references to Catalan-identified concepts ("seny"); folkloric traditions (the "sardana"); notable figures, such as the musician Pau Casals himself a symbol of Catalan hybridity, being of Catalan and Puerto-Rican heritage and products ("anís del Mono") are humorously marked by their overstressed inclusion. Indeed, the decision to portray Marés's previously-mentioned facial disfigurement as the result of a "Molotov-Tío Pepe" cocktail (21) launched by Catalan separatists, is imbued with playful promiscuity in the intermixing of the famous brand of Andalusian Sherry and a well-established weapon of popular, revolutionary, dissent. As Marés drifts through the neighbourhoods of Barcelona, references to recognisable locations effectively spatialises the linguistic question, while triggering in-group identification, a key contributor to the humour of the text as whole. Examples such as, "limpiabotas ramblero" (84) and Norma's "nariz montserratina" (55), respectively allude to La Rambla in Barcelona and the mountain of Montserrat, long associated with anti-Francoist and anti-*españolista* resistance. Moreover, the symbolic significance of housing Marés and Norma in the Walden 7 apartment building and the decision to situate Marés's closing scenes at the Sagrada Familia, are artistic choices laden with irony. Marsé's allusion to falling tiles from the married couple's home a genuine problem reported after the completion of Bofill's

co-operative building suggests not only their crumbling relationship but also the conflation of this flawed expression of utopian pretension with plans for linguistic normalisation embodied by Norma. Additionally, Gaudí's unfinished masterpiece which, as Resina (2001, 100) reminds us, had become an "emblem of urban division," also evokes the *trencadís* (mosaic) so often associated with *Modernisme*'s most celebrated architect as a motif for the protagonist's multiple and fractured selves.

The intermixing of diacritical markers is yet another nod to the hybridity underpinning this novel in examples such as, "hosti, tú […] i ara qué?" (12), where the Castilian "qué" slips between the Catalan "ara" and single interrogative marker. In these cases, traces of non-normative and/or mixed modes of written speech underscore the novel's heteroglossia. For Joan Ramon Resina (2001, 93), the "hosti, tú" example is the "*only* testimony of the character's bilingualism up to the closing monologue" [my emphasis]. On the contrary: indicators of Catalan speech can also be found in Marés's use of "llepaculs i filiprim […] torracollons" (32), pejorative terms or insults that he mumbles under his breath. Later in the text, Marés, playing the stereotypical part of the "charnego" itself an insult lets his guard down by slipping *sota voce* into Catalan ("de bonito, res, maca,") for which he immediately chides himself "¡Cuidado, imbécil!" (178) in a voice which he is no longer able to determine or distinguish as one or other of his selves. In its ironic subversion of Catalan and Castilian linguistic identity as something static and/or fixed, Marsé's text troubles the notion of Barcelona as either a bi- or monolingual whole.

"Faithful" representation of common linguistic practice is also signalled by the combination of particular characters. Norma's group of friends are identified as hailing from the Sant Gervasi area of the city, a geographic detail, which is used to denote their high socioeconomic status and linguistic allegiance to Catalan. However, to account for the group's communication in Castilian not Catalan throughout the text which might otherwise appear incongruous, particularly given Norma's profession the character Totón Fotán is identified as a Castilian speaker and as such the linguistic behaviour is given a, perhaps convenient, explanation. Nevertheless, the group's speech is still marked by hybridity through a discernibly Catalan accent, which Marsé also assigns a socioeconomic charge, describing it as: "esa pronunciación gangosa y enfática tan característica de las familias rancias del Eixample" (99). The geographic designation, here of the Eixample, functions not only to signal heterolingual mimesis, but also underscores the intersectional nature of Catalan linguistic identity and is one example of the text's persistent comingling of class and language use in its sardonic

troubling of a fixed identitarian binary. Thus, and in direct contradiction to Vallverdú's position, for King (2002, 300), the manifestation of Marsé's Catalan literary accent ironically "[challenges] the very assumptions which underline the myth of Spanish unity in the very language which is the basis of that myth."

Linguistic play in *El amante*, is further deployed through verbal distortion, subversion and/or manipulation, as Marsé inscribes Marés with a hybrid language repertoire to complement his identitarian vacillations. During one of Marés's early forays into his Anadalusian *persona(e)* pre-Faneca where he adopts the role of a shopkeeper asking for language advice in order to hear Norma's voice over the phone, he explains, "ya zabusté cómo las gastan esos malparidos de Terra Lliure" (26). The derisive quip in the allusion to the Catalan separatist group is coupled with the Andalusian lexical marker "zabusté" in the role of humour enhancer and brings into play the multiple intersections of language, culture and class. Beyond the surface of the crass stereotype, the novel exaggerates with humorous effect the heterolinguistic mimesis and the linguistic repertoires of migrants to the Catalan capital from Southern Spain. In the role of the Andalusian caller, Marés manipulates Norma into reciting items of clothing, which become increasingly intimate as he "bebía la voz adorada en una especie de extásis" (27) before the two characters arrive at the "bragas"/"bragues," by which time Norma's tone is "suave" (28). The overall scene is thus permeated by a sense of dramatic irony as well as an exaggerated sexual charge. The sense is that Norma should somehow be able to recognise her husband's voice, and in her failure to do so, the reader is "in on the joke" and able to enjoy the deception. There, is however, an ambiguity as to whether she remains completely unaware of the culminating sexual undertones of the call. Indeed, Norma's transgression of class and linguistic boundaries for sexual gratification is frequently adduced in the text. Marsé resorts to lewd humour among the Sant Gervasi crowd as one of the group, Tassis, remarks: "Norma se ocupa de las encuestas públicas y experimenta con…la lengua. Estudia los contactos conflictivos de las dos lenguas […] Ese punto en que las dos lenguas se friccionan. / O sea intervino Ribas las dos lenguas en contacto vivo y caliente con el individuo" (109). The exaggerated crudeness in unpacking the duality of "lengua" by conflating sexualised tongues and language choice is yet another way in which the novel satirises essentialist approaches to identity as *exclusively* tied to a Catalan-Castilian binary.

Marsé saves his most overt thumb-nosing for the names he assigns his characters. In the case of the protagonist(s), Joan Marés, as previously noted, is a non-too-subtle anagram of the author's

name, while Juan Faneca was his original birth name prior to his adoption by the Marsé family during his childhood (Ayen 2020). Such biographical information, then, does more than simply "identify" the author; it also extends the identitarian *questions* of the text beyond the purely linguistic by bringing into play questions of genealogy and familial affiliation – including the normative binary of "birth parents" and "adoptive parents" – to underline the multifaceted complexity of identity. Added to such scathingly overt derision is the introduction of "el afamado sociolingüista Jordi Valls Verdú, peligroso activista cultural" (29) and "catalanufo monolingüe" (213). Transforming Francesc Vallverdú's name to Jordi Valls Verdú allows the Christian name to effect a possible double reference to Catalonia's patron saint and at the same time its erstwhile President at the time of the novel's publication, Jordi Pujol. The accompanying epithet, "peligroso," is both incongruous in its use for the rather innocuous occupation of a sociolinguist, while also a possible swipe at the pitfalls of linguistic essentialism, represented by Valls Verdú. Throughout the text, Valls Verdú is persistently positioned, to use Resina's (2001, 95) words, as the "*bête noir* of the piece." The reader is thus conditioned to enjoy the ridicule levied explicitly against Valls Verdú and implicitly against Vallverdú as well as, perhaps, the entire sociolinguistic endeavour of normalisation.

Engagement with figures from Catalan letters comes in the character of Norma's father, Senyor Valentí – a plausible nod to Valentí Almirall – who engages the boy Marés to give a poetry performance of Josep M. de Segarra's poem "Sant Jordi, gloriós" as part of a clandestine celebration of autochthonous culture attended by members of the Catalan haute bourgeoisie.[33] With all its connotations of Catalan national pride, Valentí's choice of text for the young Marés, acts as another recognisable cultural reference. The injection of "high literature" not only expands the heteroglossic space but also conjures up connections with the *Jocs Florals* and the literary debates of the past regarding Catalonia, language and the novel. The performance is rife with humour and for Dutra Carijo (2016, 74), the comic inversion of the revered image of Sant Jordi, patron saint of Catalonia, can also be read in terms of the Bakhtinian carnivalesque, creating as it does a "world inside out." The episode functions within the text as an explicit declaration of cultural identity: "Él [Valentí] era catalán. Yo también, pero todos mis amigos de la calle […] eran charnegos […] y con ellos yo siempre me entendía en

[33] In *Lo catalanisme* (1886) Almirall famously declared the need to recognise, "las personalidades de las diferentes regiones en que la historia, la geografía y el carácter de los habitantes han dividido la península."

su lengua" (128). Thus, Marés categorises Castilian, or at least its particular "charnego" variety, as a language which does not belong to him. At the same time, however, he acknowledges being in contact with and, by implication, capable of operating across the boundaries of several different identities, each to a certain extent constructed. When Valentí addresses him in Catalan asking whether he speaks the language, the boy responds: "Una mica pero malament" (129). The absent diacritical marker in "pero" is another signal of the abovementioned linguistic hybridity in speech. Despite being a self-identified Catalan-speaker, in order to earn the promised "duro," Marés plays the part of the exoticised "charnego" waif, projected onto him by Valentí. The moment prefigures Marés's subsequent relationship with the patron's daughter, where drawing upon these early lessons, his performed adult "charnego" persona is again fetishized, this time by Norma, *qua* the next generation. Indeed, this particular episode from Marés's childhood reflects the notion that minoritized languages and cultures live a Janus-faced, hybrid existence as they deploy the past to ensure preservation in the future

As with Artís Gener, Marsé marshals the overarching humorous tone by injecting his prose with contrast and counterpoint in moments of playful, light relief. In the parts of the novel where Marés has taken to busking outside the Sagrada Familia a pertinent site given its own multiple and contrasting facades his split identity is signalled by two-sided *rótulos*. These signs, which become increasingly outlandish in their claims, function as both jabs and punchlines in themselves. There is dramatic irony since the reader knows these are adopted stories and personae, while also a shared sense of enjoyment in the incredulity of fictional passers-by. The sign that reads "pedigüeño charnego sin trabajo ofreciendo en Catalunya un triste espectáculo tercermundista" is turned over after an hour and half and only 400 pesetas to show for Marés's trouble, to instead read: "fill natural de Pau Casals busca una oportunidad" (22) as he begins to play Casals's iconic *Cant dels ocells*. In the first instance, the flipped sign acts as a fairly overt metaphor for Marés's dual and reversible identity. Moreover, the textual intermixing of Catalan and Spanish, draws comment from a member of the public:

> Escolti, perdoni dijo con una sonrisa de conejo . Aquest rètol està mal escrit.
>
> ¿Cómo dice, buen hombre?
>
> ¡Oh! exclamó muy sorprendido el transeúnte de lustrosos zapatos . Ésta sí que es buena: ¿hijo de Pau Casals y no habla catalán? ¡Vaya, vaya!
>
> (23)

The passing pedant, who appears to take pleasure in correcting the beggar's orthography, ridicules Marés the moment he perceives that this so-called son of Casals *qua* embodiment of Catalan identity does not speak the language. The ridicule, of course, is symptomatic of an essentialist conflation of language and culture, which the author, looping the loop, extends to the would-be guardian of sociolinguistic probity, Valls Verdú. The man remains incredulous, even when Marés offers a perfectly plausible reason for his *feigned* inability to speak Catalan that he grew up in Algiers to a mother who had served as Casals's maid. This reference to a colonial past with implications of hybrid heredity is itself yet another disavowal of an exclusively Catalan-Castilian binary.

Throughout *El amante bilingüe*, Marsé returns to the question of identity as constructed, ascribed, adopted and/or performed via barbed reflections on the artificiality of linguistic essentialism and the arbitrariness of cultural capital. The Sant Gervasi crowd are conservative, rooted in a fetishized past and thus uncomfortable in the surroundings of "real-life" Barcelona, which is embodied by the mobile, changing, vibrant and plural figure of Marés/Faneca as he navigates the heteroglossic cityscape. Class boundaries intersect with other lines (linguistic, sexual, ethno-racial, national among others) in a way that injects humour via a "send-up" of group identification. The trope of Catalan *qua* victim is challenged in an ironic portrayal of linguistic elitism. The notion of purity, conformity and a top-down restrictive approach to language with all its echoes of *Noucentisme* is allotted to Catalan. Meanwhile Castilian is portrayed through Faneca as the impoverished, imprecise uncultured language and through Marés as a hybrid of codes and languages representing a third, in-between, linguistic reality. For Meriwynn Grothe (1998, 158), Norma becomes the embodiment of hypocrisy: publicly committed to eradicating "charneguismos" while privately engaging her sexual predilections for "charnegos," all of which renders her her "vida privada," as Segarra might put it unable to remain within an exclusively Catalan sphere. So positioned, Norma functions as a character for whom the reader does not root perhaps because she is all too "rooted," and disingenuously so. In this sense, while Norma can hardly be said to have failed, she is "stuck." Conversely, Marés's acceptance that he will not win back his wife, also signals the anti-hero's triumph in being able to move past her and his former self: "a Joan Marés le dieron por desaparecido" (219). Thus, Faneca's self-discovery and decision to remain in his adopted, newly "naturalised" persona (that of the fills natural de Pau Casals) act as metaphors for

a sense of identity *beyond* restrictive criteria conditioned by language alone.

Conclusions

The two literary texts discussed here, one written primarily in Catalan and the other primarily in Castilian, engage linguistic plurality as both thematic subject and rhetorical device, using humour's multivalence to contend with the fraught question of Catalan and Spanish language and identity. The dialogic shifts in both works are interspersed ironically across the diegetic levels to create and to reflect a complex and discombobulating identitarian linguistic experience. In *Paraules d 'Opoton el Vell*, such interventions typically culminate in incongruous farce, whereas in *El amante bilingüe* they are tethered to a darker sense of sardonic pathos, echoing Todorov's rejection of heterogeneity as something singularly positive. In so doing, the novels underscore the hybridity and intersection of the theories of humour outlined in the introduction through their multiple and diverse applications in both episodic examples and as part of an overarching humorous tone. Putting these two texts into dialogue, differing as they do in their humorous, linguistic, geographical and historical composition, further elucidates the complexity of the "linguistic problem" by underscoring that there is no singular multilingual experience and perhaps, in some profound way, no exclusively monolingual experience either.

Universalised metaphors of Babelian multiplicity often overlook the privileging of certain voices over others, which can be especially true in those multilingual contexts where polemics surrounding linguistic hegemony reign supreme as seen in the context of heated debates in Catalonia and Spain. In this respect, *El amante*'s criticism and ridiculing of Catalan victimhood arguably falls short since the languages in play can hardly be said to stand on an equal footing. Indeed, such "contact zones," to borrow Mary Louise Pratt's (1991) term, represent sites where "cultures meet, clash and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power" (Pratt 1991, 34). The inclusion of a work from the diasporic periphery (*Paraules*) and the presence in it of languages *other* than Catalan and Castilian invites broader explorations of language and identity, offering a refracted lens to a longstanding polarity in Spain, which, for all the demographic and political changes, continues to this day. As we have seen with respect to Marsé, this intransigent dichotomy has implications for the reading and classification of the texts and authors themselves. Many of the humorous episodes in the

two works rely on historical, geographical, and/or culturally specific allusions. Nevertheless, in both novels, while language hierarchies certainly continue to obtain, their presence acts as a highly ironic exercise in scrutinising wider implications: for Artís Gener, in terms of linguistic repression and/or suppression and for Marsé, in terms of linguistic essentialism. Indeed, what links *Paraules* and *El amante* is their nuanced and attentive destabilisation of the traditionally polarised Catalan-Castilian binary as the *single* most important aspect of language and identity politics.

Studies of the texts in question, then, underscore that approaches to the multilingual subject and/or agent must be attentive to the porous and kaleidoscopic nature of the numerous and intersecting boundaries in play. What multilingual literature, the Catalan question and humour share here is their position at and/or engagement with the margins and interstitial sites of their respective borders. Useful to consider in this respect is Homi Bhabha's (1994, 1) notion of borders as places where conventional divisions are blurred and as "in-between spaces [that] provide the terrain of elaborating strategies of selfhood – singular or communal – that initiate new signs of identity." In *Paraules* and *El amante*, such marginality is redeployed as a platform for a multiplicity of voices that variously challenge monolingual monoliths. In *Paraules*, multiplicity serves to underscore Iberian linguistic heterogeneity – in direct opposition to Castilian homogenisation – through the various "falas" of "As Espanhas do Máis Alá." In *El amante*, the typical surface-level linguistic bipolarity is deployed sardonically to scrutinise complex debates surrounding the *Llei de Normalització Lingüística* from 1983, which for some represented a legitimate attempt to turn the tide of a language marshalled steadily into decline and for others underscored a need to resist an imposed form of linguistic purism in a different guise. For all their undeniable differences, both texts are examples of multilingual literature as a form of resistance to national monolingualism.[34]

Structurally, *Paraules* and *El amante* adduce hybridity through their multidirectional shifts across a number of diegetic levels. *In Paraules*, this is achieved through intertext and paratext pushing at fixed notions of authenticity, a question which is intrinsically linked to notions of identity. *El amante*, likewise, represents what might be considered a mimetic linguistic landscape, rife with diglossic parody, resonant with Bakhtinian notions of the carnivalesque. Within and without the contexts of these interpolated shifts, time and space also play primary roles in playfully subverting the notion of boundaries as

[34] See Hiddlestone and Ouyang (2021, 9).

fixed. Artís Gener's deployment of the "found text" allows for a series of asynchronous voices to come into dialogue, transcending historical barriers. Marsé's text, on the other hand, brings the recent past into play with exaggerated nostalgic overtones and stereotypes, so as to ironically underscore the tensions and overlaps between tradition and modernity at the heart of debates surrounding linguistic and cultural institutionalisation. While both texts "spatialise" the question of linguistic identity, it is in *El amante* where this is particularly discernible in ways that bring microspaces neighbourhoods, streets, even buildings into play to give rise to the metaphors of duplicity and "schizophrenia" which challenge national and regional categories.

Both texts deploy a multiplicity of humorous techniques to underscore the intrinsic value, as well as the challenges, of engaging identity and language's own pluralities. Conceived within the context of exile, Artís Gener's critique of linguistic imperialism is necessarily indirect in its acerbic treatment of the contemporaneous context of the Francoist repression. Nevertheless, the angle of the "outsider looking in," shaped by the diasporic experience, allows for a poignant-while-comic reflection of the multiplicity of language and identity across a polyphony of voices. Marsé's novel not only offers a direct derisive, tongue-in-cheek response to the indictments of cultural and linguistic "treason" levied against him, but also serves as a strident, albeit exaggerated, contribution to debates about national literature and translingual writing in the Catalan multilingual context. *El amante* is a work that nuances cultural and linguistic alterity, while nonetheless remaining forthright in its undeniably polemical and exaggerated representation of the Catalan government and its linguistic politics in the role of aggressor. In a narrative portrayal of identity conflicts through the variegated uses of and switches between language(s), the novel deploys humour to expose extant tensions between those bent on re-establishing Catalan as the primary, if not indeed sole, language of the public sphere through top-down normalisation and legislation that has echoes of a *noucentista* past. Marsé's mockery of Vallverdú pulls no punches and sardonically holds a mirror to the inherent flaws, more broadly, of essentialising and polarising Barcelona's linguistic identity. In so doing, the text pushes beyond age-old, tired binaries of Castilian-Catalan cognates to acknowledge that the languages of the region are multiple and so too, therefore, the languages of the Catalan people. However, the fact that two decades later Carles Casajuana would again take up the questions at the heart of *El amante* in his novels

L'últim home que parlava català (2009) and its sequel *El melic del món* (2013), attest the perseverance of this politicised dichotomy.[35]

Avel·lí Artís Gener and Juan Marsé engage, in short, the variegated and multifaceted opportunities offered by humour, permeating the narrative levels of their respective texts as they seek to challenge imposed boundaries of linguistic expression. In this respect the texts are multilingual not only by virtue of including more than one language, but also through their interspersion of and engagement with the heteroglossic landscape of diegeses; dialogic register, dialect and archaisms, metalinguistic ruminations on translation, signification and neology. Moreover, in their deployment of humour in relation to the theme of linguistic plurality and multiple, or intersectional, identities, the two authors do not miss the opportunity for bilingual wordplay itself, deploying it in a heterogenous fashion that contributes to a polyphonic unfolding which challenges more intractable and still deeply rooted and naturalised binaries. To return to Eco's words in the epigraph, the humour in *Paraules d'Opoton el Vell* and *El amante bilingüe* interrogates and in many respects undermines linguistic and identitarian limits by scrutinising, while elucidating, their very existence. This is particularly evident in the Janus-faced existence of those minoritized languages, which look back on a past glory to enshrine their legitimacy while also looking to the future to ensure their continued preservation.

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[35] Casajuana, here takes up Marsé's baton in order to reflect the divisive and futile polemic surrounding linguistic identity of culture via an irony-laced rehearsal of the discursive stalemate.

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