

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.

The organization of the book reveals a lot about Cowling's project. After a brief overview of pre-Columbian practices around the consumption of chocolate, she examines its reception in the earliest decades of the colonial period before moving on to consider the significance of chocolate's relocation to the peninsular context. The endpoint in this historical trajectory is also the point at which the book opens into a multidisciplinary study under the auspices of three distinct social domains: commerce, religion, and medicine. In dividing the core of her study in this way, Cowling displays a sensitivity to how this exotic import from Mesoamerica comes to take on a multiplicity of meanings within the social fabric of early modern Spanish society. The result is a nuanced analysis that allows for a deeper understanding of precisely how chocolate functions as a material good that invariably bears symbolic meanings of one kind or another.

The study takes special care to document the historical shift in the status of chocolate throughout the early modern period. Initially associated from the European perspective with the "otherness" of its Indigenous origins, it is quickly assimilated into the peninsular context as a rare luxury good that, over time, is downgraded into a commodity accessible to a wide cross-section of seventeenth-century Spanish society. While her chapter on "Chocolate-Covered Commerce" reveals the underlying rationale for this shift as largely economic – as chocolate becomes more abundant it necessarily becomes available to those of lesser means – its impacts are registered in Cowling's study most powerfully in cultural terms. And it is here that her gift for close reading emerges as the driving force behind an analysis that highlights the diversity of ways in which chocolate comes to inhabit the culture of the period. In her chapter on commerce, for example, these close readings run from the sociological – a passage from Tirso's *Amazonas en las Indias* (1635) is invoked to support the claim that "the popularity of the drink...had skyrocketed among peninsular women in a short time" (50-1) – to a review of scatological references in Calderón, to other examples that show chocolate's symbolic force as a sign of wealth, especially for the *indianos* returning from overseas exploits. Yet Cowling never loses sight of the overall narrative, and thus, at the end of the chapter, she returns to underscore the guiding arc of her historical review. In a retrospective summary looking back from the eighteenth century, she writes: "Within a century, chocolate had transformed from a symbol of alterity to one of status, and finally to an everyday commodity that even the lowliest of people could indulge in" (79).

A similar emphasis on literary sources informs the other two chapters that make up the core of her study. In Chapter 4 on religion, "Chocolate in the Church," Cowling starts off with a deep dive into how chocolate as a beverage – the form in which it was most commonly consumed – was

interpreted in terms of religious dictates related to fasting. The chapter draws much of its inspiration from the figure of Santa Rosa del Perú and a play of the same name by Agustín Moreto. Among other things, the play shows a “hybridization of the Indigenous and Spanish understandings of rituals and the use of chocolate within them” (96). Turning her focus from the spiritual to the corporeal, Chapter 5 – “Chocolate: a Prescription for Health?” – explores early modern Spanish views on the medicinal value of chocolate. Drawing a contrast with the equivocal attitudes toward chocolate in the medical debates of the period, the author notes that “the literary sources had a more or less steady trajectory towards acceptance and promotion of the medicinal qualities of chocolate” (107). With respect to the latter, she cites several sources that extoll the beverage’s extraordinary virtues. With opinions ranging from a belief in chocolate as a generic “cure-all” to astonishing claims for its power as an “elixir or fountain of youth” – “que a todo el humano aliento, / lo vuelve a su edad temprana” (112), her study of literary texts reveals a cultural phenomenon whose significance is powerfully expressed in the collective imagination of the period.

As if to underscore this last point, the book’s final substantive chapter, “Sinfully Delicious: The Darker Side of Chocolate,” delves into what Cowling describes as “chocolate’s role in inducing people to commit some of the deadly sins, its connection to witchcraft, and its inclusion as a trope in satirical or blasphemous works of literature” (132). The chapter serves as something of a flourish to what has come before but it also underscores the complex symbolism that inheres within this exotic commodity late into the seventeenth century. With this turn at the end to “more nefarious” concerns, especially the connection to witchcraft, the chapter highlights the extent to which even as it is assimilated into the habits of everyday life, chocolate continues to evoke a sense of exoticism for large segments of Spanish early modern society. Yet for Cowling, it is precisely this exoticism that helps to explain chocolate’s commercial success. As she notes near the very end of her study, this “same exoticism ... also made it more desirable” so that, in the end, “the commercial value of chocolate had only one direction in which to go: up” (158).

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