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Reseñas / *Book reviews*

Quim Monzó and Contemporary Catalan Culture (1975-2018). Cultural Normalization, Postmodernism and National Politics (Guillem Colom-Montero), Cambridge: Legenda, 2021, 226 pages. ISBN 978-1-78188-392-1. €89,04. Reviewed by Antoni Maestre Brotons, University of Alacant.

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Quim Monzó (Barcelona, 1952) is one of the most influential Catalan authors of the last fifty years. To name just a few examples of his considerable repercussion, his books have been translated into more than 25 languages, he read the opening speech at the Frankfurt Book Fair in 2007 (in which Catalan literature was the guest), the Barcelona museum Arts Santa Mònica devoted a major retrospective exhibition to his work in 2009 and 2010, and he was awarded the prestigious Sant Jordi prize (which recognizes the whole literary career of a writer) in 2018. Monzó is enormously popular since the eighties thanks to his participation in radio and television shows and, from the 2010s onwards, to his Twitter account as well. He is considered one of the leading writers of today's Catalan literature, together with Jaume Cabré, Albert Sánchez Piñol, Maria Barbal or Carme Riera.

As Guillem Colom brilliantly discusses in his study, contemporary Catalan literature,

and even politics cannot be understood without Monzó. Before this book, there have been a pair of monographs dedicated to the author: Antoni Maestre's *Humor i persuasió* (2006), which focused on the persuasive discourse strategies deployed in Monzó's journalistic articles, and Jordi Marrugat's *Narrativa catalana de la postmodernitat* (2016), which presents Monzó as the most exemplary author of this literary and thinking movement in Catalan literature. Guillem Colom builds on and further develops these previous studies through an in-depth analysis of Monzó's heterogeneous oeuvre (comic strips, short stories, novels, translations, newspaper articles, shows). He also carefully reviews the academic literature about the author and uses a comprehensive critical bibliography on the several topics covered. Therefore, Colom's essay provides new insights into Monzó's experimentalist or avant-garde literature, his ambivalent attitude towards the culture of normalization, the comic

strips and texts he published on Catalan and Spanish politics in the late seventies or his postmodernist literary strategies. Furthermore, Guillem Colom tackles other issues that the existing literature had ignored, such as the role of pornography in Monzó's short stories and novels, and above all, his ideological tenets, which have been surprisingly disregarded to present the writer as a "neutral" voice in tune with the narrative of cultural and political normality in post-Francoist Catalonia.

In general terms, the study explains how Monzó shifts from a marginal, counterculture position in the Catalan cultural system to the mainstream, which Colom parallels with the evolution of pro-independence discourses. Its main goal is, according to the author, "to analyse the dynamic and contradictory interrelations between Quim Monzó's work and the discourses of Catalan cultural normalization." Colom argues that Monzó promoted and reacted against the collapse of the *resistencialisme* cultural model (whose aim was to resist the Francoist persecution of Catalan language and culture) and the emergence of the normalization agenda and postmodernism in the eighties. He draws on an interdisciplinary, cultural studies approach, in particular postmodernist theory, gender and sexuality and political studies. Thus, the essay is indebted to Josep-Anton Fernández's influential essay *El malestar en la cultura catalana* (2008), which discusses the very concept of normalization (namely, regarding Catalan as a "normal" culture, not a linguistic and national minority), as well as Kathryn Crameri's *Catalonia: National Identity and Cultural Policy (1980-2003)* (2008). Following Fernández and Crameri, Colom explores how globalization, cultural

commodification, gender and politics have had a bearing on Monzó's career. He holds that the writer evinces the contradictions and flaws of normalizing discourses and the fallacy on which they hinged (to conceive Catalan culture as "normal"). The most significant findings are the link between Monzó's experimental and postmodernist periods (which the previous scholarship had overlooked), the promotion of American cultural trends (mainly through translation of postmodern theorists and fiction writers) and political ideologies (libertarianism, separatism), his engagement in gender and sexuality debates (the crisis of hegemonic masculinity, pornography), and his transformation in a media celebrity in accordance with the pattern of postmodern intellectual.

The monograph is structured in five chapters, besides an introduction and an afterword. After the introduction, the opening chapter, "Moving Beyond *Resistencialisme*", examines Monzó's experimentalist first novel *L'udol del griso al caire de les clavegueres* (1976), which prefigures the *desencís* or frustration of the seventies' counterculture generation. It also reveals the tension between *resistencialisme* and the postmodernist ironical modes in Catalan culture as regards the attitude towards literary tradition. The second chapter, "Political Cartooning during the Spanish Transition", discusses the way Monzó's comic strips and humour articles in *Canigó* magazine fiercely criticize the Transition's notion of consensus, instead strongly supporting Catalan independence from Spain as a state that has not fully left its fascist past behind. The third chapter, "An Authoritative Cultural Mediator", shows that Quim Monzó has acted as a mediator by

introducing American cultural and political tendencies, in particular postmodern theory and libertarianism (which denounces political correctness, that is to say, left-wing discourses on race, gender, ecology and education). The fourth chapter, “The Influence of American Libertarianism”, fleshes out the contents of this ideological line, which Colom considers to be a good framework for understanding many Monzó’s texts. The fifth chapter, “Pornographic Imagery and Hegemonic Masculinity in Crisis”, explains how male characters embody the anxieties caused by feminism; furthermore, pornography helps undermine the division between high and mass culture in Catalan culture. The sixth chapter, “A Postmodern Intellectual and a Celebrity Author”, explores how Monzó departs from the traditional authorial image to personify the postmodern model of intellectual as a media celebrity who has a Twitter account and appears on radio and television shows. Finally, the after-

word examines Monzó’s support (though not enthusiastically) to the Catalan pro-independence process, as well as his debunking of the *Indignados* movement, which he felt that arrested and even boycotted Catalonia’s secession from Spain.

In conclusion, Guillem Colom’s essay intelligently discusses how Quim Monzó’s career epitomizes some far-reaching changes of Catalan culture in the last fifty years: the consolidation of the postmodern cultural model, the internationalization of Catalan culture, the growing impact of separatism or the evolution from counterculture to conservative positions as experimented by many members of the so-called seventies’ generation.

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