

Reviews of Books

J. V. Foix, *Daybook 1918: Early Fragments*. Edited and translated by Lawrence Venuti. Chicago: Northwestern University Press, 2019. 171 pp. ISBN 9780810140653.

There are few scholars more knowledgeable about cultural transfer or the powerplay between minority and mainstream languages than Lawrence Venuti. His contribution to Translation Studies has been outstanding. And those involved in the international promotion of Catalan culture are fortunate indeed to count on his adherence to the cause. In this context, his bilingual edition of Foix's *dietari* is, quite simply, a *tour de force*.

The handsome format attests the quality of the fare that lies within. Against a black, oneiric background there resound the golden tones of Joan Miró's "L'or de l'atzur" whose haunting cosmic archetype anticipates the uplift, polyphony and striking metamorphosis of his friend and compatriot's atavistic wordcraft. Two more Miró sketches adorn the inner pages of the volume, as they did in the original publications, underlining the magnitude of Foix's reputation amongst his contemporaries and, almost a century later, the respect of the copyright holders for the present project, which is an object lesson in scholarship.

Many commentators feel J. V. Foix to be one of the finest poets writing anywhere in Europe both during and after the interwar period of the last century. However, unlike Dalí and Miró whose creative genius found recognition via an internationally accessible medium the minority status imposed upon the Catalan language and its subsequent persecution by Franco's military autocracy consigned their literary colleague to virtual anonymity. This condition of inconspicuousness was compounded, in turn, by concomitant editorial complications. Just how do you go about packaging, for foreign consumption, nearly a thousand pages of intense lyrical output? Moreover, how do you convey an esoteric expressive idiom which would tax the most inventive translator? Happily, Venuti has successfully addressed both issues with imagination and resource; and, one suspects, with a whole lot of perspiration besides.

The hallmark of prudent scholarship is, of course, to avoid the pitfalls encountered by predecessors. David Rosenthal's valiant

attempt in 1988 to promote the Catalan's work in English may have been proved satisfactory in literary terms but, with its thirty-five poems, could be little more than a taster of the fare as a whole. Likewise, whilst adding a further twenty items a decade later, Arthur Terry's *Readings of J. V. Foix* was mainly a compilation of essays on key themes of the poet's output. Venuti squares the circle with aplomb by focussing on the first two collections, *Gertrudis* (1927) and *KRTU* (1932). These were calculated to be the first tranche of 365 prose poems, drafted between 1909 and 1925, which would be known collectively as the *Diari 1918*; although when the project was eventually published in 1981 (the symmetrical inversion of the final digits would have enchanted Foix!) only 203 appeared. In this way, with his 'Daybook of Early Fragments' the translator not only provides us with a complete picture of the startling, early creativity of this vanguard wordsmith but also serves up, in embryonic form, a truly representative sample of an expressive idiom which would, like the voice of Joan Miró, alter little but rather expand and mature in terms of coherence and consistency.

Venuti's Introduction begins with an informed synthesis of the socio-historical condition of Catalonia in the pre-Civil War decades of the last century, which saw the growth to maturity of this formidable writer. All relevant details are covered. This is a feature of major importance given Foix's protagonism as commentator on major political and cultural events both at home and abroad. Helpfully, these articles appear at the end of the book and are of fundamental importance to an appreciation of the poet's assimilation of the latest artistic innovations and his reaction to the major ideological developments on the continent, both essential elements to the avant-garde mindset.

The relevance of the global dimension should not be understated. Though marginalized, Catalonia is not parochial. And just as its present Independentist crisis is not singular, but rather reflects identical tensions in Scotland, Belgium, Canada and beyond, Foix's creativity can only be fully understood in an international context. Venuti's meditation on this aspect of the enterprise is relevant both from a stylistic perspective and also from the viewpoint of marketability. The care with which he locates the pertinence of Foixian diction, for example, to modern American expression is as sensitive as it is convincing in its painstaking exposition and illustration. (It also offers an implicit rebuke to the many commissioning editors who passed up the opportunity to publish the venture.)

However, in his purview the translator also demonstrates the relevance of the European Avant-Garde in general, identifying powerful and provocative coincidences with creative artists elsewhere. By way of example, the editor engages with the work of Breton, in particular the questionable topic of female representation. The issue opens rich avenues for comparative study as the re-encounter with the haunting dreamscapes of Foixian discourse strikes familiar resonances, at least for this reviewer, with Vanguard set pieces: from the oneiric sequences of *Chien andalou* and *L'Age d'or* to *L'Année dernière a Marienbad* and their shared fixation with theatricality, décor, ornament, costume, wigs and disguise, statues, mannikins disturbingly Dalinian in inspiration and a conventional, phallocratic pursuit of the muse, siren or object of desire.

It may appear odd, in a review of a project whose priority is translation, to deal with this element last. In many ways, excellence has become such a hallmark of this discipline – especially in the case of the present scholar – that little comment is required. I would, however, like to draw attention to two issues which confirm the quality on show here. In a ground-breaking article published in *Serra d'or* in 1968, Arthur Terry, one of the finest readers of Hispanic verse that the last century produced, identified a pulsating rhythm as a key characteristic of Foixian expression (102, març 1968, 47–52). To be more precise, he adduced Suzanne Bernard's apt description of Rimbaud's *Illuminations*, whose trailblazing prose poetry displayed a "suite d'accents vigoureux" (p. 48).

I have always found this element to be essential to the vitality and charge of Foix's creative idiom; and was therefore impressed by the consistency with which it recurred in Venuti's English version. The following piece from *KRTU* provides a representative sample. It is precisely the rhythmic syncopation which assumes pride of place in both elements. What is equally apparent in the target version is the translator's attention to such technical details as alliteration, assonance, sibilance and internal rhyme, all of which are paralleled with care and sensitivity. Again, this is inevitably the case throughout the book:

Per les obertures tubulars davallen grosses àmfors
 esmaltades. Del fons de les cisternes unes veus desordenades
 em criden pel meu nom. Però si em mogué del capdevall del
 soterrani, la meva testa aranya marmòria coronada de

tantacles cristal·lins llanguiria sota les lluors quitranoses del dia. Quina vida ardent s'escorre per les venes robustes que palpiten al llarg de les parets del passadís...! (86)

Huge enamel amphoras descend from tubular openings. From the bottom of cisterns chaotic voices call me by name. But if I left the back of the cellar, my head marble spider crowned with crystalline tentacles would languish beneath the tarry radiance of the day. What blazing life drains from the robust veins pulsing along the walls of the passageway. (87)

In my view it is the three-dimensionality of this volume which will make it invaluable to the library of every Faculty of Humanities: editorial synthesis, scholarly Introduction and accessibility of the esoteric idiom to an anglophone readership. Hispanists, Comparatists and students of Translation will find it enormously enriching.

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Catalan Narrative 1875 2015. Edited by Jordi Larios and Montserrat Lunati. Oxford: Legenda, 2020. 278 pp. ISBN 9781781887103.

This volume gathers a collection of fifteen essays on Catalan narrative works published between 1875 and 2015. As the editors acknowledge in the introduction, these conference proceedings do not aim to provide a comprehensive survey of modern Catalan novelists and short story writers. Rather, each contributor has focused on a particular author or theme, and the result is a collection of individual studies on singular works. The editors, however, find a thread running through the essays, namely “the conviction that a cultural studies approach, mobilizing intertextual, interdisciplinary, and translation-related perspectives and methodologies, has much to offer to literary studies” (1).

Yet for this reviewer the main interest of the volume lies precisely in the textual descriptions of mostly canonical but often overlooked literary works – works, one is tempted to add, that are overlooked precisely because they have been canonized. Even if the volume contains many illuminating theoretical reflections, one of the

main sources of satisfaction are the passages of close reading and textual analysis. In these times of new materialism and anxiety, to return to a sense of reality, the focus on the syntactic, lexical, and thematic “materiality” of Catalan narratives, produces the effect that one is in front of live literary creatures, as if the objects of study were textual bodies that one can feel and touch.

In fact, in one of the most stimulating articles of the volume, Joan Ramon Resina makes an astonishing but significant claim. He writes that Catalan writers have “limited metaphysical concern[s]” (238) and tend to rely on the immanent experiences of the senses and the body. The assertion is worth quoting in full:

The disinclination to engage in speculative thought is summed up by Pere Quart in a sentence expressing a view frequent among Catalans: “en definitiva, és més urgent viure que filosofar” [ultimately, it is more important to live than to philosophize] (1981: 14). In fact, the opposition “to live/to think” is in itself metaphysical, because it conceives philosophy as a variant of nothingness, insofar as it relates to the non-existing or to an “after-life.” Catalan semantics show that aversion to transcendentalism is ethnologically based. Catalan uses the same word, “res,” to denominate *something*, or its absence, so that the positive concept the *something* coexists with its negation, *nothing*, just as the electron and the proton coexist in an electromagnetic field. (238)

One may find this level of national determinism to be excessive, but it does shed light on a common, sedimented structure that acts as an immanent causality or, to use Jacques Rancière’s term, regime of visibility in the Catalan symbolic order. (One is also here reminded of Franco Cassano’s *Il pensiero meridiano* (1998), in which the Italian sociologist argues that Mediterranean peoples have a closer relation to the life of others and therefore are less inclined to engage in “distant” metaphysical speculation.) Indeed, many narratives analysed in these essays, from the portrait of everyday life in Josep Carner or the representation of a Schopenhauerian will in Caterina Albert’s *Solitud* to Albert Sánchez Piñol’s chronicle of the bare life of a heroic explorer in a remote land, include the question of life itself as a thematic core.

Thus, another gratifying effect of the book is that in these pages modern Catalan narrative emerges as an autonomous body with internal life and traversed by what Montserrat Lunati, in reference to women writers, describes as “lines of affective communication” (139). Indeed, Lunati analyses how Mercè Ibarz’s fiction establishes lines of affective communication with Mercè Rodoreda and Maria Mercè Marçal and argues that these intertextual relations are a way of signaling “how a male-dominated history of literature has kept women in a precarious position within the institution of literature” (139). We can effortlessly transpose this rationale onto Catalan literature as a whole. Hence, the network of internal connections, in which each voice “acull altres veus” [includes other voices] (157), constitutes a national enterprise that affirms the difference of Catalan literature as a non-hegemonic singularity. Another precious example of this affirmation of life can be found in Jordi Larios’s close reading of the enigmatic character of Gaietà in *Solitud*. Larios describes not only the richness of meanings of the text but also the diversity of accumulated interpretations of Albert’s masterpiece. Similarly, two essays by Sílvia Mas i Sañé and Rhiannon McGlade analyse, respectively, the ethical and aesthetic revolt and the function of humor in Avel·lí Artís-Gener’s novels. The two different approaches to the same author highlight the internal multiplicity and vibrancy of *Tísner*’s narrative. Also, Mario Santana beautifully describes the dazzling effects of Jaume Cabré’s literary techniques in *Jo confesso* (2011). He specifically sheds light on how Cabré gives syntactic expression to different historical temporalities, thus achieving a “mobilization of the past in the present [that] forces the reader to (or places the reader in a position where she can) experience two temporalities as simultaneous” (253).

But the volume also contains a good number of analyses of the historical and political themes contained in the literary narratives. The most illuminating analysis is Dominic Keown’s reading of Sánchez Piñol’s *Pallassos i monstres* (2000), *La pell freda* (2002) and *Pandora al Congo* (2005) as both national allegories and postcolonial, or anti-imperial, narratives. Kathryn Crameri provides another interesting analysis of contemporary historical novels that narrate episodes of the past to imagine what Benedict Anderson called “a deep horizontal comradeship” (80). These novels, which include Alfred Bosch’s *1714* trilogy (2008), Jaume Clotet and David de Montserrat’s *Lliures o morts* (2012), Albert Sánchez Piñol’s *Victus* (2012) and Víctor Jurado Riba’s *No s’hi enterra cap traïdor* (2014), have

no special aesthetic value but are useful to examine present political anxieties. Louise Johnson offers a clever psychoanalytic reading of two novels by Guillem Viladot, *Joana* (1991) on Juana of Castile and *Carles* (1994) on the son of Philip II, Charles – two novels that pursue a critique of power through the matter of the abject. Also, Elisa Martí-López sheds new light on the question of realism and its supposed “shortcomings” in Narcís Oller’s portrait of Barcelona’s speculative market in *La febre d’or*. Finally, Josep Murgades writes an erudite but rather unexciting reflection on *Noucentisme* and narrative.

The volume also provides a series of reflections on the problems of translation. Helena Buffery superbly analyses the transculturation with French culture of Maria Mercè Marçal’s masterpiece *La passió segons Renée Vivien* (1994). Jordi Cornellà-Detrell compares the multilingualism and code-mixing practices of three contemporary authors: Ramon Solsona, Marta Rojals and Joan-Daniel Bezsonoff. Cornellà-Detrell describes the implications of the linguistic options and “heterolingual mimesis” (54) of these authors, and he cleverly pursues a critical approach that avoids both celebration and condemnation. Finally, Alan Yates shares with us his fascinating notes on the dilemmas he faced when translating Raimon Casellas’s *Els sots feréstecs/Dark Vales* (1901/2014).

In sum, even if conference proceedings tend to produce hodgepodes or “calaixos de sastre” with uneven results, *Catalan Narrative 1875–2015* joyfully puts together a collective effort that reaffirms the powerful and well-structured form of modern Catalan literature.

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MERCÈ PICORNELL, *Sumar les restes. Ruïnes i mals endreços en la cultura catalana postfranquista*. Barcelona: Publicacions de l’Abadia de Montserrat, 2020. 318 pp. ISBN 978-84-9191-110-4.

En la introducció a *Sumar les restes*, Mercè Picornell exposa la significació i el desenvolupament de les recerques que han desembocat en aquest seu nou llibre, un recull d’articles modificats i

completats per conformar una obra amb entitat pròpia entorn al motiu de les ruïnes. Aquest hi es pres en dos sentits: una anàlisi d'obres literàries i artístiques que el tracten com a tema; el replantejament metodològic de la història i la teoria culturals des d'una perspectiva "ruïnosa".

Sempre fonamentats, sagaços i ben documentats, els estudis temàtics del llibre ofereixen una mirada comuna però alhora diversa envers els objectes examinats. Així, per exemple, la revisió de l'ús del tòpic de les ruïnes en la literatura del vuit-cents i del nou-cents, al capítol "Híbrids estètics: la natura agent en les poètiques ruïnoses catalanes", fa una primera aproximació sistemàtica a aquest tema, fonamental sobretot en el romanticisme. Es basa principalment en la tradicional enumeració, catalogació i classificació de dades no tractades amb la completesa interpretativa del clàssic estudi erudit i extens d'història literària. Tanmateix, el marc conjunt del llibre permet fer-ne una lectura intencionadament parcial i desviada, que resulta intel·lectualment productiva i oberta —podria projectar-se encara sobre moltes altres obres, des de Verdaguer a Perejaume. En canvi, el capítol "Descampats i intersticis: una lectura d'*Última oda a Barcelona* de Jordi Valls, Lluís Calvo i Gemma Miralda" se centra en una sola obra que, contextualitzada en els fenòmens que la provoquen, altres obres artístiques paral·leles i la proposta metodològica de Picornell, queda fulgurantment il·luminada i reconstruïda des de la teoria. Entre aquestes dues maneres de fer, s'estudien amb coherència temàtica, metodològica i epocal discursos literaris (capítols 3, 4, 8 i 10), cinematogràfics (capítol 5), de memòria històrica (capítol 6), d'arts plàstiques (capítols 4, 7 i 9) i performatives (capítol 10), que s'intersequen en un teixit cultural complex del qual Picornell copsa amb agudesia alguns fils.

Poques pàgines de *Sumar les restes* poden llegir-se en termes clàssics de coneixement. La majoria de contribucions en aquest sentit s'acumulen com a exemples descrits o teories sintetitzades, de manera fecunda en ser encarats des d'un distanciament perspicaç i clarificador, tot i que en algun moment no eviten la impressió de prolixitat i algunes repeticions —també a causa de la publicació originària dispersa dels capítols en forma d'articles. Però és un llibre que apel·la al pensament crític, qüestiona els sentits establerts, busca les fissures d'allò comunament acceptat i, d'aquesta manera, transforma la mirada del lector incitant-lo a pensar diversos aspectes presents des d'una nova perspectiva. Perquè la seva aportació més important —i ho és molt— és la metodologia "ruïnosa" des de la qual es concep aquesta proposta temàtica diversa, incompleta,

intencionadament plena de buits i marges estranys a un examen historiogràfic convencional, i que a cada pas fa explícita la reflexió sobre si mateixa, present en tots els capítols i central en la introducció, els dos primers i el novè.

En efecte, Picornell parteix de la reformulació historiogràfica plantejada per Walter Benjamin (37-40 i 230) i sembla connectar amb l'arqueologia del saber proposada per Foucault, per tal d'afrontar una realitat cultural, la postmoderna, que ja no admet relats lineals amb voluntat de completesa i totalitat que en fixin una estructura i un desenvolupament teleològic. I que ha projectat aquesta condició envers el passat desintegrant-ne els metarelats que almenys en posaven al descobert les pròpies nocions de cultura, des de les quals havien estat construïts i que, per tant, sí que en permetien una certa articulació. La mirada "ruïnosa" suposa actuar des de l'assumpció d'aquest estat: reconstruir, sumar, els fragments, la incompletesa, les restes que no encaixen en els discursos tradicionals, establerts o normatius. Això complementa les mirades estructurals a la cultura moderna que la mateixa Picornell no es proposa impugnar (15 i 255). Però, sobretot, planteja una manera factible d'establir un discurs vàlid sobre la postmoderna, que ja no tolera ser reestructurada historiogràficament amb fidelitat emprant eines inventades entre els segles XVII i XIX. Picornell basteix a consciència un relat "ruïnós", és a dir, que admet l'heterogeneïtat com a punt de partida; que accepta les conseqüències de no quedar tancat la incompletesa, la fragmentació, el buit; que estudia les manques o els trencaments de continuïtats; i que, tanmateix, no deixa de ser comprensiu i coherent, especialment envers una realitat cultural fonamentada en aquests mateixos principis d'heterogeneïtat, dissens, obertura i discontinuïtat. En aquest sentit, *Sumar les restes* és la prolongació de *Continuïtats i desviacions* (2013), una de les obres que ens ha ensenyat millor a mirar i comprendre la cultura catalana postmoderna. De fet, encara pertanyen al seu marc els dos darrers capítols de *Sumar les restes*. El novè proposa afegir a les nocions de "plecs" i "vèrtex" amb què Picornell proposava desenvolupar un nou relat de base historiogràfica, les "d'imatge" i "sediment", que renoven l'aposta per l'explicació de la cultura de la transició al marge del discurs periodològic, causalista i teleològic. Picornell fonamenta la seva proposta en un fèrtil examen crític del concepte de "Cultura de la Transició" i en una revisió comprensiva i exemplar de les tres fonts principals dels estudis catalans sobre la postmodernitat V.

Martínez-Gil, J. A. Fernández i l'autor d'aquesta ressenya, de qui puntualitza amb encert, en la nota al peu 15, una expressió que ara es fa amb tota evidència poc acurada. Les nocions de postmodernitat i els problemes de relació amb la cultura postmoderna plantejats per aquests autors justifiquen de sobres l'operació metodològica "ruïnosa" de Picornell, doblement fecunda perquè s'aplica a tot allò que resta als marges o als intersticis: els objectes descartats (en Francesc Torres i Francesc Serés), les deixalles i els fems (en les instal·lacions de Torres, el grup Criada 74 o Ferran García Sevilla), l'abjecte (Albert Pla), les fronteres (Francesc Serés), les ruïnes (de la poesia catalana contemporània o del monument als *Héroes del Crucero Baleares* de Palma) o les runes d'una urbs postindustrial en què diverses crisis han provocat l'abandonament d'espais i construccions (recorreguts en *Última oda a Barcelona* de Calvo i Valls o en el documental *Mercado de futuros* de Mercedes Álvarez); en conjunt, a fragments de la cultura postmoderna que inciten a entendre-la, encertadament, com quelcom obert, no resolt i, de fet, no resoluble. S'esbossa així una reconstitució de nocions definidores del patrimoni, la cultura o, fins i tot, l'humà.

Sumar les restes manté sempre la capacitat crítica, la precisió i el rigor que cal esperar dels estudis acadèmics. Si es compara amb obres per ara més reconegudes sobre la imatge cultural de Barcelona o amb reculls d'articles sobre cultura postmoderna escrits per autors no acadèmics més populars que també intenten donar una mirada interdisciplinària a fenòmens semblants, es fa evidentíssim com aquests es desenvolupen indefectiblement en el balbuceig, la confusió, l'error i la incomprensió absents del discurs de Picornell. No obstant això es difonen impunement perquè les humanitats han esdevingut un camp eteri d'on cada cop ha estat més expulsada la idea d'especialització. Amb aquest llibre, en canvi, Picornell demostra la necessitat d'un pensament en les condicions que fa possibles l'acadèmia — cada cop menys, val a dir-ho, a causa de l'estat actual de la universitat, que ha requerit a l'autora certs sacrificis personals per arribar a produir-lo, tal com ella mateixa retreu en la introducció. Aquestes són la millor garantia per a la permanència del pensament sòlid, crític i actiu amb voluntat de transformació tant de rutines intel·lectuals heretades com de la realitat present — ho demostra a bastament el capítol "Traces del feixisme en la ciutat democràtica. El debat entorn al monument als *Héroes del Crucero Baleares*, de Palma". Potser és per això que estan essent metòdicament destruïdes pel sistema polític del segle XXI. Llibres com aquest en són la resistència. Són les runes d'un sistema devastat.

Sumar les restes, però, ens ensenya precisament que les runes contemporànies són restes no patrimonialitzades, rebutjades per l'espai representatiu d'una cultura des dels marges de la qual fan possible qüestionar-la per tal de transformar-la.

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GUILLEM COLOM-MONTERO, *Quim Monzó and Contemporary Catalan Culture (1975-2018): Cultural Normalization, Postmodernism and National Politics*. Oxford: Legenda, 2021. 226 pp. ISBN 9781781883921.

Quim Monzó has been a high-profile figure in Catalan culture for several decades, and while his work has been studied from various angles, nobody has yet attempted the kind of synthesis presented here by Guillem Colom-Montero. He lays out four basic claims as to how his book deepens and widens our understanding of Monzó's *oeuvre*. Firstly, he aims to reintegrate study of Monzó's pre-1978 works into a sense of his overall trajectory, rather than seeing those years as "merely" formative. Secondly, he wants due weight to be given to the American influences on Monzó's work and thinking. Thirdly, he highlights the libertarian foundations of Monzó's politics, challenging the idea that he was some kind of random sniper whose views were *sui generis*; rather, Colom-Montero seeks to expose the myth of Monzó's political neutrality, revealing instead the inherent small-c conservatism of many of his views. Finally, Colom-Montero argues that Monzó's written production cannot be separated from his work in other media, or indeed from his life as a media personality, if we are to appreciate the nuances of his contribution to Catalan life and culture.

With these aims in mind, the book takes the form of an intellectual biography spanning all aspects of Monzó's engagement with culture and politics. When particular works are analysed, this analysis always situates them firmly within their socio-cultural context. The chapters follow a partly chronological and partly thematic structure. As well as introducing Monzó

himself, the Introduction sets out the rationale for this structure, which is designed to facilitate a comprehensive exploration of “Monzó’s trajectory as a literary writer, artist and public intellectual” (p. 3). This personal trajectory is to be firmly situated within the debates and influences that shaped Catalan culture during the period in question, and to this end Colom-Montero includes a literature review that covers issues including cultural normalization and its critics, the “postmodern” 1990s and the consolidation of Monzó’s iconic status in the cultural and political context of the twenty-first century.

Chapter 1, “Moving Beyond *Resistencialisme*,” begins with further details of Monzó’s early life and especially his exposure to American popular culture and literature. If Monzó’s early work can be regarded as experimental/countercultural, Colom-Montero argues that this is not so just because of a rejection of the *resistencialisme* that had characterized Catalan literature before the 1970s. Rather, by examining the American and European influences present in Monzó’s first novel *L’udol del grisó al caire de les clavegueres*, Colom-Montero demonstrates that transnational forces also shaped his work (as with many of his contemporaries). Whilst his early political cartoons examined later in the chapter engaged more directly in controversies surrounding the nationalizing “mission” often attributed to Catalan culture by older generations, Colom-Montero shows that Monzó’s stance on these issues was always underpinned by his understanding of the socio-cultural shifts partly brought about by Catalonia’s greater exposure to American popular culture.

The second chapter continues the exploration of Monzó’s political cartooning, this time during the transition to democracy. Colom-Montero points out that Monzó’s output at this time has received greater attention, possibly because his targets here were largely the Spanish state and its attempts at reform, and the far-right groups that continued to oppose such reform. In contrast, engaging with his earlier work means recognizing the fractures in Catalan culture and society investigated in Chapter 1. Taken together, Monzó’s cartoons of the Transition act as a kind of oppositional chronicle to the Spanish government’s attempts to create a democratic consensus and placate Spain’s regional/national minorities. Nevertheless, his support for Catalan independence consistently underpinned this critique at a time

when Catalonia's mainstream political forces were content to settle for autonomy within the Spanish state.

Chapter 3 returns to the theme of Americanization in a cultural sense, while Chapter 4 focuses on the influence of American libertarianism on Monzó's political stance. His exposure to American influences came through both travel and reading. He translated many US works into Catalan, and Colom-Montero argues that this makes him an important cultural mediator. The specific nature of Monzó's take on American culture is illustrated through an analysis of *Benzina* (1983), which reveals the influence of the essays of John Barth which Monzó himself had translated but also, and more broadly, "the relevance of the American transnational framework to a deeper understanding of Monzó's modernising project" (p. 88). The second half of Chapter 3 provides a detailed analysis of Monzó and Maria Roura's translation of James Finn Garner's *Politically Correct Bedtime Stories*, which, as well as demonstrating Monzó's own critical views on political correctness, also employs localization strategies that include references to Catalonia's political and linguistic situation.

Colom-Montero very cogently lays out the case for seeing Monzó's politics as heavily influenced by American libertarianism, even though he himself claimed to follow no particular ideology (p. 114). His views are examined through an analysis of "Fam i set de justícia" from the short story collection *Guadalajara*, which rewrites the legend of Robin Hood, and the opinion pieces originally published in *La Vanguardia* from 2001-2004 and later collected in *Esplendor i glòria de la Internacional Papanates*. Colom-Montero makes it clear that he is not claiming that Monzó had a personal political programme of any kind (other than his support for Catalan independence), but that in the broad sense his critical views on counterculture and his defence of personal liberty can be seen not only as chiming with the tenets of American libertarianism but also Spanish neoconservatism.

The fifth chapter takes a thematic perspective, looking at the role and influence of pornography in Monzó's work. Colom-Montero examines this through the lens of the crisis of hegemonic masculinity (as formulated by R. W. Connell). Monzó's take on the subject is illustrated through analysis of pornography-influenced scenes in *Benzina* and a selection of his short stories.

Colom-Montero contrasts Monzó's nuanced literary exploration of the limits and contradictions of male power (including its expression through sexual violence) with the consistent rejection of feminism he displays in his media work.

Chapter 6 focuses on Monzó's role as a "postmodern intellectual" and "celebrity author." His opening speech at the Frankfurt Book Fair of 2007 has already been mentioned in the Introduction as evidence of Monzó's high standing within Catalan culture; here, Monzó's "canonization" is seen as having been cemented by an exhibition of his life and work that ran in Catalonia for more than a year in 2009–2010 (p. 146). This is despite his constant criticism and parody of the institutionalized striving for a "fantasy" of cultural normalization of which such exhibitions are a part. Colom-Montero also reviews Monzó's media work in the twenty-first century, noting his adaptability and the intriguing personality he was able to present both in person and through social media. The book concludes with an Afterword that brings the exploration of Monzó's life and work fully up to date in the context of Catalonia's active independence movement, and once again restates the four claims made in the introduction.

The book is very thoroughly researched, both in terms of the broad span of Monzó's work that it encompasses and the secondary materials that help elucidate its importance. In some senses it feels quite forensic, as the author is always keen to expose the subtleties and contradictions which, he argues, have generally been glossed over. This attention to detail and nuance, combined with well-evidenced and clearly expressed arguments, means that Colom-Montero's insightful book will be of interest to anyone working in contemporary Catalan cultural/literary studies, whether or not they have a specific interest in Monzó.

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