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Spanish Literary Journalism at the Turn of the Twenty-First Century: *Las columnas*

*literarias* of Maruja Torres, Quim Monzó, and Manuel Rivas (1996-2004)

A Dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the  
requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy  
in Hispanic Languages and Literature

by

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## ABSTRACT

Spanish Literary Journalism at the Turn of the Twenty-First Century: *Las columnas literarias* of Maruja Torres, Quim Monzó, and Manuel Rivas (1996-2004)

by

Haley O'Neil

At the turn of the twenty-first century the Spanish press sees a boom in literary journalism, particularly *columnas literarias*, short opinion articles written regularly by established fiction authors. In *Spanish Literary Journalism at the Turn of the Twenty-First Century: Las columnas literarias of Maruja Torres, Quim Monzó, and Manuel Rivas (1996-2004)* I examine literary columns published by three of Spain's most popular and successful authors during the years of the presidency of José María Aznar. I understand literary columnists as writer-intellectuals who offer critical opinions to a wide reading public in the pages of the daily press. I situate columns of democratic Spain within a tradition of literary journalism with its roots in nineteenth century *cuadros de costumbre* that reemerges during the transition to democracy to become by end of the twentieth century a staple in the Spanish press.

My analysis of literary columns focuses on how columnists use their particular literary style to offer unique perspectives towards current events and debates. In the first chapter I understand the personal and aggressive narrative voice

of Torres' columns as the way in which she counters the purported objectivity and neutrality of the news. The second chapter focuses on how the characteristic cynicism of Monzó's columns denaturalizes the tenets of the Catalan nation-building project. In the third chapter I examine how the poetic, dense style of Rivas' columns puts into question the linearity of Spain's contemporary history.

*Spanish Literary Journalism at the Turn of the Twenty-First Century* aims to further the critical evaluation of the literary careers of Torres, Monzó, and Rivas while also proposing that by way of *columnas literarias* literary authors have become some of the most visible public intellectuals of democratic Spain.

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## Introduction: Spanish Literary Journalism of the Turn of the Twenty-First Century

### 1. Introduction

With the approach of the twenty-first century and the consolidation of Spain's democracy, one witnessed an increase in the participation of the literary author in journalism. *Columnas literarias*, short literary pieces published regularly by established fiction authors in the daily press, become a daily staple in all major newspapers and mark of one the distinctive features of the Spanish press.<sup>1</sup> Several critics have noticed the prevalence of literary columns at the turn of the twenty-first century: Alexis Grohmann describes “un auge sin parangón de la columna” (*El columnismo* 11), Luisa Santamaría Suárez states that literary columns are “el lugar donde mejor se alberga la literatura” (1), and Fernando Valls sees “el momento de esplendor” of the literary column (69). Moreover, these literary columns are published by many of the most celebrated fiction writers of late twentieth century Spain including Francisco Umbral (Madrid, 1935-2007), Javier Marías (Madrid, 1951), Manuel Vázquez Montalbán (Barcelona, 1931-2003), Antonio Muñoz Molina (Úbeda, 1956), Rosa Montero (Madrid, 1951), Manuel Vicent (Villavieja, 1936), Vicente Verdú (Elche, 1942), Juan José Millás (Valencia, 1946), and the three authors that will be the focus of this study, Maruja Torres (Barcelona, 1943), Quim Monzó (Barcelona, 1952), and Manuel Rivas (A Coruña, 1957).

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<sup>1</sup> There is no consensus for the exact terminology to refer to *las columnas*. The different terms *columnas de opinión*, *columnas personales*, *columnas de firma*, *columnas literarias*, and *artículos literarios* refer to opinion articles regularly published by literary writers in the newspapers. I will use the term in English “column” in this sense, and not in the traditional meaning of the word.

Despite the proliferation of columns in democratic Spain, they have been largely disregarded by literary criticism. This is not uncommon for literary journalism because, as John Hartsock argues in *A History of American Literary Journalism*, it is marginalized both from literary and journalistic studies (204-5). He contends that even though literary journalism is one of the most socially relevant forms of literature of the twentieth century, it “has existed largely outside the calipers of the critical paradigms of scholarship and criticism that have so much dominated that century” (244-45). The same trend occurs for Spanish literary columns, a genre that, in the words of Grohmann in the introduction to the collection *El columnismo de escritores españoles*, “sigue más bien marginado, poco reconocido y estudiado en el hispanismo” (9).<sup>2</sup> In recent years there has been a slight increase in critical attention given to columns, most notably by Grohmann’s collection, but they are still largely overlooked in favor of more traditional literary forms as evidenced by the scarcity of scholarly work published on literary journalism of the three authors of this study. To date, only Antoni Maestre Broton’s 2006 *Humor i persuació en la obra periodística de Quim Monzó* and Jessica Folkart’s 2008 “Itinerant Identities: Galician Diaspora and Genre Subversion in Manuel Rivas’ *A man dos paños*,” examine the literary journalism by Torres, Monzó, or Rivas. The aim of *Spanish Literary Journalism at the Turn of the Twenty-First Century* is thus

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<sup>2</sup> Literary columns have been studied more extensively by scholars of journalism in Spain, particularly in *Estudios sobre el mensaje periodístico*, a journal published by the Universidad Complutense in Madrid.

to add to our understanding of the literary journalism of these three authors as well as the form of the literary column itself.

To do so I pay close attention to columns by Torres, Monzó, and Rivas published from 1996 to 2004, the period that encompasses the presidency of José María Aznar and the Partido Popular (PP), to analyze what their work reveals about the role of literary columns and columnists in contemporary Spanish literary and popular spheres. More specifically, by focusing on the style and themes found in their literary journalism I examine how columnists offer voices in the public sphere that challenge the language and ideologies of dominant public discourse. I argue that columnists are public intellectuals of contemporary Spain that use their particular literary style to counter voices of politics and the mainstream press. The structure is thus intended to meet these two goals. In the Introduction I establish the parameters in which to understand the column as a particular form of literary journalism and the columnist as a public intellectual. I then dedicate one chapter to each author and examine the content and form of the columns they publish at the turn of the twenty-first century. Finally, in the Conclusion, I discuss what the individual careers of the three columnists reveal about the place of columns in contemporary Spanish literary and cultural panoramas.

## **2. Literary Journalism for the Democracy**

Literary columns were part of the transformation of the press associated with Spain's transition to democracy after the death of Francisco Franco in 1975. Several factors including increased freedom of expression, the emergence of new, quality newspapers including *El País* and *El Mundo*, and increased value placed on the news

set the stage for what Grohmann labels a “nuevo periodismo español” including a “corriente periodísticoliteraria” to come onto the scene as part of the Transition (“La escritura” 3). The leader of this new journalism was *El País*, the Madrid-based daily first published on May 4, 1976 that sought to include both information and opinion during a time of rapid social and political change (Fuentes 318). Juan Francisco Fuentes in *Historia del periodismo español* argues that *El País* met the needs of “una creciente demanda de información,” and provided “un cierto liderazgo ideológico y mediático ante una situación sumamente confusa que evolucionaba a un ritmo vertiginoso” (319). The editors of *El País* included opinion articles as part of the daily newspaper since one of its objectives was, as Rosa Martínez Montón explains in the introduction to *Textos periodísticos de opinión*, “crear opinión pública en un país acallado durante cuarenta años, ninguneado precisamente, en el terreno de nuestro interés, el de las opiniones, el de la cotidiana difusión y puesta de ideas en el tablero público” (12). After decades in which critical opinion was absent from the daily press, *El País* emerged as a forum to transmit the news as well as to discuss and analyze it.

The inclusion of literary columns in *El País* was thus one part of its mission to offer critical opinion and act as an ideological compass after decades of censorship. It is for this reason that Umbral in his 1995 book *Diccionario de literatura* states that “columnismo periodístico” was “el fenómeno social y cultural más significativo de la transición española y de nuestra democracia” (65). For Umbral, literary columns revived the monotone Spanish press after the end of the dictatorship: “El columnismo se impone porque el periodismo español, tras cuarenta

años de fotos de Franco empapeladas de sangre, volvía a ser dialogante, informativo, coloquial, disputador, vivo y alegre (66).” Since then several other newspapers have followed *El País*’ lead and in 2000 when María Jesús Casals Carro completed a survey of the Spanish press, all newspapers with a daily distribution of over 100,000 copies included literary columns in their daily publications (“La opinión” 11). The Spanish press of the democracy is thus a source of information as well as a space for opinion, critique, and debate.

Although literary columns certainly emerged in response to the socio-political conditions of the nascent democracy, they are also a recuperation of a Spanish literary tradition dating back to the mid-nineteenth century. Casals Carro reminds her readers that the form of the column is “*mucho más vieja de lo que se cree*” and should not be understood only as a cultural manifestation of the late twentieth century (“La columna” 35). I agree with Casals Carro’s assertion and thereby aim to position columns within a particular Spanish literary history that begins with the *cuadros de costumbres* of the nineteenth century and the *artículos* of the early decades of the twentieth century. While within the limits of this project it is untenable to detail all of the antecedents of the column, I intend to focus on the historical relationship between literature and social and political criticism that has shaped the contemporary column.

### **3. A Literary History: From *cuadros de costumbre* to *columnas literarias***

Columns are not the only form of literary journalism of contemporary Spain—writers and intellectuals also publish reviews, special reports, editorials, chronicles, and stories with the press—but they are a specific form of journalism



with a distinct literary history. Contemporary literary columns have their roots in the work of Mariano José de Larra (Madrid, 1809-1837), an author who is, according to J. Escóbar in *Los orígenes de la obra de Larra*, “el primer escritor que se sitúa en la primera fila de la historia de la literatura por su obra exclusivamente periodística” (93). Indeed, the literary *costumbrismo* of the mid nineteenth century epitomized by Larra’s *cuadros* largely unfolded in magazines and newspapers of the time. The *cuadros de costumbres*, short, entertaining articles that describe popular life and culture, found their place in the Madrid-based press that saw significant growth due to both technological advances that allowed for faster and wider distribution of the press and greater freedom of expression following the death of Fernando VII in 1833. The *cuadros de costumbre* published by Larra also mark the first time in Spain that the press becomes the site for the literary author to take on the role of a social and political critic.

Larra transformed the *costumbrista* movement by integrating irony, sarcasm, and social criticism into his *cuadros* (Forneas Fernández 67). His articles go beyond the observation typical of *cuadros de costumbres* by authors such as Ramón Mesonero Romano (Madrid, 1803-1882) to offer critiques of the socio-political conditions of the time (Lorenzo-Rivero 98). Fuentes explains that the articles Larra published in newspapers and magazines including *El pobrecito hablador*, *La Revista Española*, *El Español*, and *El Mundo* brought “la intención política y moralizadora” to literary journalism of the epoch (65). It is by way of the critical component of Larra’s work that we can trace a genealogy between his articles and contemporary columns. Accordingly, Grohmann describes Larra’s articles as “protocolumnismo”

for their “preocupación por la utilización de la lengua, se concepción del articulismo como un género literario, la primacia concedida al estilo y los recursos retóricos, la ficcionalización de la realidad de del ‘yo’, y su empleo de la parodia, la sátira, y el humor y el *ridiculum* en general con fines críticos” (20). In short, Larra’s *cuadros*, like contemporary columns, use literary style and technique as vehicles for social and political criticism.

Furthermore, Larra’s work reflects the belief that the literary author as a critic can promote positive political and social change. In his 1836 article “De la sátira y los satíricos” he argues that the satire that characterizes many of his *cuadros* serves the purpose of creating a more just society: “Somos satíricos, porque quisiéramos criticar abusos, porque quisiéramos contribuir con nuestras débiles fuerzas a la perfección posible de la sociedad a que tenemos la honra de pertenecer” (279). Fuentes argues that Larra’s work further emphasizes the importance of influencing public opinion: “Decidido partidario del compromiso del escritor con la sociedad en que vive, concibe idealmente la opinión pública como un gran edificio al que por patriotismo debiera añadir una piedra ‘cada español que se crea capaz de fundar una opinión (...) por medio de la imprenta’” (66). Larra’s *cuadros* would set the stage for the interaction between literary authors and the press at the turn of the century.

At the turn of the twentieth century the press continued to be the site for the marriage between literature and socio-political critique. Many authors of the generation of the 1898 including Miguel de Unamuno (Bilbao, 1864-1936), José Ortega y Gasset (Madrid, 1883-1955), and Eugenio d’Ors (Barcelona, 1881-1954), to name a few, published frequent articles and essays in the press, leading María

Cruz Seoane in “El periodismo como género literario y como tema novelesco” to label the period from 1898 to 1936 “la edad de oro de periodismo literario” (23). The majority of these publications did not follow the model of *cuadros de costumbre* but were essays, articles, or chronicles. Despite the differences in form and tone, many authors of this time period maintained the conviction that the press could serve as a space to influence public opinion. Cruz Seoane argues that although such authors were attracted to publishing in the newspapers because it brought increased income and fame, they also did so with the hope of influencing society through “la tribuna pública que es el periódico” (25). Pilar Celma in “El intelectual en la prensa: del modernismo a la posmodernidad” echoes this notion, stating that these writers and thinkers were defined by “su disconformidad con la situación política y social y el intento de influir con su obra en la sociedad” (34). Literary journalism was thus the channel for bringing social and political criticism to the larger public sphere until the political upheavals of the 1930s.

With the start of the Spanish Civil War in 1936 and Franco’s subsequent authoritarian regime from 1939 to 1975, the role of the critical intellectual in the Spanish press virtually disappeared. The exile of many writers and intellectuals, the closure by the Delegación Nacional de Prensa y Propaganda of the majority of the newspapers printed before the Civil War, as well as the censorship of the few remaining newspapers such as *ABC* and *La Vanguardia*, diminished the amount of literary journalism published in the Spanish press during the dictatorship (Fuentes 254-55). Opinion and criticism were replaced by official discourse as Fuentes describes: “el franquismo supuso, por lo menos hasta los años sesenta, la anulación

de todo vestigio de opinión pública, situada por una monolítica verdad oficial creada a base de censura y consignas” (256). However, the literary *artículo*, the predecessor of the *columna*, did not disappear from the press, but instead lost much of its critical component.

In fact, the majority of Cesar González-Ruano’s (Madrid, 1903-1965) articles that would influence the contemporary column were published during the Franco dictatorship. In his article “Con César González-Ruano: Conversación y evocación,” Victor Alperi labels González-Ruano “el Larra del siglo XX” because of his over thirty thousand articles that detailed daily life of the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s in newspapers and magazines including *ABC*, *La Época*, and *Informaciones* (192). However, González-Ruano differs from Larra in that, as Umbral states, “Larra tiene una actitud cívica y crítica muy concreta, mientras que Ruano cree que basta con la literatura” (*La escritura* 27). González-Ruano’s articles did not address political or societal concerns, but were largely autobiographical and descriptive. Umbral describes them as a “huída de la historia” because he “[n]o puede aceptar ni rechazar lo que pasa en España” (*La escritura* 112). Similarly, Teodoro León Gross in *El artículo de opinión* defines González-Ruano’s generation of literary journalists that includes Camilo José Cela (Padrón, 1916-2002) among others, as “estilistas con un pecado de omisión” for the lack of political critique in their articles (111). Nonetheless, González-Ruano’s ideas about the structure and style of the article would give shape to literary columns of post-dictatorship Spain.

In his book *Trescientas prosas*, González-Ruano describes the *artículo* as a hybrid literary form that “participa de la filosofía, de la sociología, del costumbrismo

y de otros tantos respingos.” But above all, for González-Ruano, the article is a literary genre, what he calls the “soneto de periodismo” (Gracia Armendáriz 361-2). In “La teoría del artículo periodístico de César González-Ruano” Juan Gracia Armendáriz explains that González-Ruano posits that a literary article, like a sonnet, should have technical rigor and follow a particular set of rules. The ideas about the structure of the article that González-Ruano details in “El artículo periodístico” would influence the construction of columns of democratic Spain.

According to González-Ruano, a literary article should be subjective, clear, and concise, based on anecdotes or small pieces of the news, and thematically unified (360). He states that an *artículo* should not be objective but should convey “la intimidad, la confidencia, la confesión de lo que individualmente ocurre” (403). With this subjective narrative voice should come a linguistic “desnudez” that is clear and easily understood (397). Also, he argues that articles should be based on anecdotes or small bits of news that “dan al articulista la clave de interpretación de una realidad superior y global” (365). They should also have a singular argument that follows a specific model: an opening that grabs the reader’s attention, the development of the main idea in a natural and seemingly spontaneous manner, and a closing sentence that seals the argument (Gracia Armendáriz 365). González-Ruano would be a mentor for Umbral,<sup>3</sup> the author who would transform this model in the pages of the newspapers of the emergent democracy. With the end of governmental

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<sup>3</sup> In “Sobre la perspectiva articulista de Francisco Umbral: El magisterio de César González-Ruano” Bernardo Gómez Calderón explains the relationship between the two authors as well as the influence of González-Ruano on Umbral’s work.

control of the press in 1976, Umbral combined many of González-Ruano's ideas about the *artículo* with the political and social criticism that defined much of the earlier literary journalism of Spain.

Umbral's columns brought together González-Ruano's structure of the article with a renewed impulse for social and political critique. From the late 1960s until his death in 2007 Umbral would publish thousands of columns with several Spanish newspapers. He began his career as a journalist during the dictatorship writing for *El Norte de Castilla* and then began to write for *El País* the year it was released, publishing columns under titles such as "Diario de un snob" and "Spleen de Madrid" (Gracia Armendáriz "Orígenes" 203). He left *El País* in 1989 to become a columnist for *El Mundo*, the first year of its circulation. He also wrote for *Diario 16* and spent a short time as a columnist for *ABC* before returning to work for *El Mundo* until his death in 2007. Umbral, like many columnists that would follow him, wrote for newspapers of varying ideological positions and with whose editorial line he often disagreed. Many newspapers in democratic Spain, particularly *El Mundo*, look to express a range of positions in their columns and tolerate discrepancies between their politics and the opinions of their columnists (Casals Carro "La columna" 34). For Umbral, it is the diversity of opinions found in each newspaper that defines the press of the democracy as he states in an interview published in *El Mundo* in 1993: "Sólo en la democracia está permitido que la información objetiva y la línea editorial de un

determinado medio se acompañe de la opinión personalísima y subjetivo de un individuo” (López Hidalgo 19).<sup>4</sup>

For Umbral it is by way of the subjective, personal narrative voice typical of González-Ruano’s articles that columns are a hybrid form that is both literary and journalistic, stating in *Los placeres y los días* that columns are “periodismo de arte...una cosa que se pone al servicio de la actualidad, o la crea, con todos los atributos de la información, pero con una prosa subjetiva, lo que implica también un pensamiento subjetivo (libre), que viene a donar al corazón de estraza del periódico los mejores hallazgos literarios de esta hora” (13). The way in which columns influence opinion, for Umbral, is by way of a personal narrative voice that persuades and convinces the reader, as he suggests in *Diccionario de literatura*:

En puridad, sólo lo hacen escritores, pero escritores que saben bajar a la calle y entenderse con la gente. Siendo pocos y oportunos, ejercen influencia, mueven opinión en la costumbres, en los usos y consumos, en la sociedad y, sobre todo, en la política. El español prefiere la opinión de ese conocido/desconocido amigo de barra o autobús (el periódico se lee por la calle) al informe extenso, técnico, aburrido, confuso, convencional y grave de un partido o de un consejo editorial.

(67)

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<sup>4</sup> Grohmann takes a less favorable position towards this phenomenon and labels the plurality of voices of the press as “perversidad calculada” intended to draw in a wider reading public (*El columnismo* 26).

Grohmann offers a similar take on role of the subjective narrative voice in columns, but focuses on how it can add an element of entertainment or controversy to the news: “las columnas pueden proporcionar otro tono al tenor dominante de las malas noticias, pueden entretener o dar un toque ligero a la seriedad prevaleciente en los periódicos, pueden crear controversias, son producto de una voz individual, factores que a su vez pueden incitar discusión pública y reacciones de los lectores...y pueden incluso estimular las ventas del periódico” (26). The focus of Umbral’s columns on the use of a subjective narrative voice as a way to address the debates of the day continues to be part of the literary column as it exists today.

Literary columns at the turn of the twenty-first century are thus participating in a two century long tradition of literary journalism. Columns of democratic Spain have been shaped by the marriage of literature and criticism in Larra’s *cuadros de costumbre*, the relationship between writers, intellectuals and the press at the turn of the century, the formal attributes of González-Ruano’s *artículos*, and Umbral’s emphasis on subjectivity in literary journalism. But the form of the column has also seen significant changes since the Transition and in the next section I will attempt to define a form that in many ways defies classification.

#### **4. Towards a Definition of the Literary Column**

The two traits that formally define a column are periodicity and length. The term *columna* refers to a short piece (one column, or 500 to 800 words) that an author publishes regularly on the same page of the newspaper (Casals Carro “La columna” 32). Unlike special reports or editorials, columns are consistent articles that an author writes for a particular newspaper or newspapers. While the regularity



of columns may differ—some are published daily, others weekly and some monthly—the authors maintain a consistent frequency with the newspaper. An author's columns are published on the same page and include his or her name and image at the head of the column. But, other than word limit and due date, authors of columns are virtually free of restrictions.

Indeed, columns are a form of journalism defined by their lack of restrictions. They do not have the same demands of objectivity and veracity as a news report, but are, as Martínez Montón notes, “cheque[s] en blanco” that have no criteria in terms of style, structure, or topic (25). Given such thematic and stylistic freedom, the form and content of the columns differs greatly between newspapers and authors. Casals Carro notes that a column can take any shape: “puede ser un análisis personal—ideológico, emocional—sobre hechos acaecidos. O una simple reflexión íntima. O un entrenamiento literario. O un ejercicio doctrinado y sectario. O nada. En realidad, al columnista no se le contrata para escribir sobre algo concreto...sino para escribir, sin más” (“La columna” 33). Columnists are not expected to offer informative, analytical, accurate, or insightful commentaries, they just have to write.

Despite such freedom, there are certain traits that most columns published in the national newspapers of Spain at the turn of the twenty-first century tend to display, all of them found in varying degrees in the work of Torres, Monzó, and Rivas. In particular, I believe that most columns published from 1996 to 2004 share five characteristics: 1) use of a subjective narrative voice 2) focus on the quotidian and anecdotal 3) clarity 4) thematic unity and 5) social and political relevance.

The most salient feature of contemporary columns is the use of a subjective narrative voice. Contrary to *columnas de análisis* that objectively detail information from the news from an expert perspective, literary columns are personal and opinionated. They are sometimes referred to as *columnas de opinión* or *columnas de firma* because they are intended to express only the personal opinions of the author. A signature and photo that usually accompany the columns reinforce this direct correlation between the author and his or her ideas. Given their subjectivity, they are most often narrated from the first person point of view; the protagonist of the column is the author who observes and comments on the world that surrounds him or her. As Umbral describes, columns are distinctly personal: “El artículo literario, que tanto tiene que ver con el poema en prosa, se diferencia de cualquier otra clase de artículos por eso: por el movimiento, porque dentro de él vive un hombre...” (*La escritura* 15). The quality that separates columns from all other forms of journalism is the centrality of the first-person, subjective narrative voice.

The narrative voice of a column is most often conflated with the author as a person. As Grohmann argues, columnists narrate from the perspective of a “‘yo’ autorial ficcionalizado” or “un columnista que es narrador y se convierte también en personaje” (*El columnismo* 35). For Casals Carro, the success of columns in democratic Spain is attributable to the close relation between authors and their narrative voices: “Lo que le interesa al lector de estas columnas tan subjetivas y con cita periódica son las vivencias y pensamientos de los columnistas...” (“La columna” 44). But, as Grohamm is careful to point out, despite the conflation of the author and the narrative voice in columns, the two are not the same: “el ‘yo’ de la

columna es su narrador y por lo tanto no debe confundirse nunca con su autor, una de las reglas principales cuando se lee una novela o un cuento y igualmente importante en el caso de la columna dada la primacía del estilo y la de su forma y retórica.” Grohmann quotes the contemporary columnist Javier Cercas who adeptly summarizes this relationship between the autor and the narrative voice of the column as “un *yo* que soy *yo* y no soy *yo* al mismo tiempo” (*El columnismo* 35).<sup>5</sup>

Another defining feature of the column is a focus on quotidian or seemingly insignificant parts of daily life. Along the lines of González-Ruano’s description of the literary article, most columns don’t offer explicit opinions about the big news of the day, but often begin by recounting a small bit of news they see in the paper, describing a personal experience, or relating an anecdote. These tidbits allow them to analyze larger social realities as Casals Carro notes: “El columnista español tiende diariamente a analizar más la vida cotidiana y la pequeña noticia, e incluso se sumerge en la ficción como mejor fórmula para interpretar la realidad: su realidad” (“La columna” 43). Monzó explains how he uses minor subjects as openings for his columns in a 2008 interview: “A mí me encantan las noticias banales, esas que se consideran tontas, porque, banales y tontas como son, denotan muchas cosas... Los microcosmos reflejan igual de bien que los macrocosmos” (“Superman” 41). This is one way in which columns are a literary form; they are not just commentaries on politics or news, but find moments from daily life as starting points for broader

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<sup>5</sup> This is another characteristic of the contemporary column that can be traced back to Larra who doubles the author and narrative voice in his *cuadros* (Grohmann 36).

reflections. It is through the focus of the minutia of daily life that contemporary columns open up political and social discussions that outlast the headlines of the day.

Most columns have thematic unity and a simple structure. They tend to follow González-Ruano's construction: a grabbing opening leads into a discussion of a single topic that is completed with a concise and affecting closing sentence. Casals Carro outlines this structure of the contemporary column: "en poco espacio ha de presentarse el tema o asunto del que se va a hablar, desarrollar los argumentos con gran creatividad retórica y formular un párrafo final que, más que sentenciar, cierra el círculo abierto desde el principio; un párrafo que quiere dejar huella" (33). Thus, while there may be lines of thought that are found throughout a columnist's career, each column is intended to be read in isolation and should express one idea. For this reason, contemporary columnists have cultivated the art of the closing sentence, frequently ending with a short, statement with impact that closes off the end of the column. These endings have become a signature part of the style of the columnists included in this study as Maestre Brotons notes in regards to Monzó's columns: "La conclusió, com el final del conte, ha d'«atrapar» el lector, convertir el text en una peça redonda, perfectament acabada" (177). [The ending, like the end of a story, should trap the reader, convert the text into a round piece, perfectly finished.] Even though columns are published regularly they, unlike other forms such as *crónica*, are not sequential pieces that create a narrative, but are short, complete, pieces.

Many contemporary columns are also characterized by a clear, concise use of language. González-Ruano in "El artículo periodístico" defines how he believes language should be used in a literary article:

Amamos lo espontáneo, lo fresco, lo sencillo. Una y mil veces hemos querido explicar que nuestro afán de escritor está, precisamente, en la conquista de la suprema desnudez, en llegar a escribir casi con un estilo conversacional, en huir, como del demonio, de lo retórico y de aquello que en literatura, precisamente, hemos dado en llamar, acertada y despectivamente, *literario*.” (397)

His proposal of a clear and simple language that integrates colloquial registers and avoids opacity is found in the work of many contemporary columnists. Most columns are intended to express an air of spontaneity; they are a brief glimpses into the mind and life of the author as he or she goes through daily life. Torres and Monzó have insisted on the need to avoid complex metaphors, unnecessary adjectives, and dense structure in their columns and instead advocate for simple, concise, and direct language use. This is of course not true for all authors including Rivas who, as I discuss in the third chapter, writes some of the most opaque and difficult columns found in the press at the turn of the twenty-first century. But, for authors such as Torres and Monzó the use of an accessible narrative voice is not an attempt to dumb down literary discourse for the masses, but is the renovation of literary style and a break from the dense, metaphorical language of modernism.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, the form of the column demands brevity, and many columnists strive to create an efficient literary language. Part of this efficiency is a precise use of

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<sup>6</sup> During the 1990s in Spain there is a move towards accessible language in all forms of literature, not just literary journalism as Grohamnn studies in *Coming into one's Own: The Novelistic Development of Javier Marías* (12).

language. Columnists often use specific lexicon, words from other languages, and neologisms to use language as accurately as possible. Thus, most columns appear to be natural, deceptively simple and short pieces that capture an instant of the author's experience with the world.

Finally, although columnists are not under any obligation to discuss the headlines of the day, most columns have some degree of social or political relevance. Occasionally an author may publish a fictional account that appears to have little to do with the news, but columns are generally connected to current events or debates. Casals Carro notes that columnists embed themselves in the polemics of the moment: “Aunque abundan los escritores entre los articulistas, éstos se pronuncian ideológicamente sobre cuestiones y hechos de la vida pública. No pretenden, en la mayoría de los casos, que su representación literaria sirva de excusa para no participar en el gran debate de la sociedad” (“La columna” 60).

The defining characteristics of the contemporary columns that I outline here reveal that they are a hybrid form that is neither fiction nor traditional journalism. Scholars have debated whether columns are primarily a literary or journalistic genre—with Santmaría Suárez in *Los géneros persuasivos* and Gross in *El artículo de opinión* representing the two ends of the spectrum, respectively—but they are in essence a genre that straddles the two fields.<sup>7</sup> I agree with Bernardo Gómez Calderón who states in “La columna personal, género en disputa entre la literatura y

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<sup>7</sup> Hartsock argues that critics of literary journalism have historically attempted to define literary journalism as either literature or journalism, with few entertaining the idea that it both draws from and pertains to both fields.

el periodismo” that columns maintain two simultaneous goals: “expresión literaria” and the desire to “analizar, comentar o matizar los hechos, de emitir juicios, para influir la audiencia” (262). Contemporary columns thus demonstrate both a concern for aesthetics and style and an impetus towards social and political criticism.<sup>8</sup>

On the one hand, columns are a literary form in that they prioritize creative expression as Miguel García Posada describes in “El columnismo como género literario.” He contends that unlike traditional news articles that use language as a means to convey information, columns prioritize language and literary style. For Posada, this is how columns convert fleeting daily events into enduring texts as he states about Larra: “Larra hace permanente lo efímero...Larra es siempre escritor, creador, no informador ni informante. Lo supiera o no, busca permanecer con su lenguaje, quiere que sus palabras perduren, lo anima la voluntad de perennidad que define el discurso literario...” (63). Contemporary columns similarly prioritize literary expression over analytic or objective argumentation as Grohmann comments:

la columna de escritor hace alarde de los marcadores de discurso que lo relativizan, tiene finalidades poéticas o estéticas, reduce por lo general al mínimo el componente informativo, su conexión con la actualidad puede ser muy endeble, se vale de un lenguaje literario...Las columnas de escritores, como toda la literatura en

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<sup>8</sup> In this regard, I disagree with Grohmann who argues that columns are a strictly literary form that does not have the pragmatic goals of journalist texts (37). I do not believe that there is such an impermeable line that separates literature and journalism.

general, inventan la realidad, la someten a un tratamiento formal e imaginativo que la transforma.” (37)

Although I agree that columns are a literary form and evidence the qualities that Grohmann describes, I believe that they are also a journalistic genre, largely intended to influence public opinion and counter the dominant voices of the press.

Literary columns are a journalistic form because they are published in the press and engage with current events and debates. But beyond the simple definition of columns as journalism because they are published in newspapers, I believe that literary columns are a way by which authors offer alternative perspectives towards the news. Each of the authors included in this study affirms that the column is a literary form that, at its best, can influence how its readers think about the news and the world that surrounds them. One example is Monzó, one of the most pessimistic voices in the press as I discuss in the second chapter, who, when asked the question “¿Qué es una columna” in an interview with the website *Sincolumna* answers:

En un medio de comunicación es un espacio determinado donde se pueden escribir cosas. Las leemos porque a veces encuentras alguna que cristaliza algo que te rondaba por la cabeza, o porque sobre un determinado asunto te da una perspectiva nueva....Una columna no puede cambiar un mundo, pero puede cambiar una corriente de opinión y modificar un poquito la trayectoria de algunas cosas. (“Me gustaría”)



I argue that columns are not simply literary pieces published in the press, but are articles with the objective of providing alternative modes of reading and interpreting the news.

## **5. Columnists as Public Intellectuals**

I further believe that columns are a way in which literary authors align themselves as public intellectuals who can offer opinions on nearly any subject to a wide audience. While there is much debate about who can be a public intellectual, I understand the public intellectual as defined by Richard Posner in *Public Intellectuals: A Study of Decline* as “a critical commentator addressing a nonspecialist audience on matters of broad public concern” (5). Contrary to the traditional intellectual as Antonio Gramsci defines it in *Prison Notebooks*, contemporary public intellectuals are not autonomous, disengaged thinkers, nor are they necessarily members of the intelligentsia; rather they are people from a range of professions that gain the authority to offer opinion and criticism to a large public. I contend that by way of columns literary authors have become some of the most visible public intellectuals of contemporary Spain.

As the title of Posner’s book implies, the study of public intellectuals at the turn of the twenty-first century largely focuses on their withdrawal from the public sphere since the 1960s.<sup>9</sup> Stephan Collini in “Every Juice-Drinker...” notices the “3-D version—the decline, disappearance or death of the intellectual” that dominates

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<sup>9</sup> This common theme is seen in several studies of the intellectual including Russell Jacoby’s *The Last Intellectuals* (1987) and Frank Furedi’s *Where Have all the Intellectuals Gone?* (2006).

discussion of the intellectual as a public figure (207). As critical work focuses on the intellectual in France and the United States, the events of May 1968 and the end of the Vietnam War are believed to signal the withdrawal of the intellectual from the public realm. One such example is David Schalk who comments in “Are Intellectuals a Dying Species?” that since the 1970s there has been “a rapid return to what appears to be the ordinary life of academics, if not all intellectuals” to “the calm and comfort of the ivory tower” (278). When intellectuals do interact with the public sphere, they are often considered sell-outs looking to market their books or get on lecture circuits (Collini 492-94). Respectively, the commercial benefits of literary columns—Grohmann argues that authors use columns to brand themselves, sell more books, and do more appearances<sup>10</sup>—explain for some the surge in the form in the press at the end of the 1990s. Public intellectuals at the end of the twentieth century are largely considered either dead or greedy, either retreating from the public sphere or shamelessly profiting from it.

In his study of contemporary public intellectuals *Absent Minds: Intellectuals in Britain*, Collini counters that such accusations rely on “nostalgic constructions of the past” and reinforce “patronizing or condescending” descriptions of “a celebrity-drugged public” that eat up watered-down ideas intended for the masses (492).

Rather than adhering to antiquated definitions of the intellectual, Collini argues that the study of intellectuals should shed such preconceptions to “see how intellectuals

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<sup>10</sup> Literary journalism is certainly part of the commercialization of the literary market of the 1990s, along with aggressive marketing, more promotional tours, and new literary prizes (Perriam 209).

can make use of existing media to reach those public who, being neither as doped up or dumbed down as fashionable commentary suggests, *do* want to see issues of common interest considered in ways that are less instrumental or less opportunist, more reflective or more analytical, better informed or better expressed” (495-6). In Edward Said’s 2002 article “The Public Role of Writers and Intellectuals” he similarly posits that while the “romantic-heroic notion” of the intellectual has been done away with, writer-intellectuals represent a new form of politically engaged public thinkers (20).

Said postulates that by the end of the twentieth century the “*maîtres penseurs*” were replaced by the figure of the writer who took on the role of the intellectual by “speaking truth to power, being a witness to persecution and suffering, supplying a dissenting voice in conflicts with society” (“The Public Role” 25). Writers, Said theorizes, are now the public figures that offer critical readings of politics and society. The success of an author’s literary work endows him or her with what Collini terms “cultural authority” that gives weight to his or her opinions and critiques (*Absent* 484). For Said it is the “the aura of creativity and an almost sanctified capacity for originality” still attributed to literary authors that affords them the gravitas to address political and social concerns (25). Said points to the political involvement of writers such as Salman Rushdie, Derek Walcott, Gabriel García Márquez, Elie Wiesel, and Rigoberta Menchú, to name a few, as evidence of the public visibility and political engagement of the writer-intellectual at the end of the twentieth century.

Indeed, writers possess particular talents that Said in his 1994 book *Representations of the Intellectual* argues are necessary for the intellectual to function at the turn of the twenty-first century. He proposes that the intellectual is an individual “with a vocation for the art of representing” who “is neither a pacifier nor a consensus-builder, but someone whose whole being is staked on a critical sense a sense of being unwilling to accept easy formulas, or ready-made clichés, or the smooth ever-so-accommodating confirmations of what the powerful or conventional have to say” (12, 23). Language, for Said, is at the heart of intellectuals’ activities; they challenge what lies behind codified political or journalistic language and have the capacity for “catching the audience’s attention, being better at wit and debate than one’s opponents” (26-28, xviii). Michael Walzer in *The Company of Critics* similarly suggests that intellectuals are “general practitioners” whose specializations are “linguistic and methodological rather than substantive” (9). For Walzer and Said it is the task of the intellectual to counter the voices of the public sphere by challenging the language and discourse that they use.

Said, Walzer, and Collini provide a useful framework for understanding columnists as public intellectuals of turn of the twenty-first century Spain. They are not experts in any of the topics they discuss, but instead offer critique by way of literary expression. Columnists use literary language—be it metaphorical and poetic or pointed and acerbic—to contrast and contradict the voices of the press and politics. Rather than offering expert analysis or insight, columnists counter the dominant voices of the press with a perspective that is personal, subjective, sometimes funny, and most often entertaining. Maestre Brotons details how Monzó

uses humor, irony, metaphor, and analogy to create persuasive literary columns. Similarly, María Celea Foneas Fernández examines how Torres uses different levels of irony to offer a feminist view of gender relations (154-5). It is thus by way of literary style that columnists challenge conventional representations of the news and open up distinct ways to understand it.

Literary columns by Torres, Monzó, and Rivas also explicitly affirm the need for critical voices in the public sphere of democratic Spain. At the same time that their constant presence in the press contradicts the supposed death and withdrawal of the intellectual, their columns vouch for the importance of debate and dialogue in maintaining democratic society. In my analysis of each author's literary journalism I examine how they position themselves as public intellectuals and how each author's particular literary style serves as a vehicle to offer critical commentary to a wide reading audience.

## **6. Maruja Torres, Quim Monzó, and Manuel Rivas**

This study focuses on the work of three literary columnists, Torres, Monzó, and Rivas, who publish in the most widely distributed newspapers in Spain in the 1990s and 2000s. The three authors have much in common: they began their careers as journalists before becoming successful fiction authors, they situate literary journalism as a core component of their body of work, they have published columns regularly during the past three decades, and they have published collected volumes of literary journalism. Moreover, I believe that the work of these three authors evidences the close relationship between the style of their columns and the critique they contain. Although the language that they employ and the issues that they

discuss vary widely, Torres, Monzó, and Rivas all use their unique modes of expression as a way to contest the dominant voices of the public sphere.

Torres began a career in journalism in 1964 working as a secretary for the newspaper *La Prensa*, and later writing articles for magazines such as *Fotograma* and *Por favor*. As a traditional journalist she covered many world events including wars in Panama, Libya, and Lebanon, before publishing her first fictional book, *¡Oh es él! Viaje fantástico hacia Julio Iglesias* in 1986. She won the Victor de Serna Award in 1986 and the Francisco Cerecedo Award in 1990 for her journalistic work, as well as the Premio Planeta in 2000 for the novel *Mientras vivimos* and the Premio Nadal in 2009 for the novel *Esperadme al cielo*. She has worked as a columnist for *El País* for over a decade and is one of the few women columnists in Spain. To date she had published twelve books including one collection of columns, *Como una gota* (1995).

Despite the fact that Torres is one of the most prolific and popular columnists as well as one of few columnists to appear on the coveted back page of *El País* on a weekly basis, her literary journalism has not received any critical attention.

However, I believe that Torres offers a unique model of literary journalism that maximizes subjectivity and candor. She is one of the most politically outspoken columnists and is known for her frank, direct, and often contentious style that stokes controversy. In the first chapter I examine how Torres has brought to the press an uninhibited and opinionated feminine narrative voice that tackles the most polemic issues of the time period, particularly the Israeli-Palestine Conflict and the PP's support of the Iraq War. I argue that Torres inscribes a moral obligation on the

journalist and author to be an outspoken voice of criticism that strives towards creating a more just society.

Monzó was born in Barcelona in 1952 and has lived in the city ever since. His work is as prolific as it is diverse: he has published several novels and collections of short stories, wrote the screenplay for the film *Jamón, jamón* (1992), has translated American authors including Ernest Hemmingway, Truman Capote, and J.D. Salinger into Catalan, and has published multiple volumes of collected articles. He has won several awards including the Premio de la Crítica Serra d'Or for *Olivetti, Moulinex, Chaffoteaux et Maury* (1980), *L'illa de Maians* (1985), *El perquè del tot plegat* (1993), and *Guadalajara* (1996). He also won the Premio Nacional de Literatura in 2000 for his collection of short stories *Vuitanta-sis contes* (1999).

Like Torres, Monzó began his career as a journalist, covering wars in Northern Ireland and Vietnam before becoming a columnist. Over the past thirty years he has published thousands of columns with several Catalan newspapers. Monzó has published exclusively with the Catalan press and has used them to create a public persona as a Catalan, and not Spanish, intellectual. Accordingly, his columns often confront issues endemic to contemporary Catalonia including questions of nationality, language, and cultural heritage. Although not all of his columns are political, he maintains a constant thread of political criticism that challenges Catalonia's politics since the 1979 Statute of Autonomy. In the second chapter I examine how in his columns Monzó puts into question the successes of the Catalan Statute of Autonomy and its related political agendas including official

bilingualism, economic restructuring, and immigration. I contend that the cynical narrative voice of Monzó's columns opposes the celebratory political rhetoric surrounding Catalan autonomy since the Transition.

Rivas is the face of contemporary Galician literature. He came onto the literary scene in 1996 with the collection of stories *¿Qué me quieres, amor?* and has since published five novels, ten collections of poetry, five collections of short stories, one play, and nine collections of literary journalism. Rivas began his career as a journalist and wrote for Galician magazines and newspapers before regularly publishing in *El País*. During the time period in question he writes frequent columns for *El País* as well as longer opinion articles.

Rivas' columns in many ways diverge from the conventions associated with literary columns in Spain. His literary journalism is opaque, poetic, metaphorical, and often difficult to comprehend. In my analysis of Rivas' columns in *El País* I focus on how he uses his particular literary style—a style that contrasts that of both Torres and Monzó—as a means to offer an alternative understanding of the news. His columns put into question the linear progress of democratic Spain and the country's supposed rupture with its Fascist past.

In studying columns by each of the three authors I focus on how the particular literary style of their columns functions as a means of social and political criticism. I argue that as voices in the press, columnists use their distinct narrative voices to counter the rhetoric of the public sphere and offer alternative modes of approaching contemporary politics and society.

## **7. Columns as Middle-Brow Literature**



I understand literary columns as one way in which authors position themselves as public intellectuals that reach a large reading public. But, although columns reach a wider reading public than most literary novels, they are not a popular literary form. Despite the surge in the publication of newspapers after the end of the dictatorship, the sector of the public that reads the press on a daily basis in democratic Spain is surprisingly selective. Richard Gunther, José Ramon Montero and José Ignacio Wert explain in “The Media and Politics in Spain: From Dictatorship to Democracy,” that the number of people who read the press on a daily basis in Spain rose from 32% in the mid-1970s to 36% in 1998. This percentage is far below the 61% of average daily readers in Europe and reflects continuing social problems sowed during the dictatorship including the poor education of adults over fifty and the behavioral norm of watching television instead of reading (52-3). They also argue that such low readership is indicative of the fact that with the end of the dictatorship there was a move to establish high quality newspapers such as *El País*, while newspapers that appealed to less educated sectors of the society disappeared. Thus, the Spanish press largely targets an elite reading public and is inaccessible to many citizens (53). The demographics of the newspapers in which Torres, Monzó, and Rivas publish columns, *El País*, *La Vanguardia*, and *El Periódico de Catalunya*, reflect the fact that these newspapers still reach a fairly selective group of readers.

*El País*, *La Vanguardia*, and *El Periódico de Catalunya*, together with *El Mundo* and *ABC*, are the most widely distributed informational newspapers in

Spain.<sup>11</sup> All three newspapers report that their readers are largely urban, male, and upper-middle or upper class. *El País*, a center-left newspaper owned by the Grupo Prisa with a distribution of 460,000 copies a day, reports that its readers are 59% male, 39% university educated, and 49% middle-upper or upper class (El País: Reasons for 30 years)<sup>12</sup>. *La Vanguardia*, a center-right Catalan newspaper, and *El Periódico de Catalunya*, a progressive Catalan newspaper, both based in Catalonia and owned by Grupo Zeta, distribute 179,535 copies 161,649 copies a day, respectively. In 2006 *La Vanguardia* reported that 62% of its readers were men, 46% were upper or upper-middle class, and 46% from cities with more than 200,000 inhabitants (“*La Vanguardia* 2006”). *El Periódico de Catalunya* is the most accessible of the three papers, but the demographics of its readers are still similar to those of the more prestigious newspapers: 61% of its readers are men and 83% percent come from the middle, middle-upper, or upper class (Zeta Gestión). These newspapers, and their columnists, are targeted towards an urban, educated, middle class.

Literary columns thus bring literary journalism to a large, but not popular, reading public. For this reason, columns are essentially a middle-brow literary form as Pierre Bourdieu defines it in *Distinction* (326). Within the socio-historic

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<sup>11</sup> Newspapers dedicated to sports have wide distribution in Spain. After *El País*, *Marca*, a newspaper largely dedicated to soccer, is the most widely read of all newspapers.

<sup>12</sup> These numbers pertain to printed editions. Readership statistics for the online versions of the newspapers’ online versions are not available. While some, such as Gross, argue that younger readers may be attracted to online newspapers, it is not verifiable that this is true in the case of the newspapers included in this study. Also, as Gross notes, the column in its digital form is not altered, but is a reproduction of its printed version (267).

framework of Spain during the last half of the twentieth century, the rise of middle-brow literature coincides with an emerging middle class that looked for entertainment and socio-political involvement with the cultural aperture of the Transition. But, it is perhaps for its mid-brow nature that literary journalism has not been taken seriously by scholars and critics. For Hartsock, the fact that it reaches a wider, more economically diverse spectrum of readers removes any possibility, from the critic's perspective, of it being "high literature" worthy of study (222). Even with the increased prevalence of cultural studies over more traditional literary studies in academia, middle-brow forms often go untouched. In the introduction to *Spanish Cultural Studies*, Jo Labanyi argues that the focus on 'high' and 'low' and 'elite' and 'popular' dichotomies in the field of cultural studies has excluded mid-brow forms from receiving adequate attention. Columns are neither high literature nor popular culture, but exist in "the messy middle area" as Labanyi puts it (21). But this messy middle area is the site for literary production such as the columns in which the dichotomies between high and mass culture and literature and journalism break down.

#### **8. 1996-2004: *El Aznarato***

The time period from 1996 to 2004 corresponds to a particular epoch in Spanish history, the presidency of the PP (Partido Popular), led by José María Aznar (Madrid, 1953) or, as the historian Javier Tusell defines it, the "aznarato." Understanding that the delineation of all time periods is always somewhat arbitrary, Aznar's presidency frames a period of recent Spanish history. In particular, it

defines a conservative political interval between the social democratic politics of Felipe González and José Luis Zapatero.

The years from 1996 to 2004 in Spain were marked by Aznar's and the PP's conservative politics that followed fourteen years (1982-1996) of the presidency of González, leader of the PSOE (Partido Socialista Obrero Español). The scandals and charges of corruption that characterized the last years of González's term, as well as high unemployment rates and attacks by the Basque terrorist group ETA, led González to call a general election in 1996. Aznar and the PP won a narrow victory, winning only 39% of the votes over the PSOE's 37.5% (Tusell 30). This "amarga victoria" was the beginning of Aznar's term in which he sought to break with the recent past and begin what Aznar labeled the "segunda transición" in his book by the same name published in 1994 (Tusell 38).

Aznar's first term was defined by changes to the Spanish economy. Large corporations including Telefónica, Repsol, and Endesa were privatized, Spain had the greatest economic growth of any European country, unemployment numbers declined, and the national deficit was reduced. In 2001 the London-based magazine *The Economist* labeled Aznar's first term a "striking success" ("José María Aznar"). He was largely popular with the Spanish public during his first term and in the 2000 elections won a much more decisive victory, getting 44.5% of the votes and gaining outright majority.

The relative ease of Aznar's first term gave way to much more contentious political battles during his second term. Two issues—the Prestige oil spill and support of George W. Bush's Iraq War—were to be particularly divisive. Aznar's

government was criticized for its handling of the Prestige, an oil tanker that sank slowly for six days off the Galician coast, spilling millions of gallons of oil into the sea. The government was accused of worsening its effects by giving the crew improper instructions while the tanker sank, of not having the appropriate means of response, and of trying to downplay the effects of the disaster. For Tusell the Prestige “senaló un punto de inflexion en la política del gobierno,” marking one of the first moments of Aznar’s diminishing popularity (327). This was followed by the even more unpopular decision to support Iraq war. Although the majority of the Spanish public did not support Spain’s participation in the Iraq War—a survey from March 2003 indicated that 92% of respondents were against it—Aznar backed Bush and sent Spanish troops to Iraq (Tusell 335). The poor results for the PP in the midterm elections of 2003 were considered backlash from both of these issues (Gaynor). They would also be two of the decisive factors in the PP’s loss to José Luis Zapatero and the PSOE in 2004.

The eight years of Aznar’s presidency were contentious, especially from the point of view of the intellectual left. Aznar maintained a difficult relationship with the Spanish press, in particular with the two largest media corporations, Grupo Prisa, owner of *El País*, and Grupo Zeta, owner of *La Vanguardia* and *El Periódico de Catalunya* (Tusell 119). The two newspapers opposed many of Aznar’s policies and their columnists frequently criticized and challenged his politics. Santamaría Suárez’s analysis of columns published the day after Aznar had been reelected shows the preponderance of negative opinions of the president in the press (“Interesante momento”). Thus, while literary columns are always intended to

evaluate and criticize the political ideologies of its epoch, the time period from 1996 to 2004 in Spain saw a particular disparity between the beliefs of Aznar and the PP and the press and intellectual left. Torres, Monzó, and Rivas are all critical of Aznar's positions and policies and their columns frequently address the political and social ramifications of his presidency.

## Chapter 1: The Critical Obsessions of Maruja Torres' Literary Columns

Nunca he sido objetiva, pero creo que mi subjetividad es muy honesta.

Maruja Torres, "Barcelona es mi amante"

### 1. Maruja Torres and the Subjective Narrative Voice

María Dolores Torres Manzanera (Barcelona, 1943), more commonly known as Maruja Torres, has developed a dual career as a journalist and literary author over the last forty years. Since she first began writing for the press in 1964 she has published innumerable articles, chronicles, interviews, and columns with Catalan and Spanish newspapers and magazines including *Fotogramas*, *Por Favor*, *La Vanguardia*, *El País Semanal*, and *El País*. At the same time she has had a successful career as a fiction author, publishing her first novel *¡Oh es él! Viaje fantástico hacia Julio Iglesias* in 1986. Torres does not separate her literary and journalistic work but instead argues that they are two modes of approaching reality as she states in a 2007 interview: "La realidad nos dan dos posibilidades, la ficción y el periodismo" ("Barcelona"). Many of her novels including *¡Oh es él! Viaje fantástico hacia Julio Iglesias* that fictionalizes her career as a gossip columnist, draw from personal experiences as a reporter, while her reporting is imbued with a first-person, subjective narrative voice not typical of traditional journalism. I understand Torres' columns as part of a career that has consistently defied the conventions of literary and journalistic genres to always prioritize a subjective narrative voice.

Torres' writing career was unconventional from the beginning. As is often mentioned in interviews and articles, she grew up in near poverty in the Barrio Chino

of Barcelona and did not attend college. She describes her childhood during the late years of the Franco dictatorship as “no solo humilde sino inculta” in “un barrio en donde los libros no existían” (“Siempre” 3). While working as a secretary in 1964 Torres wrote a letter to the novelist Carmen Kurtz who published sociological articles for the newspaper *La Prensa*. Kurtz, impressed by the letter, helped the 21 year-old Torres land a position with the newspaper, writing articles about youth culture at the moment under the title *Problemas de juventud* (*Mujer* 68). Torres often mentions Kurtz as a mentor and a pioneer that opened avenues for women authors in late and post-dictatorship Spain (“Kurtz”). This first position did indeed serve as an opening through which Torres entered the journalistic, and later literary, world. But, the early years of her career were a far cry from her later politically involved journalism. She notes in *Mujer en guerra* that during the late years of the Franco dictatorship women journalists were relegated to writing “páginas femeninas” about “maternidad, cocina, salud, moda, belleza y chismorreo,” and were not given the authority to cover the topics of serious political and societal consequence that interested her (73).

After writing for *La Prensa*, Torres went to work for the women’s magazine *Garbo*, and then at the age of 25 took a position writing for the celebrity and film magazine *Fotogramas*. It was during her tenure at *Fotogramas*, a magazine that during the late 1960s brought humor and wit to the celebrity press, when Torres’ ironic narrative voice began to emerge (*Mujer* 109). With the end of the Franco dictatorship in 1975, she began to publish a series of articles about sexism under the title “La ventana indiscreta” for the political satire magazine *Por favor* published



under the direction of Manuel Vázquez Montalbán, Forges (Antonio Fraguas), and Jaume Perich from 1974 to 1978 (McDonough).<sup>13</sup> She published sporadically with other newspapers and magazines including *Pronto*, *La Vanguardia*, and *TeleExpress*, but began what would be her most significant relationship with the press when she took a position with *El País Semanal* in 1982. Torres first wrote under the direction of the author and columnist Rosa Montero for the gossip section of the newspaper's weekly magazine which, as Torres states, placed her in the difficult position of writing gossip columns for "un periódico en el que el Libro de Estilo dejaba muy claro que un rumor no es una noticia" (*Mujer* 151). She briefly left the newspaper in 1984 and moved back to Barcelona to work as a reporter for *Cambio 16* and write columns for *Diario 16*, but returned to *El País* in 1986 to write as a journalist, covering politics, international affairs, and societal problems. It is the long-lasting relationship with *El País* that has become the cornerstone of Torres' career.

It is in the articles, chronicles, and reports that Torres publishes with *El País* that she begins to fully challenge the conventions of objective journalism. During the 1980s and 1990s she reports from Latin America, Asia, and Africa covering international events including the American invasion of Panama, the end of South African apartheid, and the Lebanon War. But this work hardly falls into the parameters of traditional, neutral news reporting. Instead, she always seeks, even in

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<sup>13</sup> Gary W. McDonough studies the significance of *Por Favor* during the early years of the Transition stating that the humor magazine offered critical alternatives including "competing political dialogues, evocations of popular culture, forbidden themes of sexuality, feminist voices and ironies of silence" (120).

her work as a reporter, to insert the subjective, personal experience of the event into the news. For example, Torres published a series of chronicles in *El País* that detail her travels through Latin America in 1989, including the invasion of Panama during which she witnessed the death of her photographer Juan Antonio Rodríguez by American fire. The series was later collected in the book *Amor América: un viaje sentimental por América Latina* (1993). As the title suggests, the collection is as much a tale of personal discovery as a chronicle of the political environment of Latin America at the moment. In a similar vein, the book *La amante en guerra* (2007) is a fusion of the reporting she did as a correspondent in Beirut for *El País* in 1996 and her personal experience in the city. She states in the book's introduction that it "pertenece al género de lo inclasificable" because "no es una crónica y tampoco es un diario ni una reflexión, y es todo eso y también tiene mucho de novela" (15). Her unique style of reporting won her the Victor de la Serna prize in 1986 and Premio Francisco Cerecedo in 1990. For the latter, the award committee noted her nonconformity with the tenets of objective journalism citing her "talante periodístico de gran causticidad e inconformismo, siempre inclinado a cuestionar las convenciones inertes con audacia, penetración irónica y precisión de lenguaje en situaciones y medios diversos" ("Maruja Torres, premio"). When Torres left behind her work as an international reporter, what she calls "la parte más salvaje del periodismo" ("Entrevista"), she did not abandon her commitment to redefining the parameters and conventions of journalism. Instead, as a columnist she consistently examines the press and the ideologies that lie behind its purported objectivity.

Torres' fiction also draws from her personal life experiences. To date, she has published seven novels: *¡Oh es él! Viaje fantástico hacia Julio Iglesias* (1986), *Ceguera de amor* (1991), *Un calor tan cercano* (1998), *Mientras vivimos* (2000), *Hombres de lluvia* (2004), *Esperadme al cielo* (2009), and *Fácil de matar* (2011). She has won two of the most prestigious literary prizes in Spain: the Premio Planeta in 2000 for the novel *Mientras vivimos*, and the Premio Nadal in 2009 for *Esperadme al cielo*. She is also one of the best-selling authors with both *Mientras vivimos* and *Esperadme al cielo* reaching the top ten bestsellers lists in Spain in 2001 and 2009 respectively. Many of her novels blur the lines between fiction and journalism. *¡Oh es él! Viaje fantástico hacia Julio Iglesias* is a comedic account of a reporter following the Spanish pop star that draws on her experience as a celebrity journalist for *Garbo* and *Fotogramas*. *Un calor tan cercano* is the story of a young girl living in post-war Barcelona based on Torres' childhood, *Mientras vivimos* fictionalizes the relationship that Torres had with Kurtz, and *Esperadme al cielo* is a tribute to two of her closest friends, the authors Terenci Moix and Manuel Vázquez Montalbán, who both died in 2003.

By way of this brief biographical sketch I aim to emphasize how Torres' writing has, from the beginning of her career, foregrounded the subjective experience of the writer. Her columns, like her fiction and journalism, center on the personal, emotional, and intellectual insight of the author with direct experience with what she or he writes about. Torres has always connected her writing with her individual identity; even as a journalist she only infrequently published unsigned articles or columns (*Mujer* 146). The epigraph of this chapter, taken from an

interview with *El País*, highlights how Torres distances herself from the guise of objectivity or neutrality in all of her work. The narrative voice and author are even more conflated in her columns in which Torres draws on her range of experiences, from interviewing celebrities to covering wars and strife, to create a persona as a hardened and insightful reporter who can offer unique perspectives about the daily news. In *Mujer en guerra* she suggests that her past experiences shape what and how she writes: “Yo *he sido* en esos lugares. Mi cuerpo de hoy, éste que ahora me condiciona, *ha sido* en Beirut y en Addis Abeba...Lo que fui está en lo que soy, y aquí me tenéis, intentando explicarlo y explicármelo” (231). Accordingly, her columns are closely related to her personal experiences. Unlike many columnists who examine the minutia of daily life in Spain as metonymies for larger meditations, Torres discusses in her columns the concerns that drive her journalism and fiction including war, injustice, inequality, and human rights. She speaks as a witness of suffering and calamity who can question and confront how traditional journalistic forms cover the news.

Moreover, for Torres having a voice in the press is a privilege that carries the responsibility to be the voice of truth that can contradict the dominant voices of the public sphere. She situates literary journalism as a way to interact with the public forum, describing a column as “como estar en la plaza pública, en el ágora, en la vida de todos los días, con los demás, compartiendo” (“He convertido”). She defines her role in this public forum as voice of dissidence and contest as she states in an interview with Eva Piquer conducted for the Catalan newspaper *Avui*: “Un periodista no ha tenir amics ni a la faràndula, (tenir-ne és un pecat lleu) ni entre els polítics (un

pecat més greu)...S'ha de ser respectuós amb el que és digne de respecte, però gairebé res és respectable ("L'imant"). Per això sempre he estat poc respectuosa." [A journalist should not have friends in show business (having them is a small sin) nor in politics (a larger sin)...One should be respectful with that worthy of respect, but almost nothing is respectable. That is why I have never been very respectful.] For Torres it is the task of the journalist and the columnist to be an independent, confrontational, and irreverent voice in the public sphere.

In her columns published from 1996 to 2004 Torres insists on the need for explicit, critical, and contestatory voices in the public sphere to contradict the discourse of politics and the press. The aggressive and trenchant narrative voice of her columns is thus the means by which she performs this role; her direct, contentious, and sometimes offensive language stands in contrast to the codified, neutral language of the press. Following Said's discussion of the intellectual at the end of the twentieth century, I study Torres as a columnist who maintains that the writer-intellectual should be a voice of judgment that strives towards motivating political change. In doing so, she reasserts the values of the Transition, suggesting that writers and journalists should not abandon the critical projects associated with it, but stay committed to critique and debate as part of maintaining democratic society.

## **2. The Responsibility of the Intellectual**

Said's portrait of the contemporary intellectual in *Representations of the Intellectual* is one of an individual agent who openly and fearlessly offers a voice of confrontation and dissidence with the aim of improving knowledge and the welfare of the public. In order to do so, Said argues, the intellectual must take individual

risks by making moral judgments, challenging convention, and taking on contentious or unpopular positions. He coins the expression to “speak truth to power” to describe the task of the intellectual to express “a kind of consciousness that is skeptical, engaged, unremittingly devoted to rational investigation and moral judgment; and that puts the individual on record and on the line” (20). This type of explicit and personal critique is a far cry from what Linda Hutcheon labels the “complicitous critique” of postmodernism. Said disregards the discussions of the impossibility of the intellectual in postmodern society by theorists such as a Lyotard, commenting that “despite postmodernism” there remains a “truly vast array of opportunities” for the intellectual to embody “universal values like truth or freedom” (18). The rejection of grand narratives that characterizes much postmodern theory is, as Yumna Siddiqi points out in “Edward Said, Humanism and Secular Criticism,” “antithetical to the possibilities of resistance to political oppression and willed human liberation movements” (81). Simply put, Said argues that although postmodern theory has rejected Enlightenment principles of progress, reason, and truth, the intellectual still has the responsibility to embody these values and work towards political change at the turn of the twenty-first century.

Said’s broader reflections about the possibility of the intellectual “despite postmodernism” can also be found in discussions of the shifting role of the intellectual in Spain after the Transition. The progressive culture of Spain’s transition to democracy saw, as Elías Díaz comments in “The Left and the Legacy of Francoism,” a “flood of enthusiasm for knowing and discussing a wide variety of political issues” and an emphasis on “a plurality of viewpoints and the need for self-

criticism” (283). The press served as one of the privileged sites for making visible such discussions. Richard Gunther comments in *Democracy and the Media* that the press of the Transition acted “as the principal channels for...democratic values, political information, and norms of differing political views” and “visible arenas in which individuals could debate and disagree with one another civilly” (51). But, with the end of the Transition and the consolidation of Spain’s democracy, this enthusiasm waned, along with political engagement. The terms *desencanto* and *segundo desencanto*<sup>14</sup> have been used to refer to increasing apathy following the events of 1992 when the country fully completed its transition to a consumer society. Isolina Ballesteros in *Cine (ins)urgente: textos filmicos y contextos culturales de la España posfranquista* describes the pessimism of *segundo desencanto*: “La bonanza económica condujo pronto a la despoliticización y la corrupción política; después al desencanto y la apatía narcisista.” Ballesteros also notices a shift towards the centrality of the individual over the collective in 1990s Spain (240). Javier Gómez-Montero in the introduction to the collection *Memoria de transición española* similarly argues that Spain’s conversion to a consumer society brought “la ulterior decepción de los proyectos de emancipación de una generación engañada y

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<sup>14</sup> The term *desencanto*, taken from the title of the 1976 film by Jaime Chávarri *El desencanto*, typically refers to the “general sense of disappointment with the reality of the liberal democratic system in action” during the early years of the Transition (1979-1982) (Graham 312, 396). While some critics continue to use the term to refer to literature published in the 1990s such as Pepa Anastasio in his study of Juan José Millás, “*Tonto, muerto, bastardo e invisible: el sujeto político español y la fantasía de la novela familiar*,” others employ the term *segundo desencanto* to refer to the disenchantment related to the failure of the socialist party during the 1990s.

decepcionada tras la lucha antifranquista y cierto punto decepcionante por su acomodaticio repliegue o abandono de sus ideales en el transcurso de la Transición” (11). Among these values was that of the role of criticism and debate in establishing and maintaining democratic society.

Respectively, the *segundo desencanto* also brought about increased skepticism towards the function of literature and the role of the literary author in society. In his 1998 *La literatura en la construcción de la ciudad democrática*, Vázquez Montalbán describes the diminishing faith in the place of literature in democratic Spain:

Y es que con la democracia llegó a España la ofensiva cultura neoliberal desacreditadora de la dialéctica y la crítica, y legitimadora de la fatalidad intrínseca de la realidad y la internacionalización capitalista del sentido de la historia y de la cultura... Sin proponérselo programáticamente, sino por la simple relación de ósmosis con las vivencias y evidencias sociales, la literatura española refleja decrecimiento y un desdramatizado pesimismo sobre su propia función social. (91)

Despite such pessimism Montalbán maintains that he, among others, have not abandoned what he calls their “obsesiones críticas” (91). He explains these critical obsessions in a 1995 interview: “Yo creo que mientras exista una división del rol social, y en nuestra especialidad es manipular el lenguaje y a través del lenguaje influir y tratar de persuadir, porque en el fondo comunicar es persuadir, la influencia social del intelectual es real...” (“Yo podría”). Montalbán echoes Said’s continued



conviction that the intellectual still has the role of influencing public opinion and motivating political change at the end of the twentieth century. He asserts that the *segundo desencanto* has not resulted in the withdrawal of the writer and intellectual from the public sphere, but rather that certain authors in the face of such pessimism and apathy have maintained their ‘critical obsessions,’ or relentless belief in the role of the debate and a plurality of viewpoints in maintaining democratic society.

We can understand Torres as a public intellectual of democratic Spain that holds onto her “obsesiones críticas” in Montalbán’s terms or “speaks truth to power” as Said describes. In her own discussion of the role of the writer in the public sphere, she suggests that all authors and journalists have the responsibility to offer personal opinion and judgments, stating in *Mujer en guerra* that “cada escritor debe tener una actitud moral y un punto de vista” (22). She reiterates this conviction in the introduction to the 2004 collection *No a la guerra*, a book that compiles voices of journalists who oppose the Iraq War, in which she describes the journalist as an agent of moral judgment:

¿Quién dijo que un periodista es sólo un notario, un testigo de la realidad? ¿Hay alguien más necesario que el que ve, el que comprueba, el que cuenta?...Este libro lo han escrito, pues, reporteros. No son patriotas, ni cínicos. Son humanistas. Patrideros de la injusticia y la vida, dos enormes ideales demasiado importantes para dejarlos en manos de los políticos...Contienen información. Cristalina, nítida información sobre los verdugos y sobre las víctimas.

Sobre las armas y quienes las cargan. Información acerca de la  
mentira. Y están imbuidas de reflexión moral. (“Prólogo” 10)

In her columns Torres takes on the role of a writer and journalist who by way of her personal experience can speak truth to power, or contradict the official versions of the news. One way that she does this in her columns is by using a language that is direct, personal, and judgmental.

### **3. Writing against Neutrality**

When we consider Torres as a public intellectual that “speaks truth to power,” the trademark style of her columns can be understood as one of the ways in which she articulates a contestatory voice. Much attention is given to her steadfast and often controversial political positions—causing a stir, for example, when she stated in the column “Sugerencia” (11/16/2006) that Israel was “gobernado por George W. Bush”<sup>15</sup>—but I believe that Torres’ columns are more than exaggerated political opinions. Instead, I argue that Torres’ columns can be read as a continuous confrontation with the conventions and ideologies of the press. In particular, her contentious and aggressive narrative voice is part of how she challenges the value of objectivity and neutrality in the news. In her columns Torres echoes the debate over the ethics of objectivity led by scholars such as Noam Chomsky<sup>16</sup> to argue that the

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<sup>15</sup> This statement elicited a response published in *El País* from the Spanish Ambassador to Israel, Víctor Harel, who accused Torres of being “anti-semita” (“Antisemitismo”), to which Torres responded in the column “Antisionista” (11/26/2006): “La firmante de esta columna no es antisemita. Soy antisionista. Antisionista, antisionista, antisionista.”

<sup>16</sup> See, for example, Noam Chomsky and Edward Herman’s *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media* or David T.Z. Mindich’s *Just the Facts: How “Objectivity” Came to Define American Journalism*.

guise of objectivity has led to uncritical reproductions of the news and has removed the reporter as a voice of judgment. The language of her columns looks to reinsert a critical, personal, opinionated voice into the press.

The unmistakably brusque, unapologetic, and aggressive language of Torres' columns is part of how she does this. Critics have used a variety of adjectives to describe the language of her columns. Umbral, in a review published in *El Mundo*, calls it “festivo y sangriento” (“Mientras”). Similarly, Moix writes in *El País* that Torres' columns are part of “una literatura de mala baba acumulada en la indignación ante la estupidez de la vida.” But I contend that her use of language reflects more than personal style and outrage; it is also a deliberate confrontation with the language of the press. As a columnist, Torres offers the opposite of a dry, anonymous, politically correct reporting and advocates for a more expressive and judgmental form of journalistic language. Take for example the column “Estos Nazis” (1/15/1997) in which she argues that language used in the newspapers to describe members of ETA such as “*estos chicos*,” “*radicales*” and “*violentos*” does nothing but “enmascarar el miedo profundo” that they have created in Spanish society. She suggests a different term: “Les llamamos lo que no debemos llamarles para evitarnos la vergüenza de bautizarles como merecen: Nazis. Jóvenes o no—y que lo sean sólo sirve para indignarme más, porque tiene toda una vida de nazismo por delante—eso es lo que son. Nazis.” I believe that this column can be read as an implicit *ars poetica* that subscribes to the notion that language should be exact, explicit, and judgemental. In this case, Torres posits that the term “Nazis”, with all of its negative and emotionally charged connotations captures more precisely ETA's

effect on society than the “suaves eufemismos” used by the newspapers. Language is also the way by which the journalist or writer offers moral judgment; instead of using words that convey neutrality, she uses terms that clearly take a moral and ethical stance. Torres’ direct, uncompromising, and sometimes confrontational or exaggerated tone reflects an understanding of the journalist as more than a witness of an event, but as a critical voice in the news.

The imperative the Torres places on the journalist to be direct, independent, and critical is contradicted by the press of the democracy that she depicts as controlled by political and commercial interests. Throughout her columns published from 1996 to 2004 Torres argues that the press has lost the role it acquired during the Transition to provide debate and express multiple positions to become another commodity of democratic Spain.

#### **4. Unfilled Expectations 1: The Press of Democratic Spain**

While Torres defines the role of the press as an independent voice of judgment, she also examines how the press of democratic Spain has abandoned this task. In her columns she frequently argues that the press has lost its political and social imperatives of the Transition to become another commodity stating, for example, in the column “Mas” (9/10/1997) that the press is an “espectáculo” and “parque[s] temático[s]” that treats its readers as “clientes a quienes que hay que halagar y satisfacer.” She further comments that during the 1980s and 1990s newspapers shifted their focus from politics to leisure and consumption, publishing more magazines and supplements dedicated to “gastronomía, decoración, jardinería, bricolaje, guía de espectáculos [y] turismo” (*Mujer* 82). The problem with the

commodification of the press is, for Torres, that in order to please its consumers it creates false realities that are more enjoyable and comprehensible than the news. Torres' columns further suggest that this substitute reality supports political powers already in place, making the media once again a tool of governmental control. She thus explores, as Joan Ramón Resina studies in relation to Vázquez Montalbán's novels in *El cadáver en la cocina: La novela criminal en la cultura del desencanto*, "la transición de la dictadura de los mausers a la dictadura de la imagen" (276). The commodification of the press is seen in Torres' columns to have once again turned the media into a channel to mislead, rather than inform, its readers and viewers.

The column "Herodes" (12/28/2000) characterizes the press and politics as creators of substitute realities that distance readers and viewers from their world. In the column she describes two parallel universes: "lo verdadero real" and the "fantasías virtuales que percibimos como auténticas." One example is the Día de Santos Inocentes, commemorated the day of the column's publication, when in celebrating the "alegres inocentadas del 28 de diciembre" one ignores the fact that the holiday "conmemora precisamente una matanza de niños." For Torres, the disparity between the events of the Massacre of the Innocent Saints and the day's lighthearted celebration in Spain embodies the divide between a fabricated reality, "un cuento que se nos narran para facilitarnos la digestión," and "lo verdadero real." Like the holiday, press and politics function as "un cuento que se nos narran" that supplants the "verdadero real." Torres suggests that one such political myth is "el plan de paz de Clinton para Israel y los palestinos," that hides the facts that "no habrá paz en Oriente a medio ni largo ni quizá a corto plazo." Throughout Torres'

discussion of the press she examines how it creates “cuentos que se nos narran” that distance the reading and viewing public from the harsh realities of the world.

One of these harsh realities is war. Torres’ columns examine how the media turns war into a series of entertaining, awe-inspiring events that have almost nothing to do with death and destruction. Speaking from the position of a reporter who has experienced the calamity of war, she looks at how the media’s coverage of it fails to convey its horrors. In a column published in *El País* in 2009 entitled “La banalización” Torres comments that constant diffusion of images that have replaced the “real” by the “medios de comunicación,” or “redes de amplificación,” have had the effect of “banalización cotidiana...del mal.” Such banalization of evil to which she refers, as Edward Herman studies in *Triumph of the Market*, was first studied in relation to workers at Nazi concentration camps and now extends to the portrayal of war by the mass media: “It is the function of defense intellectuals and other experts, and the mainstream media, to normalize the unthinkable for the general public” (97). This “normalization of the unthinkable” is a consistent theme of Torres’ columns, particularly those about the Iraq War.<sup>17</sup> She argues that the commodification of the media has turned war into digestable entertainment that reinforces political ideologies.

In the darkly humorous column “Culpable” (3/4/2003), Torres notices how the media covering the lead up to the Iraq War focuses on the sophistication of

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<sup>17</sup> Torres was a vociferous opponent of Aznar’s support of the invasion of Iraq in 2003 and published several columns against the war as well as the introduction to the collection *No a la guerra*.

weapons without mentioning their victims. The depiction of war as a science marked by technological innovation and high-tech machinery is one of the ways in which the media normalizes war. As Herman suggests, the “technological superiority” of the invader reflects their “moral superiority” and has the effects of “distancing the public from the slaughter” of civilians (101). Torres notes that among the coverage of “bombas inteligentes,” “bombas de fragmentación, and “B-52s” the fact that they will kill human beings, including civilians, is overlooked. She comments with ironic disbelief that there are civilians living in the country they are going to attack:

Parece mentira pero es rigurosamente cierto...hay que aceptar lo evidente: Irak tiene habitantes. Malintencionados, diría yo. Su perversión es tal que, entre esos habitantes, ¡Hay mujeres! Entre esas mujeres, las hay que han tenido el descaro de ¡ser madres! Por consiguiente, en Irak, contra toda perversión, hay niños y niñas...En Irak se dan también, están e incluso circulan ancianos y ancianas.

In her feigned surprise she adds that these women, children, and elderly that live in Iraq have the gall to “interponer sus cuerpos en el camino de nuestras bombas inteligentes.” Torres sarcastically points to the purely material coverage of the war that allows the citizens of Spain, including herself, to disregard the fact that they will be part of the death of “individuos de diverso tamaño, sexo y edad.” She reiterates that the “verdadero real” of the war, including death, is hidden by the “cuentos que se nos narran,” such as the technological sophistication of warfare.

She further argues in the column “Humanidades” (3/20/2003), published the day of the invasion of Iraq, that coverage of the war is about showmanship and not truth. She observes coverage of the war by the media obsessed with images of weaponry that ignores its consequences. She ironically comments that the death of civilians cannot compete with the spectacle of war technology: “Las víctimas deberán montar un espectáculo de primera, si quieren competir en los informativos con el glamor de los últimos avances en materia de asesinatos colectivos y destrucciones masivas... Tendrán que enviarnos un show importante, las víctimas, si quieren ser incluidas en el prime time.” The media, as Torres remarks, does not account for the suffering these same weapons create. Instead, by focusing on the awe of war and the sophistication of the attackers, it commodifies death and destruction by turning it into pure entertainment.

Torres’ columns further suggest that by turning the news into entertainment the media has once again become a political tool to serve governmental interests. Although the press is not directly controlled by the government, she posits that its digestible images and seemingly neutral reports propagate political ideologies. She examines how the news has shifted from a critical space to a forum in which events staged by the government are continually broadcasted and reproduced. Her position resonates with Daniel Boorstin’s popular study of mass media in the United States *The Image: A Guide to Pseudo-Events in America*, in which he argues that the news is largely compromised of “pseudo-events” that are dramatic, intelligible, and convenient and therefore more entertaining (39-40). Instead of presenting unsettling or unintelligible aspects of the news such as the death of civilians, the mass media



largely focuses on fabricated events such as news releases, leaks, and staged events (11). As Boorstin contends, the media is no longer propaganda that lacks any ambiguity, but instead exists between “fact and fantasy” and is neither “true nor false” thereby creating a world in which “fantasy is more real than reality, where the image has more dignity than its original” (36-7). As Torres describes the “cuento” of Innocent Saint’s Day that overshadows the fact that it commemorates the killing of children, staged events mask more unsettling news. The news is, in this regard, is another “cuento que nos narran.”

She continues to explore these “pseudo-events” in the column “El hotel” (4/10/2003), where she assesses the tensions between fabricated and spontaneous images. The first is the pre-planned show of the toppling of the statue of Saddam Hussein in Bagdad shortly after the invasion of the city that is shown on television stations around the world. She sarcastically applauds the production value of the pseudo-event: “Bien hecho. Bravo. El simbolismo del momento, ya digo, resultó perfecto...Un show a pie de hotel. Nos conocen como si nos hubieran parido,” and comments that is almost made her forget about the atrocities of the previous day when two reporters, including Telecinco’s José Couso, were killed when an American tank fired shells at The Palestine Hotel that housed reporters. But in that forgotten moment, a moment that is not preplanned or staged and that received minimal attention from the press, she finds a more poignant symbol, the Palestine Hotel “lleno de amenazadores paisanos, armado con sus cámaras y sus palabras, y neutralizados en el último momento por la sabia decisión de algún productor de Hollywood...” In that second image Torres notices a different revelation of truth

than that of the falling statue. She suggests that the Palestine Hotel represents an attack on journalistic freedom, including the right to investigate, document, and criticize the war. She notes that the two events close in time and space represent the two versions of the war: one of fabricated images that sell official truths and another that represents the more real consequences of war on society. She asks her readers to focus on this second image: “Miren bien el Hotel Palestina. Contéplelo hasta que les hiera los ojos. Somos nosotros. Los civiles. Iraquíes, norteamericanos, españoles.” Instead of being distracted by the showmanship of the pseudo-event, she asks her readers to consider the news that is less entertaining and digestible but can reveal what is truly at stake in these events, including the silencing of reporters.

For Torres, the effect of the media as a “fantasía virtual” is the disengagement of the public from the political and social realities of the world. In the column “Mírala” (10/30/2003), for example, she suggests that the media turns “un escenario cada día más lleno de sangre” into “una tarde con Mickey Mouse en Disneyworld.” War thus becomes purely superficial, meaningless, and uninteresting. She depicts the Spanish public, including herself, as detached and unaffected: “Nos hiela la sangre y endurece nuestras arterias. Da igual. Da igual, que todo dé igual.” The dehumanizing effect of the coverage of the war is thus twofold; while the citizens of Iraq are forgotten behind spectacular images of war, European and American citizens are so desensitized and alienated that they lose human compassion and empathy and become hardened and cold. Far from the “deber moral” (*Mujer* 199) that she assigns to the media to engage the public with the complexities of

events such as the war, the press presents a simple, easy version of the news that disengages its readers.

As in the column “Nazis,” Torres suggests throughout her work that restoring a critical edge to the press is an act of recuperating language. She sees a lack of expressive language in the press, describing the newspapers of democratic Spain in the column “La bronca y sus analogías” (2/8/1998) as “prensa de monotonía” that is “muy mocho y aburrido” and lacks “la riqueza de sinónimos y analogías poéticas.” For Torres, journalism of democratic Spain is a far cry from the lack of respect for politicians that she vouches for in the interview with Piquer, and is instead completely reverent to institutions of power. Moreover, the guise of objective, neutral language gives control to official news reports, and not the journalist, as she argues in the column “El hilo” (4/29/2004) about the coverage of the news of the Middle East: “Es precisamente el lenguaje aséptico utilizado por los ocupantes y sus cómplices lo que nos ha conducido hasta aquí... Se empezó por conquistar el lenguaje. Para conquistar la tierra y vaciarla. Y así, el pueblo que ocupaba esa tierra se convirtió en un ‘problema’ una ‘cuestión.’” She notes in this quote the dehumanizing effects of neutral language; the way in which a problem as complex, personal, and controversial as the Israel-Palestine conflict is summarized in an empty word that carries none of this meaning. As she argues in “Nazis” that the term “estos chicos” hides the horror of ETA terrorism behind euphemistic code words, she points out how terms such as “problema” remove all of the complexities of the conflict from its discussion.

Torres advocates for a journalism that instead of reproducing official versions of the news is judgemental, outspoken, emphatic, and affecting. She concludes “Bronca y analogías” arguing for the return of expressive language to journalism as a way to bring a critical perspective back into the press:

Creo que los periodistas deberíamos enriquecer nuestro vocabulario al comunicar al respetable que los políticos están de los nervios: entregados a la controversia, la polémica, el desacuerdo, la impugnación, la cizaña, y el altercado. O enzarzados en pugilatos, rivalidades, peleas, peloterías, agarras, discordias, divisiones, desuniones, descontentos, desavenencias, conflictos, oposiciones, impugnaciones, cismas, pugnas, lides, pendencias y reyertas...si escribimos todo esto, tal vez lleguen a comprender—los políticos—lo ridículos y culpables que son, lo mucho que les estamos perdiendo el respecto.

For Torres it is the duty of journalists to speak truth to power and challenge the dominant voices in the public sphere. As a columnist she inscribes this same duty on herself and takes on the role of a political and social critic who gives voice to unpopular, controversial, and overlooked issues and positions.

#### **4. Unfulfilled Expectations 2: Women’s Rights in Democratic Spain**

One way in which Torres offers an oppositional voice in the press by discussing issues that get little attention. One of these issues most commonly discussed in her columns is women’s rights. As one of the few women columnists in Spain, Torres sees it as her duty to expose the continual inequalities and injustices

that women face in and outside of Spain. Moreover, she argues that the promises of equality for women in democratic Spain have not only been left unfulfilled, but have been forgotten.

Torres' commitment to women's rights in her columns is of particular importance because she is one of the few feminine voices in the Spanish press. Casals Carro found in a 2000 study "La opinión en la prensa: retrato de España en el primer año del siglo XXI" that women wrote only 6% of the columns published in the major newspapers and that *El País* employed only five women columnists.<sup>18</sup> She concludes that the "enorme desigualdad en la representación femenina en la opinión publicada en España" is evidence that women are still not chosen to "influir" and "formar opinión" (57-8). Similarly, the editors of *A New History of Spanish Writing* note that although *El País* is the most liberal national newspaper in Spain it, like several other newspapers, has "turned toward a male-led version of history" (Perriam 21). In her autobiography Torres traces her decades-long struggle to leave the "páginas femininas" and work her way up to writing columns for *El País*. As one of the few women columnists in Spain, she insists that it is her responsibility to speak about the gender equalities that continue in democratic Spain.

As a woman public intellectual, Torres posits that it is her moral obligation to continue to advocate for women's rights as she states in a 2003 interview:

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<sup>18</sup> The other major newspapers in Spain had even fewer women columnists; in 2000 *ABC* and *La Vanguardia* had three, and *La Voz de Galicia* and *El Mundo* one. *El Periódico de Catalunya* is the newspaper that had the most, with six women writing columns (Casals Carro 57-8).

No estoy en contra del feminismo; soy feminista y quiero serlo las 24 horas del día, porque es una actitud ante la vida, una defensa de tus derechos y la reivindicación de tus deberes. Reivindico un feminismo práctico, diario que tenga en cuenta que las cuatro mujeres que nos hemos instalado en el mundo de los hombres tenemos un compromiso muy grande con las otras que son pobres, indígenas, golpeadas o campesinas. (“Entrevista” 4)

Identifying herself as one of the few women to enter into the “mundo de los hombres,” she asserts that she must continue to fight for the rights of women who still suffer from injustices. She adopts a feminist stance that focuses on achieving social and political equality. She rejects that such political feminism is outdated at the turn of the twenty-first century, insisting that sexism and discrimination endure in and outside of Spain.<sup>19</sup>

Catherine Davies’ *Contemporary Feminist Fiction in Spain* that studies the work of two women authors and literary journalists, Monserrat Roig and Rosa Montero, is useful in positioning Torres’ political feminism within the context of late twentieth century Spain. As Davies describes, the feminist movement in Spain largely failed due to internal dissension as well as opposition from the Catholic church, political parties, and the media (7). Moreover, many of Spain’s most visible

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<sup>19</sup> Torres’ insistence on the need for political feminism resonates with Said’s statement that at the turn of the twenty-first century, “governments still manifestly oppress people, grave miscarriages of justice still occur, the co-optation and inclusion of intellectuals by power can still effectively quieten their voices...” (18).

women authors have distanced themselves from feminism for concerns of being pigeonholed (6).<sup>20</sup> Thus, although there was a boom of women writers starting in the 1970s, many of these authors explicitly rejected any affiliations with feminism (Perriam 215). Davies examines how Roig and Montero are two of the declared feminist authors of Spain who, like Torres, advocate for a political feminism concerned with women's emancipation and equality.

What Torres' labels "un feminismo práctico" in the previously cited quote aligns her with Roig and Montero who promote a "humanist feminism" as Davies defines it: "The type of feminism they espouse is not radical feminism ('feminismo de la diferencia' in Spanish), nor overtly psychological, nor the feminisms associated with the better known French theorists, nor lesbian feminism. Generally speaking, they tend towards hetero, socialist, and political feminist positions" (10). Torres describes feminism as a political position that asserts that women must still struggle for equality, justice, and liberation. The form of feminist critique that she offers is thus quite different from that of many Generation X women authors whose work is more closely aligned with Hutcheon's definition of the complicitous critique of postmodernism. Candice L. Bosse in *Becoming and Consumption* examines novels by several women Generation X authors, contending that they depict consumption as a vehicle for constructing feminine identities. Torres' definition of practical feminism is largely incompatible with such complicitous critique because, as

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<sup>20</sup> Davies cites several authors who explicitly reject feminism including Cristina Fernández Cubas, Mercedes Abad, and Ester Tusquets (6).

Hutcheon describes, political feminism prioritizes social and political change: “Feminisms will continue to resist incorporation into postmodernism, largely because of their revolutionary force as political movements working for real social change. They go beyond making ideology explicit and deconstructing it to argue a need to change that ideology, to a effect a real transformation of art that can only come with a transformation of patriarchal social practices” (163). According to Torres, there has not been sufficient improvement to make explicit feminist critique obsolete. To the contrary, her columns reflect dissatisfaction with the reforms of women’s rights in democratic Spain.<sup>21</sup>

The central axis of Torres columns about women’s rights is that the promised reforms have been left largely unfulfilled. When asked in a 2007 interview if a glass ceiling still exists Torres answers: “No, no es un techo de cristal, es un techo de acero inoxidable.” She continues by stating that “hemos avanzado muy poco” and that one of the only things that has changed in regards to women’s rights is “un maquillaje en las costumbres” (“Siempre 2”). She suggests that the same inequalities exist, but they are veiled under a common belief that gender equality has been achieved. In her columns dedicated to women’s rights, Torres reiterates this perspective, arguing that the same systems of oppression are still operating, but they are no longer recognized as such.

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<sup>21</sup> In this regard, Torres’ position is similar to that of Roig and Montero who, according to Davies, “believe[s] that the Socialist Party’s reforms have not gone far enough” (20).



In the column “Pasarela” (5/14/1997) for example, she looks at a course offered by the Xunta de Galicia entitled “*Perfeccionamento da muller,*” described as a “*Curso enfocado a mulleres que querran dar un toque de distinción á súa vida: Maquillaxe, comportamento social, pasarela da rúa, nutrición.*” [A course for women who want to give a hint of distinction to their lives: Make-up, social behavior, walking the runway, nutrition.] Sarcastically, she notes how women’s “empecinamiento a ser iguales a los hombres” led them to “estudiar, trabajar, mantener a los hijos y hacer la compra,” and thereby lose their “feminidad.” She ironically mocks the lack of femininity of her readers: “Vosotras, que ahora mismo me leéis con un rictus de escepticismo en el molesto bigote que os ha crecido como consecuencia, precisamente de la repudiable manía de leer.” She proposes that the simple fact that the Xunta de Galicia is offering this course provides evidence that women still face latent sexist ideologies.

What Torres highlights in “Pasarela” is that gender stereotypes are not only still part of society, there are still disseminated by government institutions. The government of Galicia itself still maintains that the construction of women’s identity is makeup, runway walking, and social graces. She argues in the column “Entre la espalda y la pared” (11/22/1996) that the idea that there have been significant changes in regards to women’s rights is absurd: “Se bella y cállate, se decía en otros tiempos. ¿Otros tiempos? No me hagan reír” Her pessimistic position underscores a belief that political feminism is not outdated, but continues to be necessary in order to bring reform. This belief is also manifested in several columns in which Torres argues that the politics of democratic Spain largely ignore the concerns of women.

While “Pasarela” is a funny, sarcastic look at the vestiges of sexism in Spanish politics and society, Torres also addresses more frankly what she sees as the continued disregard for women’s rights by Spanish politicians. She positions herself as the voice for women who are negatively affected by political decisions and who have little influence in the public sphere. In the column “Un voto” (2/26/1996), for example, she protests the fact that extended legalization of abortion did not pass, in part due to the lack of support from left-wing politicians. She notes that the then president of the government, Felipe González, did not vote, signaling “un símbolo terrible del desinterés hacia los problemas de la mujer, mayormente de las mujeres de clases populares, que nunca podrán acceder al aborto privado que el actual orden de cosas reserva a las privilegiadas, entre ellas congresistas y periodistas.” Similarly, in “Mujeres” (4/30/1997) she comments that the sentencing of two gynecologists for performing abortions in 1990 and the fact that rape laws were not changed by the Spanish court is “motivo[s] suficiente[s] e indignante[s] para que todas las mujeres sensatas empecemos a recelar y ponernos como hidras.” But, instead, she notices silence surrounding these issues: “no han escuchado aún clamor alguno por parte del Instituto de Mujer adscrito al Gobierno en curso—tan ambiguamente silencioso sobre el aborto.” Such silence is, for Torres, evidence that women still do not have a voice in Spanish politics and society: “Nadie hablará por nosotras ni siquiera mientras estemos vivas.”

Much like Roig and Montero who, as Davies argues, are disenchanted with the reforms of Spain’s democratic government, Torres expresses indignation with the lack of attention given to women’s rights. She argues that the silence that surrounds

these issues evidences the failure of reform in democratic Spain. And while she comments that no one will speak for “nosotras” she does just that; she explicitly adopts the role of a feminist woman public intellectual with the obligation to bring these matters to the public forum. She inscribes a political duty onto her literary journalism to give voice to those issues that are absent from a male-dominated press.

### **5. *Hogueras de agosto***

The two sides of Torres’ public persona that I study come together in her signature series *Hogueras de agosto* published in *El País* from 1995 to 1997 during the month of August. In a column published at the end of August 2009 in *El País Semanal* she nostalgically remembers the Augusts in which she wrote the series from “lugares tan peligrosos como el pantalán del Náutico de Palma de Mallorca, las fiestas benéficas de Marbella, y Oropesa” (“La banalización”). She also somewhat regretfully acknowledges that the series that graced the back cover of *El País* several days a week during the month of August has become one of her signature pieces. In the series the usually politically engaged Torres writes from the summer playgrounds of the rich and famous covering the comings and goings of royalty, politicians, athletes, and actors. She documents her month of hobnobbing with Spain’s beautiful people with the characteristic irony and incisive sense of humor that runs throughout much of her literary corpus. But aside from their pure entertainment value, *Hogueras de agosto* is a parody of the ideological underpinnings of the gossip press.

Although the *Hogueras de agosto* series may at first seem to be a departure from the topics and style of Torres’ weekly columns, I believe that it is a more playful and ironic continuation of the themes found throughout them. I have

examined Torres' literary journalism from two perspectives: as the voice of a once-reporter who suggests that the press no longer fills its civic obligation and as a feminist-author who examines remaining patterns of sexism in contemporary society. These same themes are found in the *Hogueras de agosto* series in which she examines how the celebrity press creates stories that distance people from their world and propagates stereotypes of femininity. The series is also a parody of her own career; in *Hogueras de agosto* Torres takes an ironic stance towards her own journalistic past, recuperating the topics that she covered for years with the freedom to criticize and even mock them.

The biggest difference found in the *Hogueras de agosto* series is the mode of critique. Although Torres' columns are often funny, ironic, and entertaining they are typically explicit in their political connotations. As I argue, in her weekly columns she uses a direct, aggressive, and personal narrative voice as an alternative to the language of the press. The *Hogueras de agosto* series, on other hand, makes heavier use of parody as a mode of critique. Understanding parody as imitation with a critical difference (Hutcheon 7), Torres imitates the form and content of the *prensa de corazón* as a way of denaturalizing it. But the series is not strictly parodic; instead Torres' narrative voice throughout the series shifts from imitation of the *prensa de corazón* to an explicit condemnation of its role in society.

The story line that holds together the *Hogueras de agosto* series is the ongoing conflict between Torres' persona as a politically engaged reporter and that as a woman who tries to adapt to the values of the celebrity world. She appears to fight against her identity as what she calls a "una mujer concienciada," concerned

with politics and international affairs to enter into the world of “frivolidad” to become an “adulta-burbuja” (“Glamur y patata”, “Vuelve la moda”). To adopt her new position she must, as she states in the column “Morir por las marcas:” “refinarse, aparca[r] sus ansias republicanas...y hasta deja[rse] crecer las garras de astracán.” She documents her attempts to fit in with the celebrity crowd, relating, for example, in “Glamur y patata” how she tries to “ascender en la escala social y convertir[s]e en una matrona digna de los nuevos tiempos,” by meeting with a makeup artist who tells her to moisturize her face with cooked potato (which she later steals from a restaurant to its patrons’ disgust). She at times appears to have completed the transformation, ending, for example, the column “Armonías y arpeggios,” (8/21/1997), with a personal aside to the reader: “(Aviso: sólo faltan 43 días para la boda de la infanta Cristina de Borbón con don Iñaki Urdangarín. Vigílad el cielo.)” But, she does not maintain the parodic narrative voice and in many columns slips back into the voice of the “mujer concienciada” bored with celebrity life.

While she sometimes manages to feign interest in beauty pageants, regattas, and galas, she more often documents her suffering as she covers such events. Unable to shed her identity as a “mujer concienciada” in the column “En plena Era Anal” (8/3/1996), she begs her readers to understand her torment: “Dado que esta noche—anoche, para ustedes—me embarco en un submarino repleto de aspirantes a Miss Baleares a las que acompaña la contraacadémica de la antilengua Sofía Mazagatos, júrenme que, si me sucede lo irreparable—entro en coma—hortera, me arrojo del submarino en marcha, se me desdobra la personalidad, las estrangulo,

etcétera—cada vez que la canten, lo harán en memoria mía.” She sarcastically questions if she can survive an evening with the “adulta-burbujas” who, for Torres, embody antiquated models of femininity and dominate the pages of the *prensa de corazón*.

Taking into consideration Torres’ feminist stance, the *Hogueras de agosto* series is a parody of the *prensa de corazón* that reveals the latent ideologies of the genre. With Spain’s transition to a consumer society the number and distribution of gossip magazines grew to the point where in 2004 six of the top ten most widely read magazines were gossip magazines (Bueno 622). The magazines including *¡Hola!*, *Diez Minutos*, and *Pronto* focus on the private lives of celebrities, fashion, beauty, recipes, and leisure and are largely read by urban, married housewives (Bueno 623, 626). Torres mocks how, as Juana Gallego describes in *Mujeres de papel*, the press distinguishes between the “discurso público,” including the news that is targeted to male readers, and the “discurso privado” of women’s magazines (22). She positions herself and her readers as “mujeres concienciadas” more interested in the reality of public discourse than topics related to the domestic sphere.

The overarching theme of the *Hogueras de agosto* series is that the celebrity press is an unsatisfactory substitute for reality. As in Torres’ critique of journalism, she notes that the celebrity press attempts to create entertaining narratives. But, as she witnesses celebrity life first hand she notices that such narratives are pure fabrication. Neil Blain and Hugh O’Donnell in *Media, Monarchy and Power*, examine the role of royalty in postmodern European societies, and argue that the coverage of royalty by media follows a narrative pattern. Whether the

narrative pattern is that of the fairy-tale or of a soap-opera, the celebrity magazines use images to create a story.<sup>22</sup> But, according to Torres there is no story, and in the column “Morir por las marcas” (8/6/1997) she amazes at the lackluster lives of Spanish royalty. The royal family is of great interest to the Spanish gossip press, and there is still a taboo surrounding their coverage.<sup>23</sup> But, from Torres’ perspective, they are dull. In the column, she describes the monotony as she watches them as they sail their yachts through the Mediterranean Sea: “Tanto mirarles, me mareé, y además no hacían nada. Sentados, aburriéndose como nosotros o quizás más, porque aunque tienen un común la afición marinera, observé que carecen de temas de conversación.” The fact that the royal family is not only boring, but bored, overturns the image created by them in the press. Their lives are not like a fairy-tale or a soap opera, but are instead completely uninteresting. Far from the personalities that the magazines make them out to be, the royal family, as Torres depicts them, is a degraded version of herself and her readers. They are, in this column, symbols that are completely empty of any content.

The *prensa de corazón* is depicted in Torres’ columns as another branch of the mass media that creates substitutes realities. Reality, in Torres’ terms, is the reality of wars, politics, famines, and human injustices, all which continue on, even in the month of August. In her first *Hogueras de agosto* article, “Unos vienen y

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<sup>22</sup> Blain and O’Donnell also contend that in Spain the monarchy still carries symbolic political meaning and has come to represent a historical continuity between pre-war and post-Franco Spain (118).

<sup>23</sup> The censorship of the cover *El Jueves* in 2007 in which a caricature of the Crown Prince Felipe and his wife Letizia having sex is an example of this continued taboo.

otros van” published on the first of August, 1995, she contends that the August break is “un limbo desde el que cultivar la estúpida creencia de que sólo importa lo que nos pasa a nosotros.” As she appears to take part in this limbo, leaving behind her usually politically oriented columns and covering celebrity events, she also never lets that reality slip away. Instead, she consistently questions why the media continues to cover the lives of the rich and famous when there are truly interesting, and important, events happening around the world. In the other bookend of the 1995 *Hogueras de agosto* series, “Nunca digas nunca jamás” (8/31/1995), she describes that while she and much of the reading public has remained in this “limbo” the world has not:

las vanidades que han ardido a lo largo del último mes, escondiendo, con sus humos turbios, los verdaderos fuegos que nunca dejaron de arder. A estas alturas, ya me importa un rábano que Alessandra Mussolini... esté en Marbella o no, o que Lady Di venga a Sotogrande o no... Nunca nadie me había importado menos, y espero que a ustedes les ocurra lo mismo. La portada de este periódico, que se hacía eco, el 1 de agosto, de la acusación del asesinato de Lasa y Zabala contra dos guardias civiles, no ha dejado de sangrar desde entonces. La de hoy, si no me equivoco o no pasa algo peor y más cercano mientras escribo esto, sale con Bosnia el rojo vivo.

Dropping her conflicted identity as a reporter-turned gossip columnist, Torres directly says what she has implied all along: the fantasy that the gossip press creates is an unsatisfactory substitute for reality.



In fact Torres' *Hogueras de agosto* series is not a separate project, but part of her larger body of work as a journalist and columnist. One of the most salient themes of Torres' career as a columnist for *El País* is a consistent implicit and explicit critique of the press and the media. Obsessed with stories over realities and objectivity over truth, the press, according to Torres, has lost the ability to approach the news seriously and critically. Her critique of the *prensa de corazón* is thus not much different from her position towards the daily news, but her way of presenting it maximizes her sense of humor and irony. Documenting her personal experience socializing with the rich and famous she discovers that the lure of celebrity is, to use her term in "Herodes," another "fantasía virtual."

## **6. Conclusion**

In the end, I believe that Torres' columns are an ongoing call for a renewed interaction between the press and the public forum in democratic Spain. Instead of reproducing codified language, repeating staged events, and creating entertaining story lines, the press, in Torres' estimation, should act as an independent voice of criticism. Thus, despite postmodernism and the drastic changes it has brought to Spanish society, Torres advocates for voices in the public sphere that promote and advance democratic ideals. Torres' own "obsesiones críticas" include, among others, giving voice to continued political injustices that face women. While her political-feminist stance and insistence on explicit political criticism may seem like a vestige of the progressive culture of the Transition that are outdated by the end of the twentieth century, it is possible, as Said argues, that the everlasting injustices of the world may necessitate such public intellectuals that speak truth to power now more

than ever. What is clear is that for Torres writing columns is a duty and obligation; when asked “¿Qué es una columna?” she replied: “Un privilegio. Una responsabilidad. Un sprint. Un desafío. Un desahogo. Un privilegio. Una responsabilidad...” (“No me traen”).

## Chapter 2: Quim Monzó and the Cynical Catalan Intellectual

Politically, so much has happened in so few years, and there have been so many lies that there comes a moment when you don't trust anybody—the skepticism reaches a point that you don't even trust your father or mother.

Quim Monzó, “On Literature”

### 1. Monzó, Journalist

Quim Monzó's literary career as one of the best-selling Catalan authors of the democracy has been accompanied by a prolific career as a journalist. Monzó first worked as a war correspondent for the newspaper *TeleExprés* in the 1970s, covering the Vietnam War, the Portuguese Colonial War, and the conflict in Northern Ireland. As he began to publish successful novels and collections of short stories, publishing his first book *L'udol del griso al caire de les clavegueres* in 1976 that won the Premi de Novel·la Prudenci Bertrana that same year, his relationship with the press shifted but never waned. He began to write chronicles and columns for several Catalan newspapers including *Avui*, *El Món*, *El Diari de Barcelona*, *El Periódico de Catalunya*, and *La Vanguardia*. When his popularity as a fiction writer and a columnist continued to grow, Monzó, with the publishing house Quaderns Crema, started to collect his columns in several books, publishing 696 columns in seven collections: *El dia del senyor* (1984), *Zzzzzzzzz* (1987), *La maleta turca* (1990), *No plantaré cap arbre* (1994), *Del tot indefens dels hostils imperis alienígenes* (1998), *Tot és mentida* (2000), and *El tema del tema* (2003) (Maestre Brotons 12). In fact, fifty-percent of his published books are collections of chronicles and columns, and if we take into consideration the thousands of additional columns he

has published over the last three decades, it becomes clear that literary journalism constitutes the majority of his oeuvre. In the time period from 1996 to 2004, Monzó writes columns for two Catalan newspapers, publishing in *El Periódico de Catalunya* from 1990 to 1997 and writing a weekly column for *La Vanguardia* since 1999.<sup>24</sup>

The trademark style and dryly pessimistic take on contemporary life that has made Monzo's fiction famous characterizes his columns as well. Monzó, like many columnists including Torres and Rivas, argues that there is no clear line that separates his literary journalism from his fiction, stating in a 1998 interview with Katarzyna Olga Beilin that the only difference between them is their place of publication:

Mis artículos salen luego en libros y la gente me dice que muchos de ellos son unos cuentos perfectos, aunque están recogidos como si fuesen artículos.... La relación entre mi periodismo y mi literatura es intensísima, o sea, escribo como escribo porque he hecho mucho periodismo. Al mismo tiempo el periodismo lo escribo como la narrativa. Me es muy difícil separar las dos cosas. ("Lo veo" 186-7)

While there are significant differences—Monzó's fiction, for example, is almost always narrated in the third person while his literary journalism most often uses a first-person narrative voice—his columns share with his fiction a bare-bones,

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<sup>24</sup> The columns published in *La Vanguardia* included in this chapter have been collected from the online archive at *lavanguardia.es*. The original date of publication is given for each column.

precise, and cruelly funny use of language. Moreover, all of his work, be it fictional or journalistic, is imbued with a skepticism and pessimism that renders inane all aspects of life, from politics to love. Beilin describes Monzó's "grotesco, mordaz" fiction in which "[l]a fe, el optimismo y el entusiasmo...tiene[n] que contemplarse como una idiotez" (169). In a similar vein Manel Ollé, in "Quim Monzó y las ficciones en guerra," comments that Monzó's columns "reduce al absurdo toda clase de discursos públicos" (35). Indeed, all of Monzó's work depicts contemporary life as a web of fabrications and illusions, a world in which, in Monzó's words, "[n]o hay nada verdadero" ("Lo veo" 185).

In this chapter I understand Monzó's characteristic style and skepticism in terms of cynicism. Following recent discussions of the role of the cynic in democratic society by scholars such as Benjamin Schreier in *The Power of Negative Thinking*, David Mazella in *The Making of Modern Cynicism*, and Louisa Shea in *The Cynic Enlightenment*, as well as the theorization of the cynic by critics including Michel Foucault in his last lecture course "Le courage de la vérité," I read Monzó's cynicism as a critical mode engaged in a relentless examination of the present. I also argue that Monzó offers an alternative version of the public intellectual of a stateless nation who looks to uncover the limits and failures of nationalist discourse. By focusing on his columns published from 1996 to 2004, I examine how Monzó's distinctive cynicism denaturalizes the rhetoric of the Catalan nation-building process and the autonomous Catalan government, the Generalitat, to suggest that democracy has not brought sufficient reform to Catalonia.

## **2. Monzó as a Potential Elite**

By way of his literary journalism, television and radio appearances, and speeches such as the keynote address given at the 2007 Frankfurt Book Fair, Monzó has defined himself as Catalan intellectual committed to issues particular to the stateless nation. All of his work targets a strictly Catalan audience: he publishes all of his fiction in Catalan, writes literary journalism only for Catalan newspapers, and appears on Catalan radio and television programs such as *El mínim esforç* and *Articles que no farem* with Catalunya Radio, *Persones humanes* with TV3, and the late-night television show *Buenafuente* (Maestre Brotons 30).<sup>25</sup> While on one hand such appearances and articles are a way by which Monzó has branded himself and become a celebrity in Catalonia (Guillamet 240), it is also how he has aligned himself as a public intellectual of the stateless nation, what Montserrat Guibernau in *Catalan Nationalism* terms a “potential elite”.<sup>26</sup> Guibernau defines “potential elite” as intellectuals that “prioritize their allegiance to the nation without a state instead of aspiring to be integrated within the state’s official elite” (16). For Guibernau, Catalan nationalism is dependent on intellectuals that do not aim to be part of the Spanish cultural world, but work to build an independent discourse of the stateless nation. One way in which Monzó has defined himself as a potential elite of

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<sup>25</sup> Although we do not know the exact number of listeners, viewers, and readers Monzó reaches, he accesses the widest possible audience in Catalonia. *La Vanguardia* and *El Periódico de Catalunya* are Catalonia’s two top selling newspapers, Catalunya Radio has the largest share of listeners, and TV3 has one of the largest shares of the viewing public in Catalonia (Fernández 344).

<sup>26</sup> Guibernau notices that potential elite are often accused of limiting their work to the stateless nation because “competition is bound to be less intense” in a smaller community. She counters, however, that “a genuine love for the nation and a desire for its flourishing inspires many nationalists, especially in those cases where the nation feels culturally, politically, or economically oppressed” (23).

contemporary Catalonia is by writing weekly columns for the Catalan press that address many of the most salient issues facing the stateless nation at the turn of the twenty-first century.

Monzó is one in a long line of literary authors that have taken on the role of potential elite in Catalonia. Kathryn Crameri in *Language, the Novelist, and National Identity in Post-Franco Catalonia* studies how the centrality of literature in articulating Catalan identity since the nineteenth century has given literary authors a crucial role in the nation building process. Starting with the *Renaixença* revivalist movement that centered on recuperating Catalan as a language of poetry, literature has, in Crameri's words, served as a "tangible manifestation of the existence of a separate Catalan culture" and provided a "sense of historical continuity to the Catalan community" (6). She sees in both the nationalist movements before 1939 and those after the end of the dictatorship a "seemingly unbreakable link between literature and Catalanism" resulting in the politicization of literary issues (6). Accordingly, Catalan literary authors are assigned the role "'guardians'" with the task of "the protection of a vulnerable national identity" (51).

Literary journalism became, especially during the early decades of the twentieth century, a space in which literary authors aligned themselves with political concerns. Pere Gimferrer in *Literatura catalana i periodisme* details how Catalan authors and intellectuals of the *noucentisme*<sup>27</sup> period including d'Ors, J.V. Foix,

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<sup>27</sup> *Noucentisme*, a term coined by d'Ors, refers to the cultural movement between 1908 and 1923 in Catalonia in which art and literature were considered essential to nationalist political goals.

Josep Carner, Carles Soldevila, among authors, saw literary journalism as a means to bring meaningful political change: “el d’Eugeni d’Ors i més tard en el de J.V. Foix—no únicament té aquesta pretensió literària sinó que té una ambició sistemàtica i programàtica de caràcter cívic, polític, i ètic—d’ètica ciutadana—” (19). [That by Eugeni d’ Ors or later by J.V. Foix—don’t only have literary pretension but also have a systematic and programmatic civic, political and ethical ambition—of the ethics of citizenry.] As Gimferrer goes on to illustrate, the goals of their literary journalism included circulating and promoting Catalan literature, establishing Catalan as a language of prose, and standardizing the Catalan language. Literary journalism was also tied to concrete political goals including self-governance and the establishment of scientific and cultural institutions, schools, and libraries.<sup>28</sup> Thus, the potential elite of the decades preceding the dictatorship saw literary journalism as a means to diffuse ideologies that would motivate political change.

Monzó’s columns can partly be understood as a continuation of this tradition of literary journalism in Catalonia and indeed some of the concerns of the *noucentisme* authors can be found in his columns.<sup>29</sup> But, Monzó’s role as a potential elite of Catalonia varies from that of his predecessors in that his columns are not

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<sup>28</sup> The authors mentioned here were involved with both cultural and political institutions intended to meet these goals. D’Ors, Foix, and Carners were members of the Institut d’Estudis Catalans that worked to standardize Catalan and Soldevila had a post with the Mancomunitat de Catalunya. The close relationship between artists and politics was common during the *noucentisme* period.

<sup>29</sup> In particular, the goal of modernizing the Catalan language is present in much of Monzó’s work as both Maestre Brotons and Joan Nogués in “Llengua, comunicació i postmodernitat en Quim Monzó” study.



concerned with articulating a Catalan national identity or achieving political reform, but instead explore the limits and failures of the nationalist discourse of Catalonia since the 1979 Statute of Autonomy.

In *Representations of the Intellectual* Said sees a shift in the relationship between national identity and the intellectual during the last decades of the twentieth century from “patriotic consensus and acquiescence, to skepticism and contest” (37). By the end of the century, Said argues, intellectuals are no longer engaged in promulgating a collective identity, but instead examine how such identities are constructed or invented (*Representations* 33). Guibernau echoes Said when she argues that contemporary intellectuals of the stateless nations of Spain have a subversive role that “construct[s] a discourse which undermines the legitimacy of the current order of things” and “promote[s] the conditions and processes of conflict” (32). Following Said and Guibernau, I read Monzó’s columns as the way by which he takes the role of a cynical public intellectual who is distrustful of the process by which Catalan national identity has been constructed and maintained.

Indeed, Monzó’s work reflects skepticism towards the role of the literary author as a potential elite that can articulate and protect national identity. He distances himself from the traditional Catalan intellectual by putting into question the proximity between politics and literature that defines Catalanism. The epigraph that begins this chapter is Monzó’s response when asked about the relationship between nationalism and literature in a 1989 interview. He describes a society in which hopes for significant change have already been dashed, making the project of building national identity in terms of language and literature useless. He also notes a

shift from literary *resistencialisme*<sup>30</sup>—using literature to resist the oppression of Catalan culture—to skepticism. Ollé comments that Monzó’s work reflects a shift towards writing literature in a stateless nation when “dejó ya de tener sentido escribir para salvar els mots (Espriu) y el país, o para cambiar el mundo” (30).<sup>31</sup> In fact, the keynote speech that Monzó gave at the 2007 Frankfurt Book Fair is in large part a sarcastic meditation on the role of literature and the public intellectual in defining national identity in the twenty-first century. Tracing a lineage through Ramon Llull, Pau Casals, and Salvador Dalí, all who articulated Catalan culture and language at certain historical moments, he finds himself, the keynote speaker, questioning his own value: “Dubta també si—si ho diu—els que l’escolten hi pararan gaire atenció. Dubta també si—si ha paren atenció—entendran gaire què vol dir (“Senyores”). [He doubts—if he gives the speech—that those who listen will pay any attention. He also doubts—if they pay any attention—that they will understand much of what he wants to say.] At the same time that Monzó takes on the role of a potential elite—in the keynote speech bringing an unapologetic defense of Catalanism to an global audience—he questions the relevance of the public intellectual in a stateless nation that, by his account, has already failed.

Defining Monzó as a potential elite of Catalonia is also complicated by the fact that he has published the majority of his columns since 1990 in Spanish rather

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<sup>30</sup> *Resistencialisme* was the dominant discourse in post-Franco Catalonia that sought to preserve and disseminate high literature in Catalan (Fernández 96).

<sup>31</sup> This shift also allowed writers to break from the traditional models of Catalan literature and write more narrative (Ollé, Nogués).

than Catalan. Due to the centrality of language and literature in Catalan nation building, potential elite are largely defined by their commitment to publishing in the minority language. But, Monzó, after a seven year period in which he published all of his literary and journalistic work in Catalan, began to publish columns in *El Periódico de Catalunya* in Spanish in 1990 (Piquer 171). In 1999, when taken on as a columnist for *La Vanguardia*, he continued to write columns in Spanish.<sup>32</sup> Despite the controversy surrounding Monzó's decision to stop writing exclusively in Catalan, I believe that his columns published in Spanish reveal that potential elite of stateless nations are not defined solely by their use of a minority language, but by how they create a discourse specific to the stateless nation.

In *Escribir la catalanidad: lengua e identidades culturales en la narrativa contemporánea de Cataluña*, Stewart King proposes a new understanding of Catalan literature not as just literature written in Catalan, but literature that expresses a Catalan identity. He argues that many of Catalonia's most important contemporary authors including Vázquez Montalbán, Moix, Roig, and Gimferrer, to name a few, write in both languages, often for reasons that are more economically than politically motivated: "para el escritor en lengua catalana que quiere ser escritor profesional, escribir en castellano es casi una necesidad para vivir" (53). King argues that Catalan identity can be expressed in Spanish by the incorporation of Catalan words and phrases, the use of Spanish expressions particular to Catalonia, and references to

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<sup>32</sup> When collected in compilations Monzó translates columns originally published in Spanish to Catalan. The only collection to be published in both languages is *El tema del tema*, a book he simultaneously edited in Spanish in Catalan in 2003 (Ramos).

specifically Catalan images (56-67). David D. Laitin and Guadalupe Rodríguez Gómez corroborate this notion in their study of discourse style in the Catalan press entitled “Language, Ideology and the Press in Catalonia.” They found that even Spanish language newspapers in Catalonia such as *La Vanguardia* have patterns of language use that demonstrate specifically Catalan ideologies (17).<sup>33</sup> Although Monzó’s columns are published in Spanish, they are infused with Catalan words and phrases, make frequent reference to Catalan places, people and culture, and address issues relevant to Catalan society.

Moreover, many Catalan writers go beyond including cultural and linguistic particularities in their texts to create alternatives to Spanish national discourse. King brings a post-colonial perspective to the study of Catalan literature in order to analyze how Catalan writers, including many who write in Spanish, challenge the fundamentals of a centralist understanding of Spain: “Tales escritores se disputan la centralización de la cultura española a enfatizar lo local y lo periférico sobre lo universal y lo céntrico; escriben contra las metanarrativas españolas mediante el uso de narrativas que disputan y socavan simultáneamente estas metanarrativas” (64). King’s reading of the work of Juan Goytisolo and Vázquez Montalbán as disrupting Spanish national history sheds light on how Monzó acts as a potential elite even when writing in Spanish. In particular, in his columns Monzó calls into question the

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<sup>33</sup> For example, when discussing the Spanish government writers in *La Vanguardia* use the phrase “el gobierno español” while writers in *El País* refer to it as “el gobierno.” According to Laitin and Rodríguez Gómez this reflects “the Catalanist assumption that there is not a single government” (17-18).

fundamental values of the Autonomous Communities System that defines contemporary Spain.

Monzó's decision to write columns in Spanish also underscores the tension between literary authors as potential elite and the limited opportunities for publishing in Catalan in the mass media. The Generalitat's focus on promoting the publication of literature in Catalan has come at the expense of more popular forms of writing. The press, in particular, is largely published in Spanish with only 12% of the daily press and one weekly news magazine, *El Temps*, published in Catalan in the 1990s (Fernández 344). Matthew Tree in "Mort de dama?: Una visió personal de l'estat actual de la literatura catalana" argues that cultural production in Catalan exists on two ends of the spectrum, the "high seriousness" and the "vulgar," but lacks any mid-brow production that can bridge the two (3). The reading public has also resisted journalism in Catalan, with only 37% of respondents in a 2003 survey answering that they ever read the press in Catalan (Institut d'Estadística). Authors therefore face the choice of publishing literary journalism in Catalan in magazines and newspapers with a limited scope, or reaching a broader reading public by writing in Spanish.<sup>34</sup>

Monzó has chosen the latter of the two options and has written regular columns in Spanish since 1990. Shortly after ending his exclusive use of Catalan he did an interview with Marta Nadal published under the title "Quim Monzó: Contra la

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<sup>34</sup> Of course, this choice does not only pertain to literary journalism. But, while an author's decision to publish his or her fiction in Spanish or Catalan may dictate its reception and distribution, there is a much larger market for literature than journalism in Catalan.

hipocresia de una falsa normalitat” in the literary magazine *Serra d’Or*, in which he attributes his decision to discrimination against authors publishing in Catalan in the mass media, a linguistic normalization process focused on Catalan as a literary language, and the failure to recognize the shortcomings of the Catalan nation building project. As the title of the interview suggests, Monzó argues that the fact that it is accepted that the mass media is published in Spanish, and not Catalan, is evidence of the collapse of the nation building project:

Es troba d’allò més normal que un escriptor faci l’obra «creativa» en català i el periodisme en espanyol. No seria fins i tot menys greu a lo contrari? Quan faig un article a «El Periódico» hi ha prop de mig milió de lectors potencials. D’una novel·la—posem per cas *La magnitud de la tragedia*—hi ha cinquanta mil lectors potencials. L’article de diari en espanyol té deu vegades més lectors. En canvi, tothom sembla trobar-ho normalíssim. ... A mi em sembla molt greu. Que pensin que n’hi ha per tant és una demostració més que la societat catalana està podrida. Que això de Catalunya s’ha acabat.

(867)

It is considered normal that a writer does ‘creative’ work in Catalan and journalism in Spanish. Wouldn’t the opposite be less severe? When I write an article for “El Periódico” there are close to half a million potential readers. For a novel—for example *La magnitud de la tragedia*—there are fifty thousand potential readers. An article in a Spanish newspaper has ten times more readers. On the other hand,

everyone seems to find it very normal... To me it seems very serious.

Those who think it isn't are one more example that Catalan society is rotten. That Catalonia is over.

Despite the fact that Monzó begins to write columns in Spanish he maintains that the prevalence of Spanish in the mass media is evidence of the failure of the nation building project. His columns since continue to espouse an unequivocal Catalanist perspective that portrays the reforms since the Statute of Autonomy as detrimental to the survival of Catalan language and culture.

Monzó offers an alternative version of the public intellectual of Catalonia by publishing columns in Spanish while maintaining a Catalanist perspective, putting into question the role of literature in creating national identity, and taking a critical stance towards the autonomous government and its policies. By doing so he, in Maestre Brotons' words, "s'allunya de la imatge típica de l'intel·lectual i, concretament, de l'intel·lectual català (57). [distances himself from the typical image of the intellectual and, concretely, of the Catalan intellectual.] I further understand Monzó as a cynical intellectual whose proclivity towards skepticism and suspicion, along with an unadorned, brazen use of language, puts into question the fundamental values of Catalan identity and politics. As a potential elite of Catalonia, he takes on the assumed benefits and successes of the nation building project since 1979, arguing that political rhetoric has normalized what he sees as the continued destruction of Catalan language, culture, and society.

### **3. The Cynical Public Intellectual**

Critics describe Monzó's work as pessimistic, skeptical, and indifferent, but not cynical. The cynical perspective, however, most accurately describes the suspicion of language, distrust of politics, and despair for the future seen in Monzó's literary journalism. Indeed, the very title of his 2000 collection of columns *Tot és mentida* epitomizes his cynical perspective. The central idea of the book, that the contemporary world is a network of deceptions and fabrications, precisely represents the cynic's distrust of everyone and everything. But, the negative connotations associated with cynicism—especially nihilism and apathy—have made it a troublesome term to use. Shea sees a “semantic shift” from the nineteenth to twentieth century whereby cynicism loses its traditional meaning with roots in the school of Greek philosophy of the Cynics to come to commonly refer to “an attitude of disillusioned self-interest” (132). The recent work of critics such as Mazella and Schreier looks beyond connotations of pessimism and political disengagement to explore the critical potential of the cynic (Schreier 6). They find in Diogenes of Sinope, the cynic who by way of his ascetic lifestyle, outrageous behavior, and direct language denaturalized the customs and norms of Athens, a form of critique that takes on conventional modes of thinking and acting to expose how they have gone unexamined (Schreier 35).

The critical potential of the cynic lies in that, in Schreier's words, he “illuminates the limits of convention...in order to denaturalize it” (36). He argues that cynical critique goes after what appears self-evident and natural in order to “disclose the operation of normalization” (35). Foucault's depiction of the cynic is similarly rooted in how he attacks normalized practices, both individual and



institutional: “it is also a fight against customs, against conventions, against institutions, against laws, against a certain condition of humanity; it is a combat against vices...that depend on, or are at the root of, so many habits, laws, political organizations, or social conventions” (qtd. in Shea 184). At the heart of the cynic’s critical project, from Diogenes<sup>35</sup> who challenged the customs of ancient Greece to contemporary cynics such as Monzó, is defamiliarizing what has been accepted as normal or natural. The cynic does this by way of a brazen language that encodes nothing, a satirical, irreverent sense of humor, and outrageous and challenging criticism.

The revival of the cynic during the last decades of the twentieth century with Peter Sloterdijk’s 1983 *Critique of Cynical Reason* and Foucault’s 1984 “Le courage de la vérité,” as well as more recent scholarly work on the cynic, is in large part because these authors see in the cynic a critical perspective that resonates with the disillusionment of the period.<sup>36</sup> In his review of Sloterdijk’s book, Andreas Huyssen understands his interest in cynicism as a response to “a generation that had its formative experiences in the 1960s and that has since then seen its hopes not so much dashed as crumble and fade away” (159). Huyssen describes a moment in which Enlightenment beliefs in progress and utopian hopes for the future are no longer relevant, rendering rational critique useless (163). The cynic, from both

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<sup>35</sup> Diogenes was one of the founders of the cynic philosophy who embodied his motto “deface the currency!” by rejecting the conventional values of Athens.

<sup>36</sup> Shea also reads Sloterdijk’s and Foucault’s revival of cynicism as a way to establish a different relationship to the Enlightenment, stating that they “call on Cynicism as an alternative to Adorno’s negative dialectics and to Habermas’s discourse ethics, a third way of conceiving the philosophical task of modernity” (198).

Sloterdijk's and Foucault's perspective, allows for a form of critique that does not look towards a utopian future, but instead engages in a relentless critique of the present. Shea comments that cynicism allows Foucault to conceive of Enlightenment not as the "forward march of progress" but as a "critical investigation of our historical present" (172). Cynicism is thus a critical perspective that can respond to the increased pessimism and skepticism towards the future that marks the second half of the twentieth century.

In the case of Spain generally, and Catalonia specifically, the end of utopian dreams comes with the conclusion of the transition to democracy. In Catalonia the hopes of autonomy and flourishing language and culture were only partially met after the 1979 Statute of Autonomy. In his study of Juan Marsé's 1990 *El amante bilingüe* Joan Ramón Resina describes the "foundering utopian expectations" in which "the post-Franco reconstruction of the Catalan identity" is "a scam" ("The Double" 100). Monzó, unlike the potential elite that preceded him, does not anticipate in his columns a revolutionized future, but witnesses in the present the ruins of a society that has hardly lived up to the hopes of the past. His characteristic cynicism is a critical mode that does not maintain any ideals for a better future, but provides, in Shea's terms, "an attitude grounded in, and devoted to, a permanent critique of our present" (177).

I thus understand Monzó as a cynic public intellectual whose ongoing critique of the present is meant to engage his readers in self-critical examination. Shea argues the cynic provides a way to rethink the role of the public intellectual in the late decades of the twentieth century. She sees in both Sloterdijk's and Foucault's

depiction of the cynic a “more engaged type of scholar, one who refuses to relegate his critiques to an abstract sphere divorced from the everyday workings of politics and society” (199). Rather than the Enlightenment ideals of “free dialogue grounded in the public use of reason” the cynic, for Shea, “attempts to break the rules that govern intellectual conversations so as dislodge established modes of thought” (151). The cynic public intellectual uses audacious language, satire, and a scurrilous sense of humor to expose the limits of what is dictated by decorum or custom. In this way, Monzó in his columns pushes his readers to consider how what they consider normal or natural has been constructed and internalized.

#### **4. The Language of the Cynic**

When seen through the lens of cynicism, the trademark style of Monzó’s columns—their skeletal use of language, crude sense of humor, and uncommon directness—is a way in which he breaks with conventional uses of language. In a 1990 interview published in *El Temps*, Monzó defines his columns as an ongoing confrontation with the language of the public sphere: “en qualsevol cas, però, l’eix dels articles continua sent el mateix: la lluita contra el tòpic, contra el lloc comú, contra la banalitat, contra el blablablà” (“Una maleta” 87). [the central idea of the columns is still the same: the fight against the cliché, against the commonplace, against banality, against the blah blah blah.] The minimalist structure and language, first person narrative voice, and shameless sense of humor of Monzó’s columns all function to combat the “blablabla” and reveal what lies underneath clichéd, commonplace language.

Monzó's columns are most often narrated from a first-person point of view that observes the world with incredulity often bordering on disgust. Piquer in "Quim Monzó, periodista" aptly describes his columns as a "crònica personal" [a personal chronicle] that ironically confronts "la mediocritat ambiental que ens embruta els pulmons" [the environmental mediocrity that dirties our lungs] (169). Indeed, each week's column adds another episode to his encounters with a world filled with inane habits, misleading language, and worthless politics. Much like Diogenes who wanders the streets of Athens exposing the absurdity of customs (Schreier 33), the narrative voice of Monzó's columns finds evidence in his everyday experience in Barcelona that things are not what they are said to be. In particular, simple moments from everyday life—a lunch at a local market, an ad in the newspaper, a conversation overheard in a bar—expose the disjunction between what is purported to be true by Catalan politicians and life in the city.

The austere, candid, and, in Foucault's terms, parrhesiastic language of Monzó's columns is one way in which he challenges customary use of language. Like much of his fiction, his columns are instantly recognizable for their short sentences and paragraphs, simple lexicon, and sparse use of adjectives. For Ollé it is by way of an "esquelético pero muy preciso lenguaje" that Monzó's columns give voice to the "observación minusiosa de la realidad más dura" (8). Such characterization resonates with Foucault's definition of the language of the cynic as parrhesia, speaking "without dissimulation or reservation, without set phrases or rhetorical ornamentations that might encode or mask it" (qtd. in Shea 177). Shea, following Foucault, further defines parrhesia as a personal, critical, direct use of

language: “parrhesia can be defined as the act of speaking the truth to a person with clear, unadorned words...the rhetoric of the parrhesiast is blunt, committed, and courageous; it places critique before consensus and peace” (178). Parrhesia, Foucault argues, is an essential component of the cynic’s critique because it is the way in which he strips away the language in which customs and norms are couched. I read the bare-bones structure and style of Monzó’s columns that makes meaning exact and unambiguous as a confrontation with what he sees as the deceptive and misleading language of politics and the press.

The language of Monzó’s columns also breaks rules of taste, decorum, and political correctness. In particular, their caustic and sometimes prurient sense of humor coincides with Mazella’s description of the “uninhibitedly ironic, shameless, and satirical tone” of the cynic (30). Maestre Brotons understands the “mordaç i corrosiu” [scathing and corrosive] sense of humor of Monzó’s columns in the tradition of Larra’s *costumbrista* articles as a way to mock social and cultural habits. But, Monzó’s sense of humor goes beyond mocking and is often bawdy, scatological, politically incorrect, and sometimes shocking. For Mazella such “violations of linguistic and social decorum” are a way to challenge “existing values in the most ostentatious and public fashion possible” (30). By breaking rules of both tact and taste Monzó’s sense of humor exposes the rules surrounding what can and cannot be said in the pages of the daily press.

The style of Monzó’s columns is thus part of his relentless critique of the deception and illusions that make up contemporary life. Although his direct, unadorned style can seem, in Ollé’s terms, “ofensiva de tan evidente” (32), and his

crude, aggressive narrative voice may come across as misanthropic or distasteful, these characteristics are part of his fight against the “blablabla.” Moreover, as Foucault argues, pugnacity and candor are at the core of the cynic’s critical project: “One might say that the Cynic is, in a sense, a benefactor, but a benefactor who is essentially, fundamentally, constantly aggressive. An aggressive benefactor, whose principle instrument is, of course, the famous diatribe...He is useful because he *fights*, he is useful because he *bites*, he is useful because he *attacks*” (qtd. in Shea 183). It is by way of what Huyssen calls the “reversal of the civilizing process” that cynics such as Monzó engage in a critical examination of what is held to be true and normal (168).

#### **4. Defamiliarizing Catalanism**

My analysis of Monzó’s columns focuses on how his cynicism functions as a critical tool that defamiliarizes the unexamined assumptions behind the Catalan nation building project since 1979. I elaborate on Ollé’s assertion that Monzó’s literary journalism “[m]uestra...las maniobras de distracción y engaño que se ocultan detrás de los eufemismos públicos y políticamente correctos,” to examine how his columns cast suspicion upon how the Generalitat has defined the terms of the nation building process. Tenets of contemporary Catalan politics including bilingualism, tourism, and immigration, are seen in Monzó’s columns as deceptive political rhetoric that has normalized the problems that plague Catalan society including linguistic and racial antagonisms and uncontrolled development. Monzó, as a potential elite of Catalonia at the turn of the twenty-first century takes on a

subversive role that undermines a political system that, from his perspective, is nothing but a scam.

The way in which Monzó subverts the values of democratic politics in Catalonia echoes how in his fiction he undermines the implicit ideologies of literature. Montserrat Lunati in “Quim Monzó i la re-escriptura irònica de la fantasia” and “Quim Monzó i el canon occidental: Una lectura de ‘Pigmalió,’” examines how Monzó’s parodies of well-known stories and fairy-tales de-naturalize the implicit values of canonized literature. According to Lunati, Monzó’s stories “estableixen un diàleg conflictiu amb obres literàries i motius llegendaris del cànnon occidental, un diàleg que altera, ‘desnaturaliza’ supòsits culturals de la nostra educació sentimental que la tradició ha repetit sense qüestionar” (“Quim Monzó i el cànnon” 1). [establish a conflictive dialogue with other literary works and legendary motives from our sentimental education that tradition has repeated without questioning.] Moreover, Monzó’s fiction, for Lunati, puts into question “valor mítics que sovint han servit per escriure la veritat oficial...l’heroïsme, la justícia, la generositat, la solidaritat, el progrés, les prerogatives immediates i sovint invisibles de la masculinitat, etc.” (“Pigmalió” 2). [mythical values that have often served to write official truth...heroism, justice, generosity, solidarity, progress, the immediate and often invisible prerogatives of masculinity, etc.] Monzó’s literary journalism, rather than confronting implicit ideologies of literature, establishes a conflictive

dialogue with the political rhetoric espoused by the Generalitat, and especially its longtime president Jordi Pujol.<sup>37</sup>

One of the principles that Monzó challenges most frequently in his columns is the value of tourism to Catalonia. He disrupts the consensus surrounding tourism as the stimulus for Barcelona's economic and infrastructural regeneration to reveal the detrimental effects of tourism on civic life. He contradicts the rhetoric of the Barcelona-model of tourism that touts the possibility of economic expansion while maintaining urban civic culture, arguing that it has masked how tourism has compromised the well-being of citizens of the city. In two columns published in *La Vanguardia*, "El turismo basura" (7/17/2002) and "Por un equilibrio ecológico" (1/31/2002), Monzó denaturalizes the purported value of tourism to Barcelona.

In his discussion of tourism Monzó challenges the assumed benefits of the Generalitat's promotion of Catalonia and especially Barcelona as tourist destinations. Since the 1978 Constitution autonomous governments have promoted the cultural particularities of their communities to attract tourists, making nationalities of Spain, in the words of Eugenia Afinoguénova and Jaume Martí-Olivella in *Spain is (Still) Different*, "the source of a varied and rich network of local and regional industries that underline their own specific cultural heritage as major tourist assets" (xxviii). The authors also point out that tourism in Spain is not "confined to the role of the free-market player," but is a "powerful state-guided

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<sup>37</sup> Pujol was President of the Generalitat and party leader of *Convergència i Unió* from 1980 to 2003.



force” (xvi). Since the Transition both the Catalan Generalitat and Barcelona’s city council have invested millions of Euros to reconfigure Catalonia as an international tourist destination. Andrew Smith in “Conceptualizing City Image Change: The ‘Re-Imaging’ of Barcelona” describes three campaigns sponsored by Barcelona’s government to brand the city as a tourist destination: the “*modernista* city,” the “sporting city,” and the “monumental city” (11-15). The longest running was the *Barcelona posa’t guapa* campaign from 1986 to 1999 that focused on refurbishing the facades of the *modernista* buildings in the city (Balibrea 191). Such efforts have continually increased the number of tourists that visit Barcelona well after the travel boom of the 1992 Olympic Games and have made it the fastest growing European tourist destination of the last ten years with seven million visitors coming to the city in 2007 (Barcelona Turisme). Due to the promotion of Catalonia as an international tourist destination, tourism from countries other than Spain has grown the most, and of those seven million visitors, five million came from outside of Spain (Barcelona Turisme). The efforts to reconfigure Barcelona as a tourist destination have received overwhelmingly favorable reception in and outside of Catalonia.

In fact, until 2004 there was broad consensus that tourism benefited Catalonia by revitalizing its economy, creating thousands of new jobs, and drawing in slews of investors.<sup>38</sup> Many urban planners lauded the reconfiguration of Barcelona as a major tourist destination for the Olympic Games as a triumphant

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<sup>38</sup> This public consensus may have ended in 2004 with the Forum de Barcelona, an event that was criticized for being a ruse for speculation.

success, in part because of a focus on limited gentrification, consultation with neighborhood groups, and support for small businesses (García 117-19).

Barcelona's urban development was also celebrated internationally: the city won the Gold Medal from the Royal Institute of British Architects in 1999 and the term "Barcelona model" came to mean a model of urban regeneration that maintained civic life while increasing tourist revenue. In fact, there was virtually no internal or external criticism of Barcelona's tourist development before 2004 as Mari Paz Balibrea examines in "Urbanism, Culture and the Post-Industrial City: Challenging the 'Barcelona Model.'" "Barcelona has continued to enjoy an uninterrupted holiday of national and international prestige, as well as a particularly unanimous consensus with regard to the quality and beauty of its urban developments and the habitability of the city" (187). The quality and beauty of the transformed Barcelona was also a common theme in the press during the late 1990s and early 2000s. One article published in *La Vanguardia* describes Barcelona's metamorphosis from "un gris sucio y mate" to "una gama amplia de colores" (Vivanco), while another states that the *Posa't guapa* campaign was "una campaña pionera a escala mundial" that improved life for citizens, "despertando el orgullo de la ciudad" (Soler). It was widely accepted that the Generalitat's promotion of tourism was exemplary in its efforts to bring economic growth while improving the welfare of citizens of the city.

In his columns published from 1996 to 2004, Monzó repeatedly puts into question the self-evidence of the value of tourism to Catalonia, suggesting that the consensus on the benefits of tourism has left unexamined the detrimental effects it has had on urban life. In particular, he argues that the promotion of the cultural

particularities of Catalonia has not protected them, but has turned them into commodities used to bring in tourists' money. Schreier describes how Diogenes "held a mirror to Athenian society to expose the artifice, hypocrisy, and arbitrariness of customs and norms" (33). As Monzó narrates his interactions with the world he does the same; he describes how an examination of daily life in the city reveals the hypocrisy of promoting Catalan culture to tourists.

The narrative voice of "Por un equilibrio ecológico" tells about a lunch he eats at a traditional restaurant Quim, located in the Boquería, the city's central market. In his description of a seemingly banal event, he exposes that the tourism boom in Barcelona has radically altered such everyday experiences but that the consensus surrounding the merits of tourism have normalized these changes. Starting from the title of the column Monzó describes the city of Barcelona as a ecological system thrown out of balance by the influx of tourists to the city: "La Boquería entera es hoy en día un parque temático para turistas que, con su presencia masiva, distorsionan el medio ambiente del mercado que en teoría venían a disfrutar." He thus suggests that the basic premise underlying the Barcelona model of tourism is flawed: one cannot promote and preserve civic culture because the presence of tourists disrupts the functioning of daily life.

As he describes the lunch the narrative voices gets increasingly indignant, finally boiling over with anger when his meal is turned into a spectacle that the tourists observe with wonder and disgust. As a Catalan, he feels like he has been turned into a human representative of a culture that is in the process of being destroyed:

¡Y yo no quiero comer rodeado de docenas de ojos que miran bobaliconamente mis huevos fritos con chanquete, mis callos, mi “capipota” frío! Estoy harto de sentirme como en una jaula del zoo, cada vez que vengo a la Boquería. Yo quiero ir como había ido siempre, sentarme en uno de estos bares espléndidos y comer con tranquilidad: sin meterme con nadie pero sin que nadie me observe como a “Copito de Nieve” mientras pela una banana.

Referring to Snowflake, the albino gorilla that was the main attraction at the Barcelona zoo for years, he notices that far from a balanced ecological system, Barcelona has become a fabricated environment like that of a zoo. Thus, from his perspective, the promotion of Catalan culture has not resulted in a more livable, beautiful, and thriving city as the rhetoric of the Barcelona model pretends, but instead has reduced daily life in the city to mere spectacle. He concludes the column begging for a day of relief from tourism so that ecological balance can, at least temporarily, be restored: “¿sería posible un día sin turistas para que los barceloneses pudiésemos pasear por la Rambla, entrar en la Boquería y sentarnos en la barra de El Quim como antes de la marabunta? ¿Podríamos descansar de ellos ni que fuese sólo veinticuatro horas al año, por favor?” Describing tourists as marabunta, aggressive, raiding army ants,<sup>39</sup> Monzó subverts the value of tourism to his city, arguing the

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<sup>39</sup> Jonathan Culler in “Semiotics of Tourism” points out that tourists are frequently described using animal imagery: “they are said to move in herds, droves, flocks or swarms; they are as docile as sheep but as annoying as a plague of insects when they descend on a spot” (128).

despite claims to the contrary, promoting Catalan culture as to tourists is of great detriment to urban, civic life.

The angry tirade that implicitly criticizes the Generalitat's promotion of Barcelona as a tourist destination in "Por un equilibrio ecológico" becomes in "El turismo basura" an attack on economic practices that favor visitors over citizens of the city. Starting from the very title of the column in which he identifies tourism to the city as being of the lowliest form, he directly and ruthlessly argues that mass tourism has turned Barcelona into a "ciudad sin ley" and one of the "ciudades más castigadas de Occidente." According to Monzó, the heart of the city, the Rambla, has been transformed from the "eje de la vida ciudadana," to a place deprived of any cultural attributes, a "no lugar." Just as the Boquería has become a "parque de atracciones," the Rambla has also lost all cultural substance. The place that once was the heart of urban life has been converted into, in Marc Augé's terms, a non-place, a place of transience that caters to travelers but that holds no true sense of identity.

He further argues that such cultural degradation is due to the fact that all integrity in promoting tourism has been lost, and instead city officials will do anything to increase the number of visitors: "A las autoridades municipales y a los que viven del asunto no les importa que el corazón de Barcelona dé pena. Si fuese por ellos, nos bajaríamos del todo los pantalones con tal de que el índice de ocupación hotelera subiera unos cuantos puntos más." Monzó's candid and crude language, like that of the seriocomic cynic, explicitly rejects the discourse of

tourism. He argues that despite their claims, the Barcelonese government has become exclusively interested in capital gain.

He goes on to describe the uncontrolled touristic development as the “lloretizando” of Barcelona, attributing the term to Nazario, a painter who writes to *La Vanguardia* to complain about noise in the central Plaza Reial. He refers to Lloret del Mar, the hotel and nightclub filled beach tourist town to the north of Barcelona, what he calls the “el nivel cero del turismo.” He argues that Barcelona, like Lloret, has become a cultural vacuum that has forced out its citizens and created a vulgar, uncontrolled, and profit-driven city. He appeals to the reader to take notice of the negative effects tourism is having on daily life in the city, observing that tourists have been allowed to take it over and displace citizens: “A estas alturas, la opinión de los barceloneses cuenta poco. Yo diría que incluso sobramos, y lo mejor—para las autoridades y los comerciantes interesados—sería que nos largásemos todos a vivir a Sant Cugat de Vallès.” Using the nosotros form he suggests that both he and his readers are victims of a government that has turned their culture into a for-profit commodity. He argues that the guise of Barcelona model tourism has allowed for destructive unrestrained development to become an accepted part of contemporary Catalan society.

In his columns Monzó denies any possibility that the promotion of tourism has been done for the good of Catalan society and citizens. He suggests that the dominant discourse of tourism as a way to beautify the city, spread Catalan culture, and revitalize the economy has left unexamined the commodification of Catalan culture, the degradation of urban life, and the reduced rights of citizens in Catalonia.

If, as Balibrea states, public opinion in Barcelona has “almost monolithically, been favourable to the urban changes implemented in the city,” (189) then Monzó explicitly counters this consensus, positing that it has allowed destructive practices to go uncriticized.

Monzó hardly shies away from controversial issues in his columns and instead often adopts politically incorrect stances on highly charged debates. In fact, he defines politically correct language as a part of the “blablabla” that evades and disguises difficult issues. Part of the parrhesiastic nature of the narrative voice of his columns is how it directly and bluntly takes on all subjects without the fear of offending or breaking decorum.<sup>40</sup> This is clearly seen in his discussion of immigration, a weighty subject in a stateless nation attempting to define a national identity while receiving large numbers of immigrants who are racially, linguistically, and ethnically different than native Catalans. Like his columns on tourism, in his columns on immigration Monzó suggests that political rhetoric, especially Pujol’s integrationist stance towards immigration, veils the complexities of articulating a national identity at a time of radical change. I focus on one column published in *La Vanguardia*, “Òmnium Vaginal” (9/27/2002), to examine how Monzó holds a mirror to contemporary Catalan society to reveal that integrationist political positions have little to do with social realities.

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<sup>40</sup> Although I focus on political issues discussed in Monzó’s columns, this is also true in his columns on popular culture. Among his favorite targets are feminism, vegetarianism, the value of reading, and political correctness.

As one of the industrial centers of Spain, Catalonia has seen multiple waves of immigration, including a wave of immigrants from southern Spain in the 1950s so large that Catalonia's population grew 75% in twenty-five years (McRoberts 134.) The 1990s and 2000s saw another influx of immigrants, with most coming from Africa instead of other regions of Spain. A 2002 study found that the number of immigrants increased 259% between 1997 and 2002, 30% of those immigrants were from Morocco, and that 5% of Catalonia's population was foreign born ("Cataluña"). Pujol espoused an integrationist stance towards immigration, famously stating in *La immigració, problema i esperança de Catalunya* that "Català és tot home que viu i treballa a Catalunya...[e]xcepte el que ve amb prejudicis anticatalans, l'immigrant, en principat, és un català"" [Everyone that lives and works in Catalonia is a Catalan...except those with anti-Catalan prejudices, the immigrant is, in principle, a Catalan] (qtd. in Termes 155). Pujol, thus, sought to redefine Catalan identity in civic, rather than ethnic, terms. In Monzó's columns, the official integrationist stance towards immigration is seen as deceptive rhetoric that disguises the fact that Catalan is still considered an ethnic category.

The column "Òmnium Vaginal" juxtaposes two meanings of the term Catalan: Pujol's definition of a Catalan as anyone who lives and works in Catalonia, and the popular use of the term that designates racial, ethnic, and linguistic characteristics. The provocatively crude title of the column that refers to competition between prostitutes is an opening for a discussion of what political and politically correct language disguises. He begins by describing a newspaper ad for a brothel that specifies that its women are Catalan: "En la secció de relax de las



páginas de anuncios clasificados de los diarios barceloneses aparece el de un local llamado Plaers....Lo sorprendente de este anuncio que una frase a la derecha del pecho de la fotografiada: ‘N.º1 en Srtas. Catalanas’.” This snippet of popular culture, he argues, demonstrates that despite integrationist rhetoric, the word Catalan still denotes an ethnic identity:

demuestra el olvido en el que ha quedado el supuesto axioma de la transición que decía que es catalán todo aquel que vive y trabaja en Cataluña. Según aquel dictamen—aceptado por todos los políticos democráticos—,tan catalanas deberían considerarse las prostitutas de Kiev o Valparaíso que ejercen aquí como las de la Vall de Querol. El anuncio de Plaers demuestra lo frágil de aquella ilusión.

He sees two conflicting versions of Catalonia: the “burbuja de ficción en la que habitan los políticos” and “la realidad.” For Monzó, Catalan politicians since the Transition have defined an idealized Catalan identity that sweeps under the rug the racial and ethnic tensions involved in defining national identity at the turn of the twenty-first century.

By asserting that the term Catalan still denotes a racial and ethnic category, Monzó not only breaks with what is considered politically correct,<sup>41</sup> but also comes dangerously close to reiterating fears that immigration threatens the cultural purity of

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<sup>41</sup> Kathryn Woolard in *Double Talk: Bilingualism and the Politics of Ethnicity In Catalonia* studies how politically correct language to describe immigration is commonplace in Catalonia, with many people using euphemisms such as “recent Catalans” and “newcomer Catalans” in public, although in private many still view clear distinctions between a “true Catalan” and an immigrant (44).

Catalonia that were commonly held during the early decades of the twentieth century (McRoberts 130). But, I believe that rather than simply giving overt voice to what Manuel Delgado in *Diversitat i integració* calls “racisme cultural,” Monzó focuses on how seemingly insignificant pieces of daily life such as a classified ad reveal the disjuncture between the purported values of Catalanism and contemporary Catalan society. The fact that the ad specifies that its women are Catalan evidences that integrationist policies have been a failure and attempts to define a civic Catalan identity have been futile. Moreover, it is deceptive, euphemistic language that has deterred a critical examination of what he means to articulate a collective identity when borders that separate nations and countries have become much more fluid.

Finally, Monzó’s columns frequently take on the most crucial element of Catalan identity: language. His extreme pessimism towards language—often stating that Catalan is a dead language that retains only symbolic significance—distances him from earlier potential elite that saw the recuperation of language as the anchor for the nation building project. Decades after Catalan is declared an official language of Catalonia, and after multiple campaigns of linguistic normalization, Monzó bears witness to what he believes is a failed project. His columns contend that the driving force behind Catalan’s death is the fact that official bilingualism has normalized linguistic discrimination. Monzó’s columns see the rhetoric of bilingualism as creating a false belief in the equality of the two language while at the same time politicizing language use and deepening discord. In three columns, “Todo por la patria” (6/2/1996) published in *El Periódico de Catalunya*, and “Camino de la escuela” (4/4/2000) and “El acoso” (11/11/2003), both published in *La Vanguardia*,

Monzó looks at seemingly simple moments of daily life as evidence of how linguistic tensions and discrimination have become an accepted part of Catalan society.

In his columns about language Monzó pits himself against both public consensus and the prevailing intellectual debate on bilingualism. Public opinion at the time overwhelming favors bilingualism as evidenced by a 1998 survey in which only 15% of respondents had negative views of Pujol's language policies (Cramer *Catalonia* 56). Intellectual debate also promoted bilingualism and focused on preserving the rights of Spanish speakers in Catalonia. In 1997 over 500 writers, academics, editors, and artists signed a manifesto known as the Foro Babel that emphasizes the benefits of bilingualism, argues against making Catalan the exclusive language of education, and precautions against excluding monolingual Spanish speakers from collective Catalan identity. Monzó directly contradicts the Foro Babel, arguing that bilingualism is destructive and that it is the rights of speakers of Catalan, and not Spanish, that continue to be infringed. He also argues that the public consensus in favor of bilingualism stems from the fact that language policies have made linguistic discrimination so commonplace that it goes unnoticed. In his position towards bilingualism, Monzó clearly aligns himself as a potential elite of the stateless nation whose concerns are for Catalan language and culture that, from his perspective, continue to deteriorate under the weight of an unjust political system. But instead of looking towards a future in which Catalan can flourish, Monzó's columns are an ongoing critique of a present in which the destructive effects of official bilingualism have gone unnoticed.

Monzó's columns depict Catalonia as a divided society plagued by linguistic animosity. In "Todo por la patria" he describes the decision by the Catalan police force that they will only speak Spanish as evidence of the hatred that bilingualism has caused. He sarcastically asks why the police would discriminate against Catalan speakers: "¿Por qué a unos sí y a otros no? ¿Es que no somos todos igualmente hijos de Dios Nuestro Señor? ¿Es que el dinero de los impuestos con los que unos y otros pagamos el sueldo no es para ellos igual de bueno?" The answer to these questions is, for Monzó, that Catalonia is a stateless nation defined by linguistic discord, despite the fact that politicians claim just the opposite. From his perspective the decision by the police is in no way exceptional, but is simply another symptom of a society in conflict: "La *original medida* de presión de los policías catalanes demuestra no sólo su catadura moral sino la situación real del país, lejos del triunfalismo pujolista y cada vez más cerca de la irlandización definitiva." He goes as far as to compare Catalonia to Northern Ireland, a stateless nation with a history of violent political and ethnic conflict, to emphasize the severity of the linguistic conflict he sees in contemporary Catalonia.

The root of this conflict is, Monzó argues, the centrality of language in the nation building process. He comments that aligning the recuperation and standardization of language with Pujol's political goals, has turned simply using Catalan into a political gesture:

Una vez más, se identifica *lo catalán* (el idioma en este caso) con Convergència. Piensa el policía autonómico: ¿cómo fastidiar a la Generalitat convergente? Respuesta: chafándoles *el rollo* del catalán.

¡Seguro que se pican! Para su cerebro policial, el catalán es un capricho de los gerifaltes convergentes, no un derecho de los ciudadanos. Catalán=convergente...Porque escribir catalán, hablar catalán, *ser en catalán*, es—según parecer—ser convergente.

From Monzó's perspective the nation building process has had an inverse effect and has reduced, and not ensured, the rights of Catalan speakers. He concludes the column commenting that Catalan speakers are further and further alienated from their society, noting that the *mossos* (Catalan police) that once embodied Catalan identity, have become a symbol of repression: “cuando por la carretera se veía a un mosso se sentía *en casa*...Con *mossos* como éstos, ¿quién necesita guardias civiles?”

The column “Camino de la escuela” looks at how discriminatory practices have become an accepted part of daily life in Catalonia. The discord that Monzó describes in “Todo por la patria” is seen in “Camino de la escuela” as woven into the fabric of daily Catalan life and found in simple, everyday interactions. He tells the story of a babysitter, Noèlia Buenafuente, who is confronted with linguistic discrimination as she walks two children to school:

El otro día, cargados con las mochilas y las carpetas, poco antes de la nueve de la mañana se detuvieron en una acera, cerca de la estación de Sants, y esperaron a que el semáforo cambiase del rojo al verde. De repente, un hombre de unos cuarenta y cinco o cincuenta años, con anorak y poco cabello, se volvió hacia los niños y les dio una octavilla blanca y alargada. El niño miró a la canguro, dudando si cogerla:

-¡Coge, coge!-le dijo el hombre. Es para ti.

El niño la cogió y el hombre aceleró el paso. Los niños y la canguro leyeron lo que ponía en el papel: ‘¿Hay algo más repelente que un niño hablando en catalán?’

The note given to the child at first seems to be startling, concrete evidence of a linguistic polemic that continues decades after the end of the Franco dictatorship. The purpose of such a note may be, he comments, a frank introduction for the children to ongoing friction surrounding language use: “¿Por qué el hombre del anorak les dio esa octavilla? ¿Para que, aún niños, tomasen ya consciencia de lo conflictivo que les será hablar en catalán?” For Monzó, it is this type of everyday discrimination that is bringing the death of Catalan: “¿Al entregarlas a los niños pretende, tal como parece, que el uso social de la lengua catalana, que cada vez es menor, disminuya aún más?” But, in a bitingly sarcastic fashion he allows this seemingly shocking moment to meld into meaningless quotidian subjects: “¿Cuántas octavillas ha (o han) repartido hasta el momento? Si son más de uno, ¿quién los aglutina? ¿Qué película dan esta noche en la tele? ¿Queda algún yogur en la nevera?” As he fades his argument into a pedestrian list of inconsequential questions he suggests that linguistic friction has become so commonplace within contemporary Catalan society that it is unremarkable. What appears to be an appalling moment of cultural clash has become so habitual that it is just another banality of daily life. For Monzó, it is the complacent acceptance of this type of conflict that destroys Catalan language and society.

The column “El acoso” similarly describes several everyday moments as evidence of ingrained linguistic friction in contemporary Catalonia. It starts with the account of an actor who is kicked out of a restaurant for speaking Catalan:

Cuando el dueño les pregunto cuántos eran, Joel Joan contestó: ‘Som set’; y ahí se lió. El dueño le dijo: ‘Yo, eso no lo entiendo...’. Joel Joan intentó razonar: ‘Home... Som set: ‘seven’, ‘siete’...’ ‘Ah. Siete. ¡Ahora sí!’...Joel Joan le explicó: ‘No t’ho prenguis com una provocació. Parlo català perquè és la meva llengua i som a Barcelona. No veig perquè m’has d’obligar a canviar’. El dueño les ordenó que se largasen inmediatamente del restaurante. A la calle, por hablar catalán.

Monzó then comments Joel Joan’s experience is not an uncommon one: “‘¡Háblame en cristiano!’ me dijeron no hace mucho en un restaurante de cocina magrebí. ‘Oye ¡a mi me hablas en castellano!’ me exigió en un bar un camarero de cabeza rapada cuando le pedí ‘truita de patatas’ de la que tenía en el expositor...una chica contó que a ella la echaron del trabajo—de una escuela concertada por la Generalitat—por hablar catalán.” Linguistic discrimination, Monzó argues, is found in all sectors of life in Catalonia, from education to commerce.

He further argues that this ongoing linguistic friction is the result of the deceptive rhetoric of bilingualism: “El acoso al catalán (diario y cotidiano) se asume como algo normal, ‘lógico’, y eso en un país en el que los políticos nos machacan día y noche—y más en campaña electoral, como ahora—con las virtudes del bilingüismo y la pluralidad.” The rhetoric surrounding the creation of a bilingual

nation without a state is, to Monzó, a mere facade to attract votes that has little to do with linguistic reality. For him, Pujol's government has done the opposite of what it promised; instead of ensuring the rights of Catalan speakers it has relegated them to a permanently inferior position: "tras veintitrés años de pujolismo, minorizados de forma definitiva los catalanohablantes, tribu en extinción en un país que constantemente se llena la boca de 'solidaridad' y 'multiculturalidad'—como a Joel Joan no lo han expulsado de un restaurante por hablar en español sino en catalán, punto en boca y santas pascuas." Monzó's dry and direct closing of the column emphasizes that despite the purported benefits of bilingualism, it has allowed for Catalan speakers to be victimized on a daily basis.

In these columns Monzó subverts the value placed on bilingualism, the foundation of the Catalan nation building project since 1979. He not only suggests that Catalonia is not bilingual community, but argues that the definition of Catalonia as bilingual has perpetuated discrimination and ensured the language's ultimate demise. By also contradicting the signers of the Foro Babel, Monzó aligns himself as a voice in the public sphere committed to how political decisions and policies affect Catalan speakers. In his columns on language Monzó takes an unequivocally Catalanist stance that argues that bilingualism has not sufficiently ensured the rights of Catalan speakers. But, unlike Catalan intellectuals of the early twentieth century, Monzó does not look toward building a future in which Catalan language will thrive, but acts as a witness to the broken promises that surround him. The problem, from Monzó's perspective, is not just that language policies have not successfully created



a bilingual society, but that bilingualism is itself destructive, bluntly stating in a 2008 interview with Ollé that “[b]ilingualism is a punishment” (“Is there” 11).

## **5. Conclusion**

As a cynic, Monzó’s does not offer any solutions, inspire hope in a better future, or provide alternatives to the system currently in place. He acts as pessimistic witness to a divided society, dying language, and deceptive politics without proposing possible alternatives. He portrays Catalonia as a failure: its cities have been ruined by uncontrolled tourism, its society is plagued by racial and linguistic tensions, and its government does little to protect its citizens. But while such pessimism may seem nihilistic, it is the way in which cynic critique challenges conventional thought. Schreier describes how Diogenes “sought to bring dominant habits of thinking into contact not with clearly demarcated alternatives, but with the very possibility of alterity denied in order that they can appear normal, in an attempt to disclose the operation of normalization” (35). It is thus not the aim of the cynic to provide another way of doing things, but simply to suggest that there is nothing normal, natural, or innate about the status quo. Thus, Monzó never advocates for monolingualism or economic or political restructuring, but proposes that the values of the contemporary nation building project are not inherent to Catalan society.

Monzó’s cynicism towards politics extends to all aspects of life, from popular culture to international relations. I have chosen to focus on columns related to Catalan politics and identity in order to understand how he breaks with the traditional model of the Catalan intellectual to become a potential elite of Catalonia at the turn of the twenty-first century. Rather than anticipating autonomy or the

recuperation of an oppressed language and culture, Monzó exposes the failure of those same projects. In short, his columns reveal, as he comments to Ollé, that “[w]e are living in a pure farce” (“Is there” 138).

### Chapter 3: The Small Truths of Manuel Rivas' Literary Journalism

Son un escritor rexional: limítome ao planeta terra.

I'm a regional writer: I limit myself to the planet earth.

Manuel Rivas, "The Year the Animals Were Speaking"

#### 1. Manuel Rivas: From the Local to the Global

Manuel Rivas Barrós (A Coruña, 1957) is a Galician author and journalist whose work crosses genres, languages, and nations. His corpus is both extensive and varied—he has published novels, collections of short stories and poetry, political essays, books of literary journalism, as well as innumerable articles and columns in Galician and Spanish magazines and newspapers.<sup>42</sup> During the Transition, Rivas was a central figure in the development of a Galician language press, writing for magazines such as *A Nosa Terra*, *Man Común*, and *Teima*, the first magazine to be published in Galician when it came out in 1976. Additionally, he founded the Galician language magazine *Loia*. He became a significant figure within the larger Spanish literary milieu with his collection of short stories *¿Que me queres, amor?*, published in Galician in 1995 and in its subsequent Spanish translation in 1996. Respectively, *¿Que me queres, amor?* and Rivas' 1998 *O lapis del carpinteiro* provided the basis for two widely successful films, *La lengua de las mariposas* (1999) and *El lápiz del carpintero* (2003). His fiction, poetry, and journalism have garnered him several awards, including Premio Crítica Española for *Un millón de*

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<sup>42</sup> To date, Rivas has published ten books of poetry, six collections of short stories, five novels, nine compilations of literary journalism, and one play.

*vacas* (1989), *O lapis del carpinteiro*, and *Os libros arden mal* (2006).<sup>43</sup> Rivas is also known and admired for his commitment to social issues, and in particular his environmental leadership both before and after the infamous 2004 *Prestige* disaster.

Rivas writes almost exclusively in Galician, and has been one of Galicia's most beloved and popular authors since the 1990s. *O lapis de carpinteiro* sold over 50,000 copies, an almost unheard of sales figure in an Autonomous Community of three million inhabitants (Eaude). However, Rivas has also become something of an international phenomenon. His fiction has been translated into twenty languages, making him one of the ten most translated contemporary Spanish authors (Ibáñez), and alongside Javier Marías the most widely sold Spanish author in Germany (Rivas "Mi obra" 1). As such, Rivas can be credited with having placed contemporary Galician narrative on the international stage.

While Rivas' writing has remained grounded in the particularities of Galicia, he has not shied away from global political issues. Rather, he has re-imagined the local, and the particularities that inevitably attend to it, as a space of privilege for discussing, debating, and thinking through these issues. While critics of Rivas' work, especially José Colmeiro, have examined Rivas' fiction and poetry extensively according to Néstor García Canclini's theorization of the relationship between the local and the global, or the "glocal," in *Hybrid Cultures: Strategies for Entering and Leaving Modernity*, an interrogation of his work as a prominent and prolific

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<sup>43</sup> This is only a sampling of a long list of awards that Rivas' has won for his fiction and journalism.

journalist in a variety of media markets in Spain both reinforces and complicates their analyses in a number of productive ways.<sup>44</sup>

Like Torres and Monzó, Rivas in fact began his career as a journalist, first writing for the newspaper *El Ideal Gallego* in 1972, at only fifteen years of age, before briefly leaving Galicia to study journalism at the Facultad de Ciencias de Información de Madrid. While consistent in his work as a Galician language journalist in Galicia, Rivas has, since then, become, on the larger Spanish stage, no less prominent a journalist than he is a literary writer. For over three decades, Rivas has contributed to *El País*. He has worked as a reporter, conducted interviews, published in the Sunday magazine *EPS*, and currently writes a regular back-page column for both the Madrid-based and Galician editions of the daily newspaper. Clearly, then, any assessment of his corpus must take his journalistic work into account. With that in mind, I aim to consider Rivas' literary journalism, in particular, in this chapter, in terms of its glocality and, to borrow language often used to discuss similar questions, its "rooted cosmopolitanism." In his 2005 *Ethics of Identity*, Kwame Anthony Appiah values the idea of "rooted cosmopolitanism" for the possibilities it opens for maintaining one's roots while at the same time affirming, and fighting for, a shared humanity. In his literary journalism in particular, however, Rivas demonstrates that, more than merely serving as a means of maintaining one's local roots without sacrificing one's ability to engage questions

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<sup>44</sup> See Colmeiro's 2009 "Peripheral Visions, Global Positions: Remapping Galician Culture" and "Smells Like Wild Spirit: Galician Rock Bravu, between the 'Rurban' and the 'Glocal.'"

of global resonance, around the turn of the twenty-first century the local provides a critically important way of approaching those questions.

Indeed, in all of his roles—author, journalist, and activist—Rivas is a local and national figure. There is no question that Rivas is a Galician author; he publishes all of his fiction in Galicia, sets much of his work in Galicia, writes for the Galician press, is a member of the Real Academia Galega and is even, according to Jorge Pérez in “O club dos poetas vivos,” part of the “patrimonio cultural e literario” of Galicia (86). More importantly, and unlike Monzó who targets a strictly Catalan audience with his columns, Rivas is a literary figure of both Spain and Galicia, writing for readers of both Galician and Spanish. His fiction is translated into Spanish shortly after it is published in Galician, and the fact that he won the Premio Nacional de Literatura in 1996 attests to his presence at the national level. It is in this dual position that Rivas is able to approach questions of national and global concern through the particularities of the local.

Rivas’ challenges to stereotypical portrayals of Galicia allow for a definition of the stateless nation that is post-national and deterritorialized. Cristina Sánchez-Conejero in “De la identidad gallega nacional a la identidad galelga global,” argues that Rivas’ literary journalism “lleva a cabo la desmitificación de la Galicia rural o de la vaca, la Galicia de la gaita y la Galicia celta” (239). For Eugenia Romero, Rivas’ narrative localizes Galician identity in a “fantastic and absent space, between ‘here and there,’” that “defines a deterritorialized *Galeguidade*” (“Amusement” 166). But, Rivas’ focus on Galicia is not just the means by which he contests or constructs Galician identity. I argue that in Rivas’

columns published in *El País* a focus on the local—on the specifics of Galician culture and politics—is the way by which he enters into discussion of global themes.

I thus aim to contribute to the understanding of Rivas' work by further considering the relation between the local and the global as seen through his literary journalism. In particular, I position Rivas' literary journalism in terms of the relationship between cosmopolitanism and regional literature that Tom Lutz describes in *Cosmopolitan Vistas: American Regionalism and Literary Value*. Lutz finds in American regional literature a “doubleness—in which an appeal to local communities...is coupled with a commitment to Literature as a universal, cosmopolitan, honorific category” (12). Lutz comments that literature of American authors such as Celia Thaxter links the specificity of place, in her case the Isles of Shoals off the New Hampshire coast, to “cosmopolitan literary and philosophical thought” (56). Appiah argues that localism and cosmopolitanism are not mutually exclusive terms and instead coins the phrase “rooted cosmopolitanism” to refer to the possibility of maintaining one's roots in the local, while affirming shared humanity. Critics point to the idealism and elitism of such a position, but I believe that it resonates with Rivas' work that looks to the particulars of Galicia as sources for finding that which concerns the global village.

Throughout Rivas' work the focus on the particular becomes the way in which he explores global themes. I use the term global to refer to Rivas' concerns for all that is human, belonging to this earth, as seen in the epigraph I have used at the beginning of the chapter. Rivas himself uses the phrase “local universal” to refer to his journalism as in the introduction to his 2009 collection *Os Grouchos* in which

he describes Galicia as “un porto da imaxinación. Un local universal onde ir de grouchos”<sup>45</sup> (9). [a portal of imagination. A local universal in which to go drinking.]

In the introductory essay to the collection *Galicia, Galicia*, Xosé Mato argues that Rivas’ articles and columns that focus on the Galician president Manuel Fraga Iribarne “nos ayuda a desentrañar la metamorfosis y la evolución *darwinista* del señor Poder en un marco concreto, el de Galicia, pero con efectos transferibles a las más anchas latitudes” (11).

The focus on Galicia found in Rivas’ columns published in *El País* is thus not just an attempt to familiarize the Spanish reading public with the current events of the autonomous community, but is the way in which Rivas enters into discussions of national and global concerns. The column “Statu quo (3)” (8/16/2002) is an example of such an intersection between the local and the global. The column starts with a specifically Galician focus; Rivas tells about the changes in the small town where his grandparents live: “En la aldea de mis abuelos, el *realismo mágico* llegó cuando llegó la electricidad.” He plays with the term magical realism, a literary term most often used to in relation to the Latin American literary movement that has also been used to describe the fantastic in Galician narrative. But *realismo mágico* as

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<sup>45</sup> Rivas’ idea of the universality of Galicia resonates with the ideas of the turn of the twentieth century cultural group Irmandades da fala that express what Dolores Vilavedra calls a “galeguismo europeísta” writing in the magazine *Nós* in 1920: “Nós ha ser a representación no mundo da persoalidade galega no sua ansia de s’afirmare como valor universal, autóctono, diferenciado, dentro ou for a da Terra” (174). [Nós should be a representation of the Galician identity to the world and its desire to affirm itself as a universal value, autochthonous, differenced, inside and outside of Earth.]



Rivas describes it is not stereotypical witches and ghosts, but technological innovation that transforms rural Galician culture:

De vez en cuando se aparecían los muertos y los animales hablaban, es verdad, pero sin llamar la atención. Ahora ¿qué era esto de la Santa Compañía en comparación con aquella lámpara de 40 vatios que boxeaba con las sombras milenarias y las arrinconaba, o con la radio que hacía crepitar la noche?...Mientras algunos antropólogos europeos entrevistaban, fascinados, a las últimas miegas, los chicos indígenas las buscábamos, a las miegas, mágicas y desnudas, en la maleta del emigrante, donde a veces vencía el *Play Boy*. Un momento sublime, de lo real maravilloso, fue la expansión del tractor, ese caballo artúrico. O el de esa otra herramienta homérica, la motosierra.

Standing alone this passage defines a fluid Galician cultural identity that blends tradition with modernity and contradicts stereotypes of Galicia as rural, magical, and backwards. But, in the column Galicia is also a “local universal,” or a specific example of how all humans attempt to grasp a nearly incomprehensible world.

In the final paragraph of the column Rivas switches his focus from the small Galician town to one of the landmarks of globalization, the World Bank. Rivas suggests that in the same way electricity and motorcycles in his grandparents’ town can only be understood in terms of *realismo mágico*, global superstructures are grasped only by way of fantastic metaphors. He points to the description of the Hot Money Cycles by the once Head of the World Bank Joseph Stiglitz:

Para adentrarse en las claves modernas del realismo mágico hay que escuchar, por ejemplo, al premio Nobel de Economía y ex jefe del Banco Mundial Joseph Stiglitz...Descubriremos cómo las reservas de una nación, ¡hale, hop!, pueden ser vaciadas en días. Nos asombraremos con fenómenos metafóricos como los Maremotos del Dinero Caliente. Y nos sabremos dirigidos por organismos mágicos, ocultos, a donde nunca llega la luz de una lámpara.

The waves of hot money, as Stiglitz describes them, that can ruin a nation in a matter of days, are, according to Rivas, the global, contemporary versions of magical realism. Global economics appear to happen as by magic and can only be described as the work supernatural forces. Thus, the column is not just about redefining Galician identity, it is also about universal concerns that include the unmitigated power of a superstructure such as the World Bank and the complexity of a globalized world that we can hardly comprehend.

Thus, rather than reading how Rivas' columns construct or contest contemporary Galician identity, I understand his focus on the particulars of Galicia as a point of departure for addressing subjects of local, national, and global concern. Indeed, I believe this is why Rivas' columns are relevant to the *El País*' wide reading public; they are not just about Galician society and politics, but about how those particulars shed light on topics and issues that concern all citizens. I also argue that Rivas' focus on the local as means to approach the global points to the centrality of the small and particular in his literary journalism. Throughout his work

Rivas narrows his focus to explore what the smallest things—a word, an image, or an object—reveal about the society, politics, and culture.

## **2. A Journalism of the Image**

The focus on Galicia is just one trait of Rivas' columns that is shares with his fiction. The many pieces of his multifaceted career as a fiction author, poet, literary journalist, and political activist are continually intersecting; he will read a poem at a political rally, publish a short story as a column, and incorporate factual details into his fiction. His public persona also corresponds with his literary work and he uses many of the same references that appear in his fiction and journalism in his interviews and appearances. In a 2000 interview with the magazine *Lateral* Rivas suggests that each piece of his corpus is connected: “cada historia es distinta, pero pertenece a un ciclo. Las mías son historias que crecen de distinta forma, pero existen hilos invisibles entre ellas. Podríamos coserlas y formarían un mismo tapiz...Mi obra, hasta el momento, está hecha de harapos cosidos” (“Mi obra”). As one of the pieces of this interwoven body of work Rivas' literary journalism reflects characteristics found throughout it, including the dissolution of the barriers between fictional, poetic, and journalistic genres.

Much of Rivas' work blurs the lines that separate genres. This is seen in his fictional work: the collection *A man dos paíños*, for example, includes a long fictional story, a story told only through photographs, and a journalistic report, a structure that, according to Jessica Folkart in “Itinerant Identities: Galician Diaspora and Genre Subversion in Manuel Rivas' *A man dos paíños*,” metaphorically represents the dynamism of diasporic identity (8). *Os libros arden mal* is a fictional

novel that incorporates historical information, including photographs of the book burning that took place in A Coruña in 1936 (Cerezo). Pérez comments that Rivas' collection of poetry *O pobo da noite* (1996) that is sold with a CD of Rivas reading several of the poems to musical accompaniment “busca incorporar o mundo audiovisual e oral á poesía” (88). [looks to incorporate the audiovisual and oral spheres into poetry.] In Rivas' collections of literary journalism he blends the lines between fact and fiction, reporting and telling, and journalism and art. The collection *Galicia, Galicia*, for example, includes a comical fictional series about Manuel Fraga Iribarne<sup>46</sup> published in *La Voz de Galicia* that ironically imagines the politician's visit to Cuba together with chronicles later published in *La Voz de Galicia* and *El País* that document that same trip that Fraga took two years later. Each of his collections of journalism is similarly varied, compiling columns, extensive reports, stories, poems, essays, speeches, and interviews.

Accordingly, his columns do not follow what may be called the conventions of the genre as I outline in the introduction. Rivas' columns—like much of his journalistic production—are hardly simple and straightforward opinions. Unlike the work of many columnists including Monzó and Torres that is intended for quick comprehension, Rivas' columns are not written in barren, direct, or simple language, but are uncommonly filled with metaphors, literary, historical, and philosophical allusions and sometimes vague and opaque language. The narrative voice of Rivas'

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46 Manuel Fraga Iribarne was the president of Galicia from 1990 to 2005 who began his political career during the Franco dictatorship as the Minister of Information and Tourism. He is a reoccurring character in Rivas' literary journalism as both a figure of ridicule and evidence of the political conservatism of the PP.

columns varies; he narrates more often in the third person than the first and frequently tells stories or allegories rather than offering direct opinions. He develops less of a personal narrative thread throughout his columns—they are not written as an ongoing series of his interactions with and thoughts about the world—but employs more techniques of fictional narrative including third person point of view, metaphor, and allegory. In this regard his columns are further from the form that González Ruano and Umbral describe that prioritizes clarity, simplicity, and personal perspective. But, it also aligns his journalism more closely with his literary production; Rivas does not make a dramatic switch from the language of his fiction to that used in his journalism.

In the introduction to the collection *El periodismo es un cuento*, a book whose title suggests fluidity between literary and journalistic forms, Rivas discards a hierarchy of genres:

Se supone también con frecuencia que la disposición mental es distinta cuando uno afronta una novela, una obra de *arte*, o un relato periodístico, que vendría a ser una *artesanía* menor. Me han preguntado muchas veces cómo llevo esa esquizofrenia. No tengo conciencia de esa fractura y por lo tanto me merezco el deprecio de algunos críticos y escritores *puros* que me sitúan en el purgatorio de la literatura. (“La educación” 23)

The passage describes literary journalism as a hybrid form in which, according to García Canclini’s definition, the difference between high and mass culture and the artist and the artisan is collapsed (2, 5). Rivas further suggests that literariness in not

incompatible with the objectives of journalism: “La literatura, la metáfora, la mirada personal, es hermana de la precisión, como la verdad histórica es hermana de una cámara como la de Walker Evans o Sebastião Salgado” (23). Rivas’ reference to two photographers, Walker Evans, the American depression-era photographer, and Sebastião Salgado, the Brazilian photojournalist, indicates that art is not unsuited to documenting social realities. Rather for Rivas it is in its literariness that literary journalism can offer a different perspective on politics and society.

Rivas’ columns also appear to be influenced by his poetry and are, in my opinion, some of the most poetic columns published in the Spanish press. Nash describes his columns published in *El País* as “suffused with tenderness and lyricism, steeled with whiplash of polemic.” *Galician Books*, the database of Galician writers maintained by the Xunta de Galicia, similarly describes the “personal, lyrical features as seen in *Galicia, el bonsái atlántico* (*Galicia, the Atlantic Bonsai*, 1989), written for *El País*.” Rivas argues that all genres of literature come from a poetic point of view: “Pero creo que lo que nos importa al final al analizar un cuadro o una poesía es saber si tienen eso que decimos alma o no, si tiene aura o aureola o no lo tienen... Yo creo que en el fondo todo texto interesante tiene que tener un carácter poético, eso si lo vemos desde esta perspectiva, quizás desde el sentido de la mirada, sentido de la mirada como sinónimo de búsqueda de cierta autenticidad” (“Visiones” 392). Indeed, Rivas’ gaze is a defining feature of his columns; he often focuses in on one detail or image to uncover its many layers of meaning. By directing his gaze Rivas practices what María Teresa García-Abad

García in “El cuento en el cine: la realidad inteligente de Manuel Rivas en *La lengua de las mariposas* calls “la poesía de la imagen” (232).

Thus, the comparison that Rivas makes between his literary journalism and photography in *El periodismo es un cuento* is not fortuitous. Rather, I believe that he points to the centrality of the image in his work. His fiction often focuses on images as essential components of the narrative as García-Abad García comments: “Rivas se situaría así al lado de escritores que, como Conrad o Henry James, construyen sus modos de expresión verbal sobre una prodigiosa visión plástica” (232). Michael Eade in “The Healer of Wounded Words” notices how Rivas’ narrative narrows in on small things: “His stories and books are full of objects: a loaf of bread, a butterfly’s proboscis, a desk, a car, a cork, that stand out on the page as in relief. He is a novelist not of ideas, but sensations. Or rather, the ideas are transmitted through the intensity of his evocation of things.” Like his fiction, much of Rivas’ literary journalism centers on imagery such as the collection *Mujer en el baño*<sup>47</sup> in which each article departs from a painting or photograph. The introductory essay takes Rob Lichtenstein’s “Woman in Bath” as a starting point that opens up to discussions of politics, society, and culture. Rivas states that the painting does not just depict a woman bathing; “Las cosas no son lo que aparentan. La *Mujer en el baño* ya no es el cuadro de un rostro feliz. Lleguemos a un acuerdo: es un cuadro de encrucijada.” He then details the multiple layers of meaning that he sees in the painting:

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<sup>47</sup> *Mujer en el baño* collects article and columns published originally in *El País*. Rivas also published a Galician translation of the book *Muller no baño*.

En esta encrucijada, también histórica, poco después de vivir el estallido optimista, nos encontramos con que John F. Kennedy es asesinado, la *nueva frontera* es abandonada, el *welfare state*...muere James Dean, muere Marilyn, muere Buddy Holly, muere el Dios social-cristiano...Esta visibilidad del cuadro, esta mujer tan campanuda, tan rotunda en sus trazos está mostrándonos la invisibilidad de la mujer, la opacidad, la cortina que se va a cerrar y ocultar la mujer real. Nuestra Peggy Sue hace visible lo invisible.

(“Mujer” 36-41)

Throughout Rivas’ literary journalism he uncovers the abundance of meaning that lies in images, objects, and words. In his columns, he focuses in on small, seemingly insignificant details and how they may tell a different story than that of the headlines.

Rivas posits that a literary perspective can offer an alternative mode of approaching and understanding the news. In “La educación sentimental de un periodista” he comments that that it is the objective of literary journalism to illuminate that which is not readily apparent: “Cuando tiene valor, el periodismo y la literatura sirven para el descubrimiento de la *otra verdad*, del *lado oculto*, a partir de un hilo de un suceso” (23). He thus suggests that as part of the press columns should open up different ways of reading and understanding the news. When asked about the relationship between literature and the image in “Visiones sobre fronteras,” he states that such a focus on the smallest of details is one way to reveal this ‘lado oculto:’ “Es decir, más bien lo que tienes que ver es un poco lo que se esconde, lo



que se oculta y que nada es despreciable, nada se pierde. Está claro que hay una relación—utilizo la imagen del nervio óptico y la yema de los dedos—, una conexión entre el arte de escribir y las sensaciones.” This sensorial approach to literature, for Rivas, differs from an argumentative form of writing, what he calls “un enunciado, una exposición de una evidencia, pero que no tiene ningún sentido literario” (“Visiones” 394).

In this regard Rivas echoes Jacques Rancière’s statement in “The Politics of Literature” that literary writing “is not imposing one’s will on another, in the fashion of the orator or the general. It is displaying and deciphering the symptoms of a state of things. It is revealing the signs of history, delving as a geologist does, into the seams and strata under the stage of the orators and politicians—the seams and strata that underlie its foundation” (18). If perhaps Monzó and Torres take on the role of the orator—persuasively writing in the first person—Rivas acts more as the geologist who uncovers that which is not seen on the surface. Rancière’s description of realist novels that display “the so-called world of prosaic activities as a huge poem—a huge fabric of signs and traces, of obscure signs that had to be displayed, unfolded and deciphered” (18-19), also seems fitting to Rivas’ literary journalism. In his columns he focuses in on little pieces of the everyday world, unraveling the webs of meaning that they contain.

Rivas’ column “Oficina y denuncia”<sup>48</sup> that takes its title from Federico García Lorca’s haunting poem “Nueva York (Oficina y denuncia)” from *Poeta en*

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<sup>48</sup> Collected in *Mujer en el baño*.

*Nueva York*<sup>49</sup> explores the layers of meaning of one of these signs of history. He starts the column noticing a small scar on the poet's chin: "El hombre tiene una pequeña cicatriz en el mentón. Le hace el efecto de un hoyuelo punzado por la vida. Esa cicatriz cuenta una historia" (248). This seemingly insignificant mark symbolizes García Lorca's tragic life. Rivas tells that as a young boy living in the countryside the poet holds a cow by a cord as he grazes when suddenly an airplane flies overhead. When both the boy and the cow raise their heads to see the plane, the cord attached to the cow cuts into the boy's chin. Rivas' comments that "[m]i viejo amigo siempre cuenta aquel incidente como fuese un presentimiento. El aeroplano era de guerra" (248). The small scar evidences the start of the war that would lead to García Lorca's assassination. In the same way as "una gota de sangre de pato" reveals "un río de sangre tierna," in García Lorca's poem, the small scar is a trace of the enormous destruction of the Civil War.

This focus on the small things is an essential component of Rivas' columns about history. He suggests that the details that often go unnoticed—a scar, image, object, or word—maintain an alternative history that that of official historical narratives. In the columns published from 1996 to 2004 he further suggests that these details contradict the rhetoric of progress and change espoused by the PP and evidence the continued presence of the past in contemporary Spanish politics.

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49 The images of the destruction of nature found in García Lorca's poem resonate with Rivas' ecologist positions. Rivas' "Oficina y denuncia" uses Lorca's description of the slaughter of animals by the city as a metaphor for the destruction caused by industrial farming, particularly mad cow's disease. Rivas also cites Lorca as a literary influence, listing Poeta en Nueva York as one of the books that changed his life in a survey of writers done by *El País Semanal* ("Cien escritores").

### 3. The Traces of History

History, especially the Spanish Civil War and the Franco dictatorship, is one of the central preoccupations of all of Rivas' literary oeuvre. His fiction including "A lingua das bolboretas," *O lapis del carpinteiro*, and *Os libros arden mal*, narrate personal experiences of historical events of the Civil War. William J. Nichols in "La narración oral, la escritura, los «lieux de mémoire» en *El lápiz del carpintero* de Manuel Rivas" comments that Rivas' fiction brought "una nueva preocupación por la memoria" that articulates the experience of a generation "aislada, alienada y desconectada de un pasado irrecuperable" (158). Along with Nichols, critics of Rivas' work have largely focused on the representation of history and memory in his fiction, especially in *O lapis do carpinteiro*.<sup>50</sup> Rivas explores in his fiction how what Resina in *Disremembering the Dictatorship* calls the "disremembering" of the past that marked the Transition has created a false division between the past and the present.<sup>51</sup> This is seen in *O lapis del carpinteiro*, a book that, according to Nichols, examines "el impacto de esta (des)conexión entre el presente y el pasado pueda causar en la identidad personal y social" (156) and, for Javier Fruns Giménez in *La*

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<sup>50</sup> Scholarly work on memory in Rivas' fiction includes Eugenia Romero's "Popular Literary *lieux de mémoire* and Galician Identity in Manuel Rivas's *En salvaxe compañía*", Mercedes Tasande's "El proceso de la mitificación en *El lápiz del carpintero*, de Manuel Rivas," Javier Fruns Giménez's *La memoria en la novela española de los 80 y 90: Julio Llamazares, Javier Marías, Antonio Muñoz Molina y Manuel Rivas*, Virginia McIntoch's *Oralidad y memoria: La construcción histórica en El lápiz del carpintero de Manuel Rivas* and Alison Ribeiro de Menezes' *Remembering the Spanish Civil War: Cinematic Motifs and Recuperations of the Past in Dulce Chacón's La voz dormina, Javier Cercas's Soldados de Salamina and Manuel Rivas' O lapis do carpinteiro*.

<sup>51</sup> The term 'disremember' differs from 'forget' in that it implies an active process, or in Resina's terms an "induced amnesia" (88).

*memoria en la novela española de los 80 y 90*, evidences the conflict between the past and “el espíritu de una nueva sociedad que ha olvidado su historia” (101). But Rivas’ concern for the repercussions of Spain’s disremembered past is a theme not only of his fiction, but also of his literary journalism. Many of Rivas’ columns are an ongoing query into how history pervades and shapes present-day Spain. But rather than looking back to the Civil War or the dictatorship, or discussing the collective amnesia of the Transition, his columns look to uncover the traces of the past that are left in the Spain’s present.

Before turning my attention to Rivas’ columns focused on politics, I examine the larger theme of history as seen in his literary journalism. Two columns that Rivas published in *El País*, “El ‘98” (7/24/1996) and “Statu quo (2)” (8/9/2002), look at how official history, as Foucault argues in “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History” turns the “profusion of entangled events” to a “simple configuration where events are reduced to accentuate their essential traits, their final meaning” (89). In the two columns Rivas juxtaposes two versions of the past; that of official history and that of the small details that are left out of it.

In “El ‘98” Rivas explores how official versions of history reduce the complexity of the past to create a teleological narrative. He describes the preparations for the centennial celebration of 1898, first noting the irony in celebrating tragedies, like those of 1898, a year that Rivas labels “uno de los años en que fuimos a carajo.” He then comments that the intricacies and difficulties of the historical event are removed from its commemoration: “El 98 fue también al año en que se manifestó una generación conciente de que España no era imperio, ni siquiera

grande y libre, sino muchas, pequeña y más atada que el nudo de la corbata de Carrascal. Pero nada de eso.” Instead, the events of the 1898 are part of a telos that lead to the present day or, as Rivas states, “la conmemoración del centenario de 1898 es una coherente disculpa para celebrar el 1998.” Official commemorations of the past, Rivas suggests, have nothing to do with remembering the past, only serve to legitimize the present as he ironically comments in the last sentence of the column: “Atención. El *Maine* va a estallar por segunda vez en forma de un monumental eructo de satisfacción.”

In “Statu quo (2)” Rivas argues that past is not found in the official versions of history, but in the details that are written out of it. He begins by citing the French author Jules Renard who states that “[l]a verdad...es de pequeñas dimensiones,”<sup>52</sup> and then tells the story of a young girl who is killed when a bomb planted by ETA detonates near her home in Santa Pola. The ETA organization labels her death one of the “daños colaterales” that is part of “un conflicto que dura siglos.” Rivas comments that official history subsumes the girls’ death: “Así, como en un cuento cruel, la pequeña verdad era víctima no de un acto personal, protagonizado por seres conscientes, sino de una abstracción, ogro o madrastra, con el apodo de Historia...Y la pequeña verdad, frágil y bailarina, no perdía la existencia en un día concreto de aquello año 2002, sino en un tiempo brumoso, donde campaban como espectros gerifaltes de ataño.” For Rivas the truth of the event—the fact that a young girl was

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<sup>52</sup> Renard’s name frequently appears in Rivas’ work. He is the author of *Histoires naturelles* (1894) about the lives of animals including mice and butterflies. Rivas wrote the synopsis for the book’s re-release in Spanish commenting that the stories within it make the reader “dilata o contrae sus pupilas” (“El paraíso”).

killed by ETA terrorists—is absorbed by the narrative of history. To use Paul Ricoeur’s terms from *Time and Narrative*, the plot of history comprehends the individual event, such as the death of the girl, turning it into a “quasi-event” (qtd. in Ashcroft 87). Rivas reiterates this idea 2003 interview in which he juxtaposes history, what he calls the *maquinaria pesada*, with truth: “Hay que tener mucho cuidado con la *maquinaria pesada* porque la verdad siempre, como decía Renard, es de pequeño tamaño. Y también es muy frágil” (Salazar). For Rivas, the girl killed by the bomb has been erased from history, but she is one of the ‘pequeñas verdades’ that lie at the heart of the truth of past.

However, Rivas suggests that even though official history writes out the ‘pequeñas verdades’ they always leave their traces, commenting in “Garzón, Antígona y la memoria histórica” that, “[c]ensurar un texto no es difícil, lo difícil es borrar sus rastros” (215).<sup>53</sup> It is in this regard that Rivas’ theorization of history takes a Freudian turn. Rivas suggests that the past that is not recognized—or to use Resina’s term, is disremembered—continues to make its mark on the present. In *Present Past: Modernity and the Memory Crisis* Richard Terdiman describes how within Freudian psychoanalysis “what is repressed in the unconscious remains banefully active in our lives,” sometimes leaving its traces on the body itself: “[t]he memory of what cannot be spoken imposes somatic avowal, the mind writes in on the body” (287, 262). In Rivas’ columns Spain’s dictatorial past remains banefully

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<sup>53</sup> “Garzón, Antígona y la memoria histórica” was first published in *El País* on July 8, 2008, and later reprinted as the introductory essay to the second section of *A cuerpo abierto* entitled “La amnesia retrógrada.”

active in its present and continues to leave its traces on contemporary society and politics.

Rivas' columns are not concerned with what happened in the past, but like Freud's work, concentrate on how the past shapes the present (Terdiman 242). Rivas insists that writing about the past is not an attempt to somehow bring retributive justice—commenting in a 2003 interview it is not an “ajuste de cuentas con la historia” (“Mi primer libro”)—but is rather a way to shed light on the present. In his speech given when he was inducted into the Real Academia Galega he employs the term “presente recordado” to refer the relationship between the past and the present: “para min, a memoria é a memoria fertile, a que é un presente recordado, non unha ollada pretérita ao pasado” (X.M.P) [for me, memory is fertile, it is a remembered present, not a preterite look back at a past]. For Rivas the past should not be understood as a series of completed actions—seen as though in the preterite tense—but as an active part of the present. Accordingly, the discussion of history found in Rivas' columns is not about recovering the truth of what happened in the past, but illuminating how history continues to shape democratic Spain.

Much of Rivas' work destabilizes the distinction between the past and the present. Romero studies in “Popular Literary *lieux de mémoire* and Galician Identity in Manuel Rivas's *En salvaxe compañía*” how the blending of borders that separate the past and the present “reveals a desire to understand Galician culture in the present as a product of the past” (297). But, in Rivas' work when the past has been repressed it manifests itself in more nefarious ways, taking the form of a scar, an

illness, or a shadow. In “Visiones sobre fronteras” he suggests that Spain’s repressed history plagues its present:

Yo creo que primero hay que replantearse un poco el concepto de lo que es la historia como algo diferenciado de nuestro presente. Hay una idea un poco equívoca de lo que son los tiempos. Es un poco equívoco entender que el presente lo dicta el calendario, de alguna forma es lo que experimentamos. Con esto quiero decir que cuanto más se ha tendido a ocultar, a olvidar ciertos capítulos de la historia, posiblemente más presente está esa historia, más presentes están los fantasmas de la historia...Creo que en nuestro presente hay sombras que están todavía enfermas. (396)

We can position Rivas’ statement in relation to Jo Labanyi’s seminal essay “History and Hauntology; or, What Does One Do with the Ghosts of the Past?” that examines the phantasmagoric representations of history in Spanish narrative and film. Using Derrida’s term “hauntology” to describe “the status of history: that is, the past as that which is not and yet is there,” Labanyi suggests that history returns in a spectral form in novels and films of the post-Franco period. She studies fantastical elements of narrative and film such as werewolves and vampires as embodying these ghosts of the past. Rivas’ assertion that the ‘sombras’ of the past remain in the present is another way of formulating such infiltration of the past in the present. In much of Rivas’ fiction, like the novels and films that Labanyi studies, the return of the past is portrayed as fantastic or magical. The pencil that the prison guard Herbal wears behind his ear in *O lapis de carpinteiro*, for example, seems to carry magical powers



as the voices of the dead men who once owned it talk to him. Such phantasmagorical or magical elements in fiction, according to Labanyi, act as the “cracks and disturbances” that let in what it is edited out by the “seamlessness of what goes down in history”(73). In Rivas’ columns we find a similar contestation of the ‘seamlessness’ of history, but in them the past does not return in spectral or fantastic forms. Rather, what Nichols calls the “interpenetración del pasado y el presente” in Rivas’ narrative, becomes in his literary journalism an examination of the tangible remnants of a history in the present day.

Many of Rivas’ columns about history coincide with the eight years of Aznar’s presidency from 1996 to 2004, a time when the debate about historical memory in Spain gained force. The burgeoning interest in history during this time was due, in part, to the PP’s first presidency after fourteen years of socialist politics. The personal and political connections between members of the PP and the Falange—most notably the friendship between Aznar’s grandfather and Franco—no longer allowed for the past to be ignored because, as Santos Juliá comments, “empezaron a sonar nombres que eran los mismos que habían sonado durante el régimen de Franco” (qtd. in Ferrán 27). Ofelia Ferrán, author of *Working through Memory: Writing and Remembrance in Contemporary Spanish Narrative*, explains that while the members of the PP downplayed their relationship to the Francoist party, their return to power brought a renewed public interest in Spain’s history

(27).<sup>54</sup> In his columns, Rivas suggests that political narratives of progress and change have veiled the relationship between Fascist ideologies and contemporary politics.

Like “El ‘98” and “Statu quo (2),” Rivas’ columns about contemporary Spanish politics juxtapose official versions of history and ‘pequeñas verdades.’ I focus on two columns published in *El País*, “Con Aznar” (9/28/2002) and “Anomalías” (12/18/2004), in which Rivas finds traces of the past that contradict the narrative of change and progress espoused by the PP. These columns suggest that despite political rhetoric that creates a division between the PP and Francoism, small things such as an object or a word evidence that the past continues to infiltrate the present.<sup>55</sup> His focus on the seemingly insignificant again aligns his work with Freudian psychoanalysis that for Terdiman “has been able to theorize entire areas of what had seemed meaningless as meaningful” (254). In his reading of contemporary Spanish politics Rivas posits that the smallest of things evidence lingering residues of past.

In “Con Aznar” Rivas juxtaposes the rhetoric of political campaigns and the small truths that tell a different story. He speaks about the PP’s decision in 2001 to recognize the oppression caused by the dictatorship after years of refusing to do so. But, for Rivas, this disavowal is nothing more than campaign tactics to create a false

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<sup>54</sup> In addition to the election of the PP, the extradition of Augusto Pinochet by the Spanish judge Baltasar Garzón in 1998 inspired debate about Spain’s own dictatorial past. This discussion of historical memory in Spain continues well into the twenty-first century in cultural, political, and academic realms as Labanyi describes in her 2008 article “The Politics of Memory in Contemporary Spain.”

<sup>55</sup> Small objects are also part of how Rivas challenges official history in his fiction. Nichols comments that in *El lápiz del carpintero* quotidian objects “figuran las historias individuales enterradas bajo el peso de una visión oficial del pasado” (171).

dichotomy between the past and the present. He first comments that the decision appears out of synch with a country distanced from its dictatorial past: “¿Qué sentido tiene en la España de hoy definirse como antifranquista? Hay gente, incluso documentada, que sostiene que ninguno. Como se supone que no hay franquistas en acción...ser antifranquista sería una excentricidad simbólica, un anacronismo simétrico al ser franquista.” But, he notices that the PP has taken on anti-Francoism as their political platform and comments that Aznar has become an “abanderado en el campo antifranquista” who on his campaign goes “de pueblo en pueblo reforzando la unión antifranquista.” According to Rivas, Aznar and PP tout their renunciation of Francoist politics as their new selling point.

But, it is when Aznar reaches the Galician town of Sada that one of the ‘pequeñas verdades’ contradicts the PP’s new political campaign. Sada is “donde es alcalde el senador popular Ramón Ares, autor del fantástica lema *Moncho es mucho*, que todavía tiene a Franco en una peana del despacho.” This single photo, sitting on the desk of a local politician in Galicia, negates the official rejection of Francoism by the PP. Rivas argues that truth is found in those small objects that are subsumed by official narratives and in this case the truth is that PP has not uniformly or completely renounced Francoism. Instead, this one trace of the past is a disturbance in the seamless narrative of progress and change.

No other figure appears more often in Rivas’ columns than Fraga, the Galician politician to whom he dedicates countless stories, chronicles, and columns. Although Rivas often takes a sarcastic stance towards Fraga—mocking, among other

things, his mannerisms and intelligence<sup>56</sup>—in several columns Fraga represents the continuity between the past and the present. Thus, in Rivas' columns Fraga not only embodies the conservatism that marks Galician politics, but also the larger concerns of a nation that in forgetting its past has not only pardoned those associated with the Franco dictatorship, but has kept them in power.

Fraga is the subject of the column “Anomalías” that examines the vestiges of Francoist ideologies in contemporary politics and society. The title “Anomalías” refers to a statement made by Fraga in 2004 that homosexuality is an “anomalía.” Rivas suggests that Fraga's statement resonates with ideologies of the past: “Quizás Fraga de hablar de anomalía estaba pensando en Eduardo Blanco Amor, homosexual y rojo, gran amigo de Lorca, y autor de la mejor novela gallega, *A esmorga* (La parranda), que tuvo que publicarse en el exilio por culpa de la censura.” He connects Fraga's statement to the persecution of homosexual authors during the Civil War and the dictatorship, mentioning the exiled Galician author Blanco Amor and García Lorca who was assassinated by nationalist troops in Granada in 1936. This one word thus evidences that Fraga still maintains and perpetuates beliefs that are purportedly no longer part of contemporary politics.

In “Anomalías” Rivas again finds discrepancies between official history and the small truths. He comments that Fraga has been pardoned by history and his role in the dictatorship has been rewritten so that he is not culpable: “aceptamos la

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<sup>56</sup> See for example the fictional series “El mejor País del Mundo: Esperpento cómico” first published as a series in *La Voz de Galicia* and later collected in *Galicia, Galicia*, that depicts Fraga as an egotistical and simpleminded.

benevolente versión del hombre paradójal, que decía lo que no pensaba y pensaba lo que no decía.” But, the word “anomalía” points to a different side of Fraga’s politics. Although Fraga at the end of his career is “instalado en el minimalismo espacial y verbal,” for Rivas, “lo que queda ahora en el lenguaje son las muescas de las anomalías.” The word is a trace left on language; it is a trace of oppressive ideologies and dictatorial politics. Like the photo of Franco sitting on the mayor of Sada’s desk, this single word “anomalía” symbolizes the perpetual presence of beliefs that, although considered anachronistic, are still embedded in contemporary Spanish society and politics.

Rivas suggests that in order for contemporary Spain to become a fully functioning democracy it must confront the traces of the past. He comments in “Con Aznar” that the repression of the past is “una sombra que debilita ‘el surgimiento de una clara cultura y conciencia democráticas.’ El disco duro de una sociedad democrática es la memoria activa frente a la suspensión de las conciencias, frente al virus de la indiferencia.” In his 2002 conversation with the English/Galician poet Erin Mouré he again describes the past as a shadow that lingers over Spain’s present, but points to the possibility of exorcizing it:

In Galicia, when someone is ill, and they’ve gone from doctor to doctor, and cannot find out what is wrong, if all the tests turn up nothing, but the patient still feels ill, feels lousy, not right, he goes again from specialist to specialist, and it can be that they turn up nothing. At his point, he has one final resort; he calls upon one last specialist, the *curandeiro de sombras*, the healer of shadows. The

*curandeiro* examines him carefully all over and finally says to him, 'You are fine. Your body is all right. The sickness is in your shadow.' And he proceeds to heal the shadow. The Civil War...is Spain's shadow. ("The Year" 65)

The *curandiero de sombras* that can confront the shadows that linger over Spain's present is, in Rivas' work, literature itself.

According to Rivas it is by telling—by turning the past into literature—that Spain can deal with the traces of the past that plague its present. Like Freud who postulates that a patient can get rid of a damaging memory "by turning it into words" (Terdiman 285), Rivas argues that Spain must give language to its repressed past. He describes this therapeutic function of literature in the column "La ópera de la ranas"<sup>57</sup> skating: "[l]a literatura no puede mover montañas ni sustituir a una aspirina para calmar un dolor de muelas. Pero es cierto que hay un proceso curativo...El primer paso para curar una enfermedad es la construcción de un relato...un cuento en el que se encuentren el dolor nombrado y los nombres del dolor" (*Mujer* 298). He further suggests in "El mosquito de la desmemoria" that the disremembering that plagues Spain can be cured by literature: "La gran noticia médica de estos días es que el mal de Alzheimer puede prevenirse con la lectura" (280). Rather than the narratives of official history that, as Ferrán comments, are "cloaked in discourses of progress and development (49)," Rivas proposes that citizens of Spain develop a

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<sup>57</sup> Collected in *A cuerpo abierto*.

narrative of the past that can “reconocer el dolor...para curar las dolencias” (“Garzón” 214).

#### 4. Writing against Hate

Rivas’ statement that literature can heal the trauma of the past points towards how he continually affirms the positive role that literature and language can have in democratic society. Rivas’ columns express an uncommon optimism towards the role of the writer and journalist in inspiring social and political change. To conclude I thus examine how in his columns Rivas suggests that the role of the literary journalist is to contradict the negative voices that fill the public sphere and motivate civic solidarity and activism.

Rivas suggests in his columns that the discourse of contemporary Spain is defined by cynicism and hatred. This includes not only politicians and the mass media, but the writers themselves that, as he describes in “Literatura y canibalismo”<sup>58</sup> are consumed by hate: “este odio de ahora pegadizo como un eczema. Es un odio *full time*. Se ha convertido en una enfermedad profesional” (202). He describes writers as spiteful, greedy men and women who have made “despreciable la figura del escritor” (201). Such writers, together with the voices of politicians, the media, and other intellectuals have become what Rivas coins “los productores de odio” in a column by the same name. He describes their “escritos, ensayos, discursos y, sobre todo, *informaciones*” as the “gran pira de odio acumulado” (152-53). Contrary to the misleading and euphemistic rhetoric that

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<sup>58</sup> Collected in *Mujer en el baño*.

Monzó and Torres see in the media, Rivas finds overwhelming voices of negativity, divisiveness, and enmity. In “La ópera de las ranas” he comments that “los medios comunicación se llenan de ruido, de egos que sólo hablan de sí mismos, de gente que vive del cotilleo caníbal, con la lengua más afilada que la navaja de un barbero...Pero yo sueño con unos nuevos espacios en los medios de comunicación” (299). As he defines the media and its participants as vitriolic disseminators of scorn and pessimism, he proposes to find an alternative form of journalism that can inspire solidarity and hopefulness.

Rivas’ article first published in *El País* on May 19, 2002 under the title “Queremos cambiar el mundo” and later collected in *Mujer en el baño* as “Nunca tanta gente,” is a spirited proclamation that “[n]unca tanta gente ha querido cambiar el mundo” (284). He argues that people from around the world in share, now more than ever, a will to actively resist corruption, violence, inequality, and environmental destruction to “[c]ambiar el mundo...abrir nuevas avenidas a la gente. Combatir el terror” (290). He recognizes that his position appears naively optimistic in a world in which “la pantalla informativa escupe disparates, gotea sangre y proclama la impotencia del ciudadano” (285). But, that is precisely the point of Rivas’ article; he argues that is the role of the writer, journalist, and intellectual to combat the vituperative voices of the public sphere.

In “Nunca tanta gente” Rivas speaks of a series of public figures from various countries that stand for social and political change. He starts with the American author Henry Thoreau, moves to Polish literary journalist Ryszard Kapuscinski, then the Nigerian author Saro-Wiwa, and finally to the Salvadorean



archbishop Óscar Romero. What unites these men of different times, countries, and professions is, in Rivas' terms borrowing from Thoreau, that they represent the "pensador auténtico" (284). He defines this type of figure as someone who "tiene esperanza...establece una cierta relación entre los actos presentes y el futuro de la humanidad...repudia el cinismo...la gran ideología de nuestro tiempo" (287). He focuses in on Kapuscinski who contradicts the cynicism that runs "por el aire acondicionado de los *mass media*" and cites his affirmation that journalism should have political and social motives: "«El verdadero periodismo es intencional, a saber: aquel que se fija un objetivo y que intenta provocar algún tipo de cambio. No hay otro periodismo posible. Hablo, obviamente, del buen periodismo»" (288). Rivas finds in these figures a legacy of public figures who maintain that they can motivate change and have a positive impact on the world in which they live.

Perhaps by using this lineage Rivas delineates how he understands his role as a literary journalist and public intellectual in contemporary Spain. His columns do not express outrage or petulance as do many by Torres and Monzó, but instead look to how the citizens of Spain can challenge political rhetoric and work together to bring change. This is seen most clearly in the columns that Rivas writes about the *Prestige* oil spill such as "El Prestige no se ha hundido" (1/18/2003) in which he describes the *Nunca Más* platform as "una revalorización del concepto del ciudadano, un ciudadano activo que demanda información veraz y participación para afrontar los problemas que le afectan gravemente." Rather than producing hate and discontent, Rivas argues that it is the role of the public figure such as the writer to motivate the action and solidarity of which he speaks.

“Nunca tanta gente” also brings me back to the rooted cosmopolitanism of Rivas’ literary journalism. The authors and intellectuals that he lists from all corners of the globe are united in their shared desire to improve human rights for those closest to them. Rivas describes how they are connected by “hilos invisibles” that move from the U.S. to Nigeria, to Poland to El Salvador (285). Indeed, the title of the original column “Queremos cambiar el mundo” suggests that we, the collective, share the desire to bring positive change. Such change, within Rivas’ literary world, is attained at the local level such as *Nunca Más*’ protests and Saro-Wiwa’s environmental campaigns but reverberates, to repeat Mato’s terms, “a las más anchas latitudes.”

There are many criticisms that can be leveled against Rivas’ optimistic position: it is totalizing, it overvalues the role of literature and the literary authors, and it rests on values that are far from universal. But, we can also understand it within Said’s argument that one of the roles of the intellectual is “to discern the possibilities for active intervention, whether we perform them ourselves or acknowledge them in others who have either gone before or are already at work” (“The Public” 140). Rivas insists that the literary figure can serve this role—he or she does not have to be what he calls a “productor de odio”—and can do it by offering an alternative discourse in the mass media. By participating with social and environmental groups and publishing literary journalism focusing on their achievements, Rivas points to these possibilities for intervention by the Spanish public.

## **5. Conclusion**

As a columnist in the Spanish press, Rivas in many ways stands alone. His columns are dense, packed with metaphors, literary allusions, and philosophical references. Far from the “economía verbal” that Monzó describes, Rivas’ columns require the reader to unpack his many metaphors and insinuations to get at his reading of contemporary Spanish society and politics. And rather than focusing on himself—his thoughts and opinions about the debates of the day—Rivas looks around him to see how the things that go unnoticed might tell us something different about the world we live in. His unrelenting optimism towards the possibility of meaningful social and political change also sets him apart from many columnists such as Monzó who cynically witness the destruction that surrounds them.

Differences aside, the central axis of his columns is the same as that of many columnists in the Spanish press. Rivas, like Torres and Monzó, vouches that the columnist should be a contradictory voice in the public sphere who offers an alternative mode of understanding the news. While for Torres and Monzó this means countering what they see as celebratory, veiled language, for Rivas it means offering an alternative to the pessimism and hatred that he sees in the mass media. Rivas suggests that an optimistic and hopeful perspective is in itself a form of opposition, stating as one of his ten commandments of literature, borrowing the words of Galician author Álvaro Cunqueiro, “[w]e resist because we dream” (“The Year” 67).

## Conclusion

The range of style, themes, and positions in the literary journalism of Torres, Monzó, and Rivas, reflects the freedom that literary columns afford their authors. Bound by only word count and due date, authors are free to express unpopular or controversial positions, experiment with form, and discuss topics of their choosing. Despite the apparent differences, however, columns by these three authors also share many affinities. In conclusion, I examine how columns by Torres, Monzó, and Rivas all, in each author's unique way, reaffirm the value of the literary author as a social and political critic in a democratic Spain that has not lived up to its promises.

### **1. Language and the Writer-Intellectual**

In the Introduction I define columnists as writer-intellectuals who use literary modes of expression as a means of offering critical perspectives towards politics and society. In the preceding chapters I have evaluated the style of columns by Torres, Monzó, and Rivas as part of the personal critique that each author proposes. Indeed, each author offers a distinct model of how literary language can counter the dominant voices of the public sphere. Torres' columns suggest that it is the obligation of the writer and journalist to use explicit, opinionated, exact, and bold language to challenge official discourse. She argues that at the turn of the twenty-first century explicit criticism is still needed to contradict the webs of fabrication spun by media and politics. The language of Monzó's columns is also explicit and precise, but takes a particularly cynical perspective. I examine how the skeptical, scurrilous and irreverent narrative voice of his columns confronts what he construes as the misleading, celebratory political rhetoric of the Generalitat. The dense, poetic,

and visual nature of Rivas' columns, on the other hand, suggests that literature serves to uncover a different history than that of political narratives. By focusing on seemingly insignificant images or words, Rivas' columns find traces of what is left out of official versions of history. For each author it is by way of a personal, expressive, literary language that he or she can challenge and contradict the dominant voices in the press.

It is also in the language of their columns that we find significant overlap between their literary journalism and more traditional work. Each of the three authors destabilizes a hierarchy of literature by insisting that their literary journalism is closely tied to their fiction and that it is not a lesser form of writing. Monzó even goes as far as to say that the only feature that separates his columns from his fiction is their place of publication. Although it is not true that there is no difference between their fiction and literary journalism, there are many characteristics that their literary columns and fiction share. All of Torres' fictional and journalistic work, I argue, focuses on the subjective experience of the writer who lives through what she writes about. Her columns are part of a writing career that centers on the personal, emotional, and intellectual insight of the author. The terse, cruel, and plain style of Monzó's columns mirrors the bare-bones language of his fictional work. It is by way of a simplified literary language that both Monzó's fiction and literary journalism render absurd the values and beliefs of contemporary society. Rivas' literary journalism shares with his fiction a sensorial, poetic use of language especially concerned with the image. The dense, metaphorical language of his

columns is part of a literary career that blends the borders between narrative, poetic, and journalistic genres.

Columns are thus the space in which literary writers regularly interact with the public sphere of turn of the twenty-first century Spain. Far from experts or analysts, columnists are writers whose creativity and art of expression offer unique perspectives towards the news. Columnists such as Torres, Monzó, and Rivas do not switch modes when writing literary journalism, but extend their characteristic literary style to contemporary issues and debates. It for this reason that literary columns are both a literary and journalistic form. Columns prioritize literary expression as a means to redefine how we think about and discuss the news.

## **2. Intellectuals of Multinational Spain**

Columnists are also public intellectuals of multinational Spain who define their audience according to the newspapers they write for, the language they write in, and the topics they discuss. Torres, Monzó, and Rivas each offer a distinct model of a public intellectual within the multinational and multilingual landscape. Firstly, Torres, born in Barcelona, largely distances herself from questions of national identity and language in her columns published in *El País*. Neither the city of Barcelona nor the particularities of Catalan culture have a prominent position in her columns, and she does little to define herself as a Catalan intellectual. On the other hand Monzó, despite publishing his columns in Spanish, has defined himself as a public intellectual for a specifically Catalan audience. By participating exclusively with the Catalan media, addressing topics particular to Catalonia, and offering a specifically Catalanist perspective he has aligned himself as a potential elite of the

stateless nation. Finally, Rivas offers a model of a public intellectual for both local and national audiences. His points of reference and concerns are almost always directly related to his native Galicia, but his columns extend beyond discussing local politics or debates. Instead, in Rivas' columns the local is a lens through which to gain greater insight into topics of national and global concern.

Columns by Monzó and Rivas, in particular, reveal the complex relationship between the literary author and national identity in turn of the twenty-first century Spain. Rivas' work points towards the dissolution of barriers that separate nations and languages, a trend that Perriam finds in much fiction of 1990s Spain (208-09). In Rivas' columns the local and the global are not incompatible and a commitment to the autonomous community does not preclude participation in national literary culture. On the other hand, Monzó's columns seem to fortify, rather than dissolve, the lines that separate the local and the national. Although he is an author of international success, Monzó's columns remain dedicated to questions of Catalan national identity and politics. As I have argued, one of the main thrusts behind his columns is that the Autonomous Communities System has failed to provide protection and support to Catalan language and culture. Far from suggesting that the local is a way to enter into discussions of the global, his columns posit that local cultural and linguistic particularities are facing continual destruction by immigration, tourists, and the societal discord created by bilingualism. The main difference between his position and that of earlier Catalan potential elite, I argue, is that rather than attempting to build up a national identity and discourse, his cynicism points to the deceptive ways in which that identity has been created. Rivas and Monzó thus

represent two radically different versions of the writer-intellectual of stateless nations of plural Spain.

### **3. Democracy and its Discontents**

The overarching theme found in the columns published by Torres, Monzó, and Rivas from 1996 to 2004 is that democracy in Spain has failed to live up to its expectations. Their positions not only reflect dissatisfaction with Aznar and the PP, but also insist that the democratic system has not brought sufficient change. Each author has particular concerns: for Torres, freedom of the press has not equated with journalistic integrity and changes in women's rights have been superficial, for Monzó the Statute of Autonomy and official bilingualism has had an inverse effect, further damaging Catalan language and culture, and for Rivas the failure to sufficiently deal with the past has allowed Francoist ideologies to remain in place. But, the work of all three authors posits that the consolidation of democracy in Spain has failed to adequately transform politics and society. The dissatisfaction with democracy reflected in their literary journalism thus coincides with what has been called the *segundo desencanto* of end of the millennium Spain.

One of the most pressing problems facing democratic Spain is, as seen in columns by Torres, Monzó, and Rivas, that democratic politics have normalized continued oppression and inequality. They suggest that political rhetoric of progress and change has created the false assumption that the transition to democracy has been completed, while leaving unexamined the problems that plague the country. The insistence on the need for a critical press in Torres' columns is a response to authority given to official versions of the news that, she argues, are intended to



mislead the reading and viewing public. Both Monzó's and Rivas' columns posit that political language has made invisible the similarities between Spain's dictatorial past and its democratic present. Monzó's columns suggest that the Generalitat has veiled the continued linguistic and social divisions of Catalonia by employing terms such as bilingualism, integration, and the Barcelona-model. In Rivas' literary journalism political rhetoric that insists on the separation of Spain's present from its past leaves unexamined the overlap between the two and, in turn, allows some of the same politicians to stay in power. For all three authors, misleading political rhetoric has impeded any possibility for achieving the promised reforms of the Transition.

Despite the disenchantment with democracy seen in their columns, Torres, Monzó, and Rivas affirm the role of debate in criticism in creating and maintaining democratic society. Rather than retreating from the public sphere or accepting the futility of criticism, they hold on to what Montalbán calls "obsesiones críticas." Each author maintains that the writer-intellectual can still influence public opinion and perhaps even motivate social or political change. One of the ways in which they do so is by calling into question the assumed successes of democracy as purported by political and journalistic discourse. Each author asks his or her readers to consider how what they hold to be true is often contradicted by everyday life. In Torres' column "Pasarela," for example, the achievement of gender equality is disputed by a course offered by the Xunta de Galicia on how to be a perfect woman. Similarly, Monzó's "Por un equilibrio ecológico" argues that simply eating lunch at the Boquería disrupts the Barcelona-model promotion of tourism that supposedly protects civic life. In Rivas' "Con Aznar" the PP's official rejection of Francosim is

contradicted by a photo of Franco that still sits on a Galician politician's desk. Their constant focus on the everyday, on the seemingly insignificant or banal parts of life, is thus a means to uncover how political rhetoric of change has little to do with the realities of democratic Spain.

#### **4. Literature of the Everyday**

It is perhaps the everyday quality that best characterizes *columnas periodísticas* of turn of the twenty-first century Spain. Torres, Monzó, and Rivas are all regular presences in the pages of the daily press that habitually offer their takes on just about any subject. Indeed, it is in their regularity that columns are unique. It is by appearing in the newspaper week after week, month after month, year after year, that columnists embed themselves as constant voices in the public sphere. They do not reserve their opinions for particular events or moments, but dissect and assess everything from royal weddings to wars. The continual presence of columns in the daily press means that critical or oppositional points of view are not exceptional, but are fully integrated into the daily press. Columns are unique in their ordinariness.

But it is also for their regularity that columns show the greatest variability. For Valls columns are less controlled by the demands of the market than more traditional genres and have thus become “el formato ideal para la experimentación” (27). Week after week columnists are free to experiment with ideas and style without many editorial pressures. Although sometimes one column may create problems for an author—such as when Torres called the PP voters “hijos de puta”—in general authors are not tied down to any particular column. Instead, they are an

ephemeral form that only will go down in posterity when collected in a book, after significant revisions. Columns by Torres, Monzó and Rivas reflect the variety that stems from such regularity: some of them are interesting, some more literary, others tend towards the offensive, and some are virtually impenetrable. They are almost never perfected pieces, but are snippets of the ideas and styles the authors are playing with that day.

## **5. The 21<sup>st</sup> Century Intellectual**

It has been the goal of this project not only to further the study of the authors in question, but also to suggest that the writer-intellectual has a visible and prominent position in democratic Spain. By the end of the twentieth century the public intellectual is largely understood from two opposing, but equally negative, perspectives. On the one hand they are believed to have retreated from the public sphere, essentially giving up on the possibility of having a meaningful impact on society. On the other they are nothing but money-hungry vultures, looking to cash in on the increase in book sales and paid appearances that celebrity will bring. It is my belief, however, that the columnist in Spain offers an example of a public intellectual that affirms that literature and the literary author can still benefit the common good at the turn of the twenty-first century. I do not ignore the financial advantages that columns offer their writers, but believe that when we look at the columns authors publish, especially those of authors writing in the newspapers long before collections of columns were featured on bookstore shelves, we find a commitment to issues that exceeds the simple hunt for fame. The columns of Torres, Monzó, and Rivas are one part of their larger careers as public intellectuals dedicated to particular issues from

women's rights, to Catalan nationalism, to environmentalism. Instead of dismissing columns as merely a means of profit, I have attempted to understand how they offer the writer-intellectual a space to discuss and debate issues important to them in the public sphere.

When we consider the possibility that the public intellectual is alive and well in Spain, we can begin to examine the shifting role of the writer-intellectual in the twenty-first century. I believe that *Spanish Literary Journalism at the Turn of the Twenty-First Century* points towards several paths of future research particularly in regards to the changing relationship between the literary author and nationalism and the new ways in which authors use the media to interact with popular culture and society. I have not attempted to provide a complete study of literary columns or the public intellectual, but by focusing on literary journalism by Torres, Monzó, and Rivas, offer a starting point for understanding the role of the writer-intellectual in contemporary Spanish society.

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