GUILLEM COLOM-MONTERO. *Quim Monzó and Contemporary Catalan Culture (1975-2018). Cultural Normalization, Postmodernism and National Politics*. Cambridge, UK: Legenda, 2021. 210 pp.

This book is a cultural history of Quim Monzó's literary and journalistic oeuvre. Through the analysis of novels, short stories, newspaper articles, political cartoons, television gags, and even tweets, Colom-Montero studies the relations between Monzó's trajectory and the processes of cultural normalization of Catalonia after Franco's dictatorship. His central thesis is that "Monzó's literary and intellectual programme both accelerated and critically responded to the decline of the *resistentialist* cultural model and the advent of the discourses of Catalan cultural normalization under postmodernism and its associated framework of cultural marketization" (3). Two main features define Monzó's simultaneous contribution and critical response to Catalan national normalization: first, a self-parodic distance toward classic and modern metanarratives; and second, the challenging of the traditional link between Catalan literature and high culture. Colom-Montero shows how Monzó occupies a singular position amidst the models of (anti-Francoist) resistant and (post-Francoist) normalizing intellectuals. In archetypal postmodern fashion, his work emerges as a site of critique of the national and cultural discourses that make possible his own discursive enunciations.

Monzó's fiction has been typically divided in two stages: the *textualista* and experimental period of the 1970s and the postmodern, American-influenced period from the 1980s on. Colom-Montero adopts this periodization but proposes to change the narrative of the trajectory. Thus, while Monzó himself and critics such as Julià Guillamon have interpreted the shift as a transition from an engaged, revolutionary positioning to a non-ideological, anti-utopian one, Colom-Montero reads the second Monzó in relation to libertarian and neoconservative principles.

The book begins with a great analysis of the uproarious political cartoons that Monzó drew for the *revista Canigó* in the mid-1970s. The cartoons not only satirized the state pacts of the Spanish transition but, more poignantly, also critiqued Catalan intellectuals who were using the moral authority that they had acquired as anti-Francoist resistants to make proposals for the new conjuncture. For instance, Monzó satirizes Salvador Espriu for defending the cooficiality of Catalan and Spanish in Catalonia. Against all moralism, Monzó practices countercultural methods and maintains a strong separatist stance. As he says, mocking the fascist slogan, he wants the *Països catalans* to be "uns, grans i lliures" ("one, great and

free") (54). Or in a parody of Antonio Machado's lines on "Una de las dos Españas / ha de helarte el corazón," another cartoon shows a nurse holding a newborn and telling him: "Catalanet que vens al món, qualsevol de les dues Espanyes et tocarà els pebrots" ("Little Catalan just now coming into the world, both Spains will give you a hard time") (74).

Colom-Montero argues that a key event of the shift from the countercultural to the postmodern phases in Monzó was his immersion in American culture. Especially after spending a year (1982) in New York, Monzó became an authoritative cultural mediator. He translated nineteen books from English into Catalan (by authors such as Truman Capote, Ray Bradbury, John Barth, J.D. Salinger, Thomas Hardy, and Mary Shelley), located the action of his second novel (*Benzina* [1983]) in New York, and wrote many articles on US culture wars.

Colom-Montero uses this connection with American culture to put forward his main interpretative hypothesis, namely that after the 1970s Monzó has been deeply influenced by American libertarianism. As evidence, the author presents Monzó's rewriting of the Robin Hood story as well as the newspaper articles collected in *Esplendor i glòria de la Internacional Papanates* (2010), which satirize progressive positionings and "neopuritan" cultural demands. The reader appreciates the risk of this ideological analysis, especially because Monzó has insisted that he has no "guiding ideology" and that he simply tries to "apply common sense" in his texts (114). Yet the analysis also includes some ambivalent points. For instance, Colom-Montero acknowledges that Monzó's profuse irony makes it difficult to decide on the ideological subtext of his work; indeed, "Monzó's ironic strategies can be seen as both subverting and legitimizing the discourses that they parody" (112). Occasionally, however, Colom-Montero seems to condemn Monzó's ambiguities, as when he accuses him of ignoring "wider issues affecting the education system" or prioritizing the individual right to property over government action (121-22) in his articles on progressive policies on schooling and the housing crisis.

Similarly, the following section on Monzó's pornographic imagery and the crisis of hegemonic masculinity critiques the value-system of Monzó's characters and at the same time acknowledges the ironic subtext –an irony that makes it possible to read his work "as a negation of what it seems to affirm" (136). Finally, the analysis of Monzó's television appearances and exchanges on Twitter explains how he is a celebrity author whose "anti-authorial forms of public engagement" subvert the model of celebrity authorship itself (168).

In the afterword, Colom-Montero examines how in the last decade Monzó has again become more openly political as Catalan secessionism has gained ground and visibility. In this period, Monzó also rejected the

emancipatory promises of the *indignats* movement and of Barcelona's mayor Ada Colau, as "the 15-M was destabilising, even challenging, the agenda of the burgeoning Catalan independence movement" (178). Perhaps this resurgence of Monzó's political commitment allows us to raise a complementary reading of his trajectory, an alternative that Colom-Montero insinuates without fully developing it. The question is: What if Monzó's "non-ideological" positioning from the 1980s until 2010 not only engaged with libertarian neoliberalism but also resulted from the deliberate rejection of the whole political space of enunciation, that is, of the constitutional order of post-Francoist Spain? In this case, his invectives against progressive ideals would not represent a deviation toward the right but a refusal to let any positioning, no matter how positive, justify the established political order. One wonders if one of the reasons why Colom-Montero cannot fully develop this reading is because the field of Hispanism forces us to replicate the spatial and ideological parameters of constituted states, even, or precisely, when one performs ideological critique. At any rate, his bright and comprehensive analysis of Monzó's trajectory provides us the materials and conceptual tools to understand the underlying political desires of this extraordinary writer.

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ERIN ALICE COWLING. *Chocolate: How a New World Commodity Conquered Spanish Literature.* Toronto: U of Toronto P, 2021. 214 pp.

For literary scholars with historicist proclivities, close textual analysis can serve as a powerful tool for illuminating the idiosyncratic nature of historical experience as contemplated from a localized, individual perspective. By obliging us to pause and scrutinize fragments of a larger text, the close reading forces us to think carefully about the meaning both of and between words, that is, as they exist within the space of discourse in its most intimate form. From there, we may return to reconsider larger contexts, namely, historical, cultural, and ideological. While offering a valuable overview of the history of chocolate in early modern Spain, Erin Alice Cowling's new book shines brightest precisely at those moments when her narrative engages with these words on the page, showing the range of ways in which chocolate – an artifact of material culture – is transformed discursively into a potent conveyor of localized meanings that resonate with the larger historical dynamics that provide the scaffolding for her study.