# ‘Ser un símbol, quina misèria!’: Social, National and Sexual Dissent in Blai Bonet’s *Míster Evasió* (1969)[1]

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*Míster Evasió* (1969), which was a profoundly innovative work in the context of the 1970s, achieved remarkable success among university students.[2] Bonet was able to reflect the hopes and concerns of a whole new crop of readers, and the critics of the time did not fail to notice that the novel could be read as a sort of generational manifesto: García-Soler argued in *La Vanguardia* that *Míster Evasió* ‘con toda su tremenda y patética carga testimonial, es un libro sobre el que será necesario volver’ (1969: 51), and an anonymous reviewer pointed out in the same newspaper that ‘trata de presentar el muchacho de 1968 a través de su condición humana’ (1969: 43).[3] By a fortunate coincidence the novel was published just after May 1968 and, in an attempt to capitalize on the impact of this recent event, *Míster Evasió* was advertised in the press as dealing with ‘La condició humana interior i exterior, del noi 1968 devorat pel trust de la Història’ (Destino 1969: 65). The timing of the book’s release could not have been more opportune, because it benefited the reception of a text which was already laden with social and political commentary.

Blai Bonet’s novels are so personal and complex that they have been approached from very different critical perspectives (see, for example, Salom 1988; Campillo and Castellanos 1988; Rosselló Bover 1987; Pons 1993, 1998, 2000 and 2009; Pla 2011). This article

[1] Research for this article was funded by a British Academy Small Grant.
[2] The former Vice-President of the Generalitat, Josep-Lluís Carod Rovira, for instance, stated in an interview that he was so impressed by the novel, which he read at 18, that he immediately bought 20 copies for his friends (Tedó 2009, p. 6; see also Triadú 1971, p. 37 and Susanna 1988, p. 44).
[3] Similarly, Triadú pointed out that ‘El mite d'una joventut i d'una època, caracteritzades pel maig francès del 68, plana damunt les pàgines calidoscòpiques, canviants i riques d'al·lusions i contrastos, de la novel·la’ (1982, p. 139).

sets out to explore *Míster Evasió*'s representation of 1960s Catalonia and will focus in particular on three key aspects which have not been addressed by scholars: first, I will argue that in this novel Bonet embarks on a frontal attack against one of the key artistic movements of post-war Catalan and Spanish literature, the so-called *realisme històric* or *realismo social*; second, I will discuss its ambiguous relation to Catalan nationalism, which the narrator seems to contradictorily scorn and embrace at the same time; third, I will explore the links between ideological, national and sexual dissent in the 1960s, a decade when the country experienced a radical economic and social transformation.

The twin concepts of *realisme històric* and *novela social* have merited several studies, and it is not my intention here to discuss them at length (see, for instance, Jordan 1990 and Simbor 2005). Suffice to say that this literary trend, born out of the socio-political circumstances, was instantly successful and for a while it seemed the most effective way to destabilize the dictatorship. According to Josep Maria Castellet, its main proponent –both in Spanish and Catalan literature –, this movement 'era una conseqüència lògica de la penosa situació en la qual vivíem sota la dictadura. Buscàvem espais per a la denúncia d'aquella situació, i la literatura podia ser-ne un. Almenys això és el que pensàvem.' (1988: 226). The new aesthetic –social and realistic– aimed at transforming society through art and was designed to challenge Francoism more directly than the symbolism used to circumvent censorship which characterised many artistic products of the 1940s and 1950s. Within the new paradigm, the writer was required to transcend purely personal, subjective experiences by contrasting his or her own self against social reality so as to offer a more critical portrayal of contemporary life.

Of course, in a European context dominated by the Modernist canon the emphasis on realism was bound to be controversial, but as Manent points out, this reaction has to be interpreted as a hasty attempt to reinvigorate the bleak Catalan post-war cultural climate: 'L'intent d'introduir el realisme històric era legítim i podia semblar un esforç desesperat perquè la nostra cultura no perdés el tren de la història (o de la moda).' (1986: 70). The main problem with *realisme històric*, of which Blai Bonet was no doubt acutely aware, is that it

immediately brought to mind the dogmatism and rigidity of socialist realism, and therefore it was seen by some as a trend that limited the writer's freedom (see Gregori 2006: 303-309). *Míster Evasió* championed the efforts to discredit this movement in Catalan literature and could have easily played a role similar to Luis Martín-Santos's *Tiempo de silencio* (1962) or Juan Goytisolo's *Señas de identidad* (1966), which have been considered turning points in the post-war Spanish novel because of their breaking away from this aesthetic perspective. *Míster Evasió*, however, has never been considered in the light of its opposition to *realisme historic* –except by Castellet himself, who was well aware that Bonet's narrative interests stood in stark contrast to his own critical convictions. Although in a 1961 article Castellet referred to Bonet as one of the three most important Catalan young writers, he was swift to point out that he rejected the author's 'caòtic, subjectiu i destructor món d'una adolescència que es busca i no es troba, que se sent apartada de la societat i s'evadeix en el sexe o en Déu' (1961: 52).

Castellet condemns Bonet's literary production precisely because it challenged some of the main tenets of *realisme històric*: it is ironic, subjective and pessimistic; it seems to place little trust in social structures; it does not focus on social groups and is not interested in portraying collective experiences; it does not aim to trigger a *prise de conscience*; it does not target bourgeois society and, last but not least, shows little influence from Marxist ideology. Marc Esquert, *Míster Evasió*'s narrator, is quite explicit in this regard: after offering a graphic description of living (or, rather, dying) conditions in the shanty town of Somorrostro, he warns the reader that 'A qui digui "això és tremendisme, literatura de socials", li fumo mastegot, que el deixo d'acord amb les autoritats per a tota la vida. Això no és tremendisme, me caso amb déna; és Somorrostro' (p. 64).

Bonet not only refuses to be identified with any specific literary style in order to reassert his creative independence, but he also disdains the use of traditional mimetic techniques typical of *realisme històric* and advocates the free exploration of language and literary conventions. As a result, *Míster Evasió* becomes an extremely complex stylistic construct which has little to do with the plain, objective, almost journalistic style which was meant to characterise

the *novela social*. The writer does not aim to mirror reality and his style is not intended to pass unnoticed; on the contrary, he constantly distorts the narrator's –and the reader's– perception of the outside world by displaying multiple stylistic planes which overlap or sometimes collide with each other. From this point of view, *Míster Evasió* is a polyphonic novel as defined by Bakhtin, a text containing a plurality of discourse perspectives which organises the social and historical voices that impregnate language 'into a structured stylistic system, expressing the differentiated socio-ideological position of the author in the heteroglossia of the epoch' (1981: 300).

*Míster Evasió* focuses on Marc Esquert, a twenty-year old man who resides in Geneva and spends his free time reflecting on his life and jotting down his thoughts in order to try to understand and justify the reasons that compelled him to leave his country. The reader not only has access to Marc's inner feelings regarding his family, infancy and coming of age, expressed in an almost stream-of-consciousness-like style, but occasionally also becomes aware of the immediate circumstances surrounding Marc's writing, since the character often describes the room and the table where he is developing his ideas: 'Ara, aquí, a Suïssa, on treballo, en aquesta habitació de Ginebra, on provo d'escriure els dissabtes a la tarda i algun diumenge de bon matí, sobre la fòrmica d'aquesta taula' (p. 31). As can be seen, in *Míster Evasió* the narrator adopts a first person point of view, which ties in with Bonet's rejection of *realisme històric*. Those writers who opposed it objected to the view that intellectuals could become impartial observers of reality and considered that society could only be understood from a purely individual stance. This led them to reject the omniscient third person as falsely neutral and endorse the idea that only from a subjective viewpoint was it possible to offer a coherent analysis of social reality. In the face of these arguments, which cast doubt on the power of literature to address collective needs, some considered that, in order to be truthful to themselves and to their readers, writers should focus on the personal, inner world of the characters. This does not mean that authors simply turned to radical individualism and rejected all forms of political or social commitment; rather, in *Míster Evasió* and other works this assumption resulted in new forms of engagement, since the

new goal was to develop more complex forms of representation so as to portray the social environment in a more honest and effective manner.

As a consequence of his complex personal crisis, which is the main topic of the novel, Marc Esquert carries out a rigorous self-examination which leads him to flee from his unaccepting family, the oppressive dictatorship and the stiff social conventions of post-war society. To this end, he quits his studies and moves to Geneva, where he starts writing his biography, entitled *Míster Evasió*. The first chapter is devoted to describing his family, which seems to metaphorically represent the social divisions that led to the Civil War: his father, portrayed as authoritarian and pragmatic, is only interested in his business and symbolises the violent and intolerant impulses of the dictatorship, whereas his daydreaming mother, who plays the piano but is incapable of taking care of daily chores, embodies the spirit of the failed Republic. Marc's paternal branch is profoundly anti-intellectual: the Republicans are described by his grandmother as 'Gent desenfeinada, lletraferida, que no saben fer res més que el vermut i discursos, que no tenen aturall a la llengua' (p. 151), and his mother's pastime is criticized because 'La Passionaria en devia saber, de tocar el piano, donasses dels rojos, que no saben fer res més que el vermut' (p. 150). Marc, however, not only rebels against paternal authority, but also against the mother's influence. While it is true that she is understanding and broad-minded, she is also portrayed as wasting her energy in pointless activities. In fact, the narrative seems to establish a subtle parallelism between what his mother represents and the opposition to the regime, which in the narrator's eyes seems to be incapable of offering any serious alternative to Francoism.

Marc's personal and family crises, which acquire a collective dimension, are the result of specific historical circumstances: the gradual transformation of the dictatorship from a fascist state into an authoritarian technocracy which embraced economic liberalism. Significantly, the novel opens with a reference to the sixth Fleet, which in 1951 anchored for the first time in Barcelona. As Theros points out, the clash between the local and the American way of life was instrumental in the development of an early consumerist mentality: 'per als barcelonins la Sisena Flota era un símbol de

modernitat que va suposar un canvi d'hàbits. Just l'any 1951 arriba la Coca-Cola, que instal·la la primera fàbrica a Barcelona. També és l'època del xiclet, dels encenedors Zippo, dels primers texans o dels calçotets tipus eslip. És el moment en què l'estil de vida americà entra a casa nostra, amb els primers electrodomèstics' (2010: 12). The impact that the arrival of the US navy had on the city is well reflected in the text: part of the final chapter takes place at Panam's, a popular joint among soldiers – referred to in the text as 'coca-colos'–; the under-aged prostitute Rosita complains that 'De fa dos dies, hi ha nord-americans. No m'aguanto, amoret' (p. 71) and, finally, the imposing presence of the American aircraft carriers transforms the city's landscape: 'Un helicòpter baixava, com una libèl·lula, sobre la pista del portaavions que barrava l'entrada color de rata del port' (p. 68).

The undeniable success of the regime's economic metamorphosis is accurately portrayed in the narrative: Marc owns a car and is constantly listening to records, and the cameras, magazines and other consumer products which circulate among his friends make evident the prosperity of the country in the 1960, which in a way questions the efforts of those engaged in political action. Borrowing Castellet's words, the protagonist's angst seems to stem from the frustration of 'haver estat espectadors inútils, només ocasionalment operatius, d'un procés històric que funcionava als marges dels nostre desigs i de la nostra voluntat de canvi' (1998: 57). It is not coincidental that Jesús, the only character involved in clandestine activities, is quickly arrested by the police among general indifference: '–Han detingut el Jesús. / –Quan? / –Ara mateix. Travessava la plaça de Sant Jaume enmig d'un grup. Anaven cap a la Via Laietana. / –Em dono la pell, si no ha estat una *xivatada*' (p. 83). Tellingly, readers are not told what happens to him, as if Jesús's plight had to be quickly forgotten and this incident had no consequences. The passive and apathetic attitude of the majority of the population is exemplified by means of a reference to one of the most successful writers of the time, José María Gironella, whose novels on the Civil War, written from a Catholic and conservative point of view, have been described as 'deformada[s] e inexacta[s], superficial[es] y, en fin tendenciosa[s]' (Aguinaga, Rodríguez and Zabala 2000: 409). Marc

ironically points out that 'quasi totes les senyores neoclàssiques varen comprar' a copy of Gironella's *Un millón de muertos*, awarded the Planeta prize in 1961 (p. 58).

The painful realisation that the forces of economic growth are more effective at changing the current state of affairs than ideological convictions is what leads the narrator to adopt a detached attitude towards political militancy and also cast doubts on the transformative effects of artistic creation. This is why he sarcastically mocks 'els marxistes de color de rosa, que corregeixen versos de poetes verdals a base de tatxar les paraules burgeses per tal que hi quedin només els mots proletaris, filla. Màgic, dolcesa, vellut, núvol, tatxadura a dojo. Nacionalitat, trimestre, pernil, foneria, apa, paraules, a fer la carrera' (p. 73). It is worth noting that, as Bonet was well aware, the word *tachadura* was constantly used by Spanish censors in their reports to indicate the passages that had to be suppressed. Marc, therefore, seems to equate the ideological impositions of Marxist intellectuals, which banned or promoted certain expressions, with state censorship; according to him, both prohibitive practices lead words to 'fer la carrera' ('prostitute themselves'). Incidentally, it appears that this passage was not born out of Bonet's imagination, since Manent reports in his diary a suspiciously similar episode: 'Em conta l'Enric Badosa una anècdota divertidíssima: en [Manuel] Sacristán és l'encarregat de *censurar* [the emphasis is mine] els mots capitalistes dels poemes que escriuen els poetes filoxinesos de la Universitat.' (1986: 36 [3 December 1960]).

In spite of his lack of interest in political doctrines, the narrator is determined to commit himself to society, and this is why he chooses to get closer to those who have been excluded from it. This process begins in the second chapter, devoted to Marc's education in a religious boarding school. In a trip to evangelize destitute children, Marc visits the shanty town of Somorrostro –which used to be one of the most deprived areas of Barcelona before it was demolished– and makes acquaintance with Rosita and Antonio, forced into prostitution by their own father, who also sexually abuses his daughter. Since one of the fundamental arguments against *realisme històric* is that one cannot effectively criticise a given social system and at the same time be an integral part of it, following his encounter with the underclass

Marc embarks on geographical and social exile. Rather than describing the social outcasts, which is what he would have done had he adopted the perspective of the *novela social*, the narrator himself becomes a pariah in order to experience (as opposed to merely observing, analysing or documenting) society from the margins. It is worth mentioning that Marc's epiphany in Somorrostro is not a mere literary invention to justify the character's behaviour. In the 1940s, school trips of this sort were regularly organized with a view to promoting religious vocations among students, although it appears that these outings often had unintended consequences. The journalist Llorenç Gomis, for instance, recalls in his memoirs that in a visit to the equally deprived El Bon Pastor he experienced feelings not dissimilar to Marc's: 'En aquella barriada vam descobrir la misèria dels suburbis l'any 42 i vam entreveure l'ofec d'una situació política i social adversa' (1994: 108).

The way in which the narrator distances himself from ideologies also causes him to adopt a critical stance towards nationalism. The theme of Catalan identity is of central importance in *Míster Evasió*, but it has not been addressed by scholars, mainly because as stated by Pons, 'la recepció crítica de Bonet va nèixer determinada per la precarietat infrastructural i pel resistencialisme identitari de la postguerra' (2009: 515). What this implies is that, since the novel was published in the 1960s, the writer's commitment to Catalan culture has simply been taken for granted. Rosselló Bover, for example, deals with this issue in a rather superficial way, merely highlighting that the novel contains 'referències a la marginació de la llengua catalana' (p. 312). In reality, this is a much more complex issue that requires careful examination because, although there is no doubt that Bonet was a passionate supporter of his own language, it is equally true that, for several reasons that will be revealed later, he found it very difficult to integrate into the cultural resistance movement.

Admittedly, articulating a discourse which was critical of Catalan society in a context in which the native culture was severely repressed and banned from the public sphere was no easy task. Nevertheless, Bonet managed to find a suitable strategy to express his concerns: irony. It is hard to take seriously sentences such as

'L'Empordà és la reserva espiritual de Catalunya' (p. 54), 'Cal ser completament català. Ser només català, fins al punt de no consumir res més que productes catalans' (p. 93) or 'N'arriba a ser, de bo, el pa amb tomàtec i pernil. I ben català. Potser més que la carn d'olla, ves' (p. 57). Equally caustic is a passage where Marc's grandmother points out that the Catalans have never worn gowns (therefore suggesting that this is not a manly garment): 'Apa, ja tenim aquí el *cupletista* amb el *batín*, que això ho han de dir en castellà, perquè no crec que mai hi hagi hagut cap català que se n'hagi posat' (p. 37). Examples abound in which the narrator mocks certain nationalist attitudes and beliefs. Marc, for instance, points out that those who purchase the volumes of the Col·lecció Bernat Metge, considered a landmark of twentieth century Catalan culture, usually leave them unopened, and also scorns the lack of ambition of those publishers who always resorted to voluntarism and refused to try to normalize the literary market: '– Penseu, doctor Bofill, que la nostra editorial no és, diguem-ne, un negoci. És, com li podria dir, amic Bofill?, és una munió d'amics de la nostra terra, que, desinteressadament, de-sin-te-res-sa-da-ment, aporten un capital, sovint gairebé migrat, a la nostra tasca' (pp. 93-94). After this conversation, it is suggested that Bofill pays for the publication of his own book in exchange for 100 copies for his friends, to which he replies that he has never had so many acquaintances.

The language of the pre-war nationalist intelligentsia is also parodied; in a sentence addressed to Uriac, a revered old poet also exiled in Geneva, Doctor Bofill points out: 'Digué que ereu el llorer del país, l'aroma i la fulla perenne de la cultura. A la sortida de l'aplec em diguéreu, ho recordeu?: "Ser el llorer d'un país és el programa vital d'un humanista"? I ja no us agrada ser el llorer de la cultura catalana?' (p. 157). By definition, irony is a rhetorical device which implies a discordance between surface and underlying meaning and relies on 'the audience or hearer recognizing that what the speaker says *cannot* be what she means' (Colebrook 2004: 15). Irony, therefore, rests on the audience's ability –or willingness– to recognize potential discrepancies between what is said and what is meant. The consequence is that the above sentences, despite their –in my opinion– sardonic overtones, could perfectly well be taken as serious

statements, particularly in a context where self-criticism was a rare exercise, since it could have been seen as a self-defeating and counterproductive strategy.

The rather grotesque ideas with which Bonet stresses the 'Catalanness' of the protagonists appear to reflect the tensions caused by his will to criticise certain nationalist attitudes and, at the same time, the realisation that he is living in a country where basic rights are violated with impunity. Irony provides a solution to this dichotomy as it allows him to playfully –and ambiguously– express this contradiction. Marc is a young rebel dissatisfied with the conservatism of contemporary society, which has left him with no other option but to emigrate, and this is why he rejects a nationalism based on symbols, rituals and the idea of the collectivity. As Uriac affirms in a passage that was censored and has never seen public light, 'ser un gigoló de la història és pitjor que ser-ho d'una doneta que fa de la vida. Ser un símbol, quina misèria!'.[4] This does not imply, however, that Marc rejects his belonging to the Catalan national community. In another important passage which was also excised, Uriac proposes a new way of expressing his feelings towards his country:

> La meva pàtria és el món, amb el detall ben profund de sentir-ho i dir-ho en català. Que n'és, de molt més verd el Montseny, Bofill, mirat com a muntanya del món, vist, trepitjat, com una muntanya molt verda, que també tenen els africans, els hindús. El Montseny del món! Tots plegats anem en aquesta direcció. [...] Sereu català del món o no sereu, noi. Si després existeix una pàtria petita, feta a la meva mesura, sóc profund a bastament per a veure que aquesta pàtria a mesura humana és la meva dona, la Margarida.

[4] Archivo General de la Administración (AGA), Culture Section, file 9465, box 21/19363. The censored passages quoted in this article are taken from the galley-proofs kept at the AGA. Alterations were made on the galley-proofs and not on the manuscript, which indicates that this was the version that Bonet wanted to offer to the public. It is true that when Tres i Quatre and Edicions 62 republished the novel (1987 and 1995) the author was still alive and he could have tried to restore the text, but he might have forgotten about the cuts or the final manuscript might have been lost.

In this quotation, Uriac rejects certain myths of essentialist nationalism because El Montseny –or, by extension, what is belived to be more specific to a given nation– is not in any way unique in the world, since each community has an equally legitimate equivalent. As a result of this relativization of the sense of belonging, Uriac highlights that one's own country is not the land or the collectivity –in other words, an abstraction– but the individual. More specifically, he claims that this 'pàtria a mesura humana' is his wife. Furthermore, the poet establishes a clear difference between excessively narrow conceptions of one own's national consciousness and his language, which he considers to be far more important as it allows him to communicate with the world: 'amb el detall ben profund de sentir-ho i dir-ho en català'.

Marc's distrust of preconceived nationalist ideas runs parallel to his wariness of *realisme històric*, because both are seen as ideological constructs that only aim to constrain the individual and limit his or her freedom of expression. In fact, this is the most important lesson he learns from the poet Uriac who, after many years in exile, finally renounces his status as a symbol, which he comes to see as purposeless, and decides to go back to Barcelona. Despite Bofill's flattery, which again verges on the ridiculous ('Sou un mite, Uriac. No oblideu que sou un mite. Els mites no s'han d'humanitzar. Sou una bandera, el punt alfa dels joves, un català de principis...' (p. 157), the poet concludes that 'A la meva obra no hi ha cap altra ascensió que la del meu egoisme' and confesses to being bitterly ashamed of 'setanta anys de badocar, de posar-me a escriure com posar-me el termòmetre' (p. 155). This whole episode is clearly inspired by the life of the poet Josep Carner, who in his 80s also expressed his wish to return to Catalonia (see Pons 1993: 189). His decision was met with opposition by some intellectuals, who considered that the writer's symbolic status required him to remain in Switzerland until the end of the dictatorship. In addition, Uriac hesitates and finds it difficult to remember Marc's name, which suggests that this passage was inspired by a controversial interview published in *Serra d'Or* (December 1966) in which an ageing Carner found it difficult to focus his mind and offer coherent responses to Baltasar Porcel's questions. The interviewer, who transformed a

distant literary myth into a fascinating, yet flawed and fragile real man, was accused of cruelty and of betraying the memory of a living classic (Ferré 2000: 311), which is precisely what Uriac refuses to become. Some other censored passages reinforce this idea: 'A Ginebra m'hi sento mite, un impostor', 'a posta no vull ser heroi, ni símbol, ni un màrtir. No ho sóc.' The similitude between Carner's and Uriac's words indicate that Bonet must have been touched by Porcel's interview and decided to adapt it to his own purposes. The following suppressed dialogue is quite clear in this respect:

> -I ara! Vós? Vós tornar a Catalunya? Què hi fareu? Què hi faríeu? No hi podreu pas fer res.
> -Algun treball s'hi trobarà. D'entrada, hi seré català. Un català normal. Un catalanet del món, Bofill. [H]e decidit de no morir verge i màrtir, inscrit a un calendariet clandestí.

Marc makes it clear in his diary that he feels excluded from society, and the enlightening quotation by James Joyce which opens *Míster Evasió* should be understood from this perspective: 'Irlanda: truja que devora la seva propia ventrada'. Obviously, to fully comprehend the meaning of this sentence it is necessary to replace 'Irlanda' by 'Catalonia' or 'Majorca'. The second quotation, by Boris Pasternak, is even more revealing about Bonet's disappointment upon realising that the Catalan and Majorcan society of the time is not able to come to terms with key aspects of his personality: 'Aquí on, de vegades, obrir la finestra és com obrir-se les venes'. To stress this idea, Marc affirms that his life 'poca cosa deu tenir d'exemplar quan sóc d'aquest país i escric' (p. 14). It appears, then, that the narrator is concerned about the degree of freedom required by the act of writing and the adverse effects of transgressing the limits of what can or cannot be said ('obrir la finestra'). Beyond the ideological motives that we have already discussed, his difficulties have also to do with the character's complex sexual identity.

Marc often expresses misogynous remarks and boldly emphasizes his masculinity with statements such as 'la tradició excita tant com una dona' (p. 82), 'Quan jo em casi, vull que sigui amb una dona i no amb una minyona de bona família' (p. 116) or 'una pagesa o

una mare de família crescuda i multiplicada, tal com serà la meva dona. Si un dia em caso' (p. 21). These brash sentences bring to mind the grotesque way in which the narrator mocks certain nationalist ideas and, therefore, perhaps should not be taken seriously, but as a parody of normative heterosexuality or hypermasculinity. The last example is particularly interesting in this regard, because its first part, which highlights Marc's manliness in a rather extravagant fashion, is followed by a conditional clause ('Si un dia em caso') that seems to question the previous statement. This is not the only example where the narrator expresses his doubts: he refuses to take part in 'mariconades' (p. 45) and asserts that 'em vaig sentir home dins tradició d'homes, una mica superior a la noia: el mascle' (p. 138) but, when he is asked what he would do if he were to see Claudia Cardinale getting on a train, he replies: 'Jo hi pujaria. Suposo.' (p. 108). This suspiciously vague 'suposo' perplexes his roommate. Smith observes in relation to Álvaro Mendiola (the protagonist of Juan Goytisolo's *Señas de identidad*) that the character's attitude seems to be the result of 'compulsory heterosexuality[,] which legitimates casual misogyny and homophobia […] since it reproduces misogynistic and homophobic stereotypes' (1993: 156-157), and the same could be said for Marc Esquert.

As in *El mar*, the protagonist of *Míster Evasió* frequently looks at his own body and, sometimes, at that of his peers. Obviously, the man who observes himself and other men is not necessarily homosexual, since using this term would entail repeating the hegemonic discourse according to which masculinity is inexplorable because it is the norm: what has to be depicted and examined is the feminine body because it is an exception. It appears as if Bonet was attempting to develop, by means of the textual and stylistic complexity of his work, a sort of masculine equivalent of the *écriture feminine*. In other words, trying to articulate a new frame of reference with regards to the representation of his gender. Significantly, Bonet asserted in an interview that 'l'home, realment, és el seu cos' (Pons 1991: 91), which explains why in his oeuvre religiosity, always mixed with carnal desire, is so physical. It is not only that, as Triadú states, Bonet's work displays a 'contrast entre sexe i religiositat' (1982: 60). Rather, since according to the author a man is mainly his body,

religious beliefs and creative energy have to be expressed physically, through the body: 'S'ha d'escriure o pintar amb el cos' (Maicas, Gelabert and Rodríguez 1996: 16). This line of argument bears interesting parallels with the work of those French feminist critics who, in their quest to find a new way for women to express themselves, turned to the senses in order to downplay the importance of logic and reason, considered the tools of patriarchal domination. This comparison is not as far-fetched as it may seem, since Bonet rejected *realisme històric* precisely because he valued the aesthetic aspects of literary expression over other factors such as character and plot development. In *Míster Evasió*, he adopted a first person perspective that conveys the narrator's point of view by means of a sensual and elaborate phrasing which is addressed towards the senses as well as the intellect and seems to become a tool for challenging established representations of social categories and gender difference.

*Míster Evasió* is at times so intricate that it is tempting to set aside the sensory qualities of the text in order to focus on those aspects of the plot which can be easily interpreted, paraphrased and summarised. This kind of reading, however, runs the risk of reducing Bonet's work to its mimetic narrative elements and excluding those features of style that do not conform to traditional conceptions of the novel, the obscure and even unintelligible aspects of the narrative which aim at altering the reader's perception of both social and narrative conventions. This is why the self-conscious incoherence, lack of continuity and fragmentation of the text should not be forced into an overarching logical explanation. It is true that the first two chapters, which focus on the protagonist's infancy and his education in a religious school, are relatively straightforward; this is because, as Pons rightly suggests, they deal with the life of the protagonist previous to his personal crisis (1993: 194). Nevertheless, in the last three chapters, which revolve around Marc's predicament and his attempts to come to terms with his ideological, national and sexual dissent, the narrative lacks structure, there appear to be little causal links between events and the coherence of time and space disintegrates. Let us examine one striking example, a short sentence articulated around the semantic plurality of the word 'Ginebra': 'Al cap de la barra de la part dels lavabos, després d'un doble de ginebra,

mentre a l'altra banda del bloc on escric, a Ginebra, plou sobre l'impermeable color de sorra de Nausica' (p. 112). The narrator is describing in his diary, using the present tense how, on a certain occasion, he found himself in Barcelona having a drink in a bar. The fortuitous appearance of the word *ginebra* (this is, 'gin'), however, produces a sudden and unconscious connection with his present life in Geneva ('Ginebra', with capital *g*), and this unexpected link is reflected in the text not in a coherent manner, but as an uncanny juxtaposition of past and present which is triggered by a wordplay. Both strands of reality, therefore, seem to overlap, and in a way they do, at least in the character's mind.

The rejection of mimetic narrative techniques coincides with the narrator's first contact with the socially excluded in Somorrostro. From this point onwards, the coherence of the narrative is frequently undermined with all sort of incongruities: two characters, the Latin teacher and Marc's roommate, a Moroccan man, are called Dani; the teacher's wife moves to Paris after her husband's death, where she suddenly comes across the protagonist in front of a cinema; Nausica's godfather also teaches Latin; Dani shares a room with Marc in Paris but no explanation is offered; Nausica's real name seems to be Maria, and the list could go on. *Míster Evasió*, therefore, is a remarkably difficult work which takes unsuspected turns and contains numerous unexplained –and perhaps unexplainable– events. If at times the text defies reason, it is because it rejects the ways in which traditional narrative techniques have forced writers to depict reality. These conventions justify and perpetuate, in the name of clarity and logic, the ideas and attitudes loathed by the narrator, and therefore the only way to do away with them is to attack their linguistic roots so as to show their superficiality. Following the poststructuralist idea that the external reality is an illusion created by linguistic structures, Bonet seems to reach the conclusion that only by subverting the way language constructs our perception of the real is it possible to confront and transform society. This explains why one of the main topics of the novel is the construction of the text itself: as Roselló Bover rightly asserts, in *Míster Evasió* 'el llenguatge ho explica tot perquè ho és tot' (1987: 45), and this is why the writer 'deixa totalment a la vista del lector el procés de l'escriptura' (p. 38).

Bonet juxtaposes a plethora of discourses, including the bombastic Francoist rhetoric, the argot of the youth, that of the outcasts and the exiles, the discourse of religion and the different languages spoken by tourists. He also employs a number of social and regional varieties: Spanish, for example, appears in the guise of the elevated language of the priests as well as the substandard dialect of the illiterate. Additionally, in the fourth chapter the narrator transcribes and juxtaposes, without much order, fragments of history books, extracts from Ramon Llull's *Llibre d'Amic e Amat* and a letter in Spanish riddled with mistakes. The novel, therefore, consists of a myriad of contrasting linguistic units which do not try to offer a complete picture of society from a neutral distance, but display some of its fragmented voices. In this way, the inflated and pompous tone typical of Francoist rhetoric appears in stark contrast with the language of the Catalan gypsies who live in Somorrostro or the quasi-illiterate Spanish immigrants:

> Enlutat, no m'atutxes les palomes. La pasma mai no assoma per ací el tricòrnio, i tu no tens per que xanelar a cops de santcristo per ahí, que ni aixina camelaràs de nosotris. Yo mintxe quan trobe de jalar, i vosaltres, els paios, per a saber si teniu fam heu de mirar quina hora és. Aire. (Rosita's father insulting a priest, p. 65)

> Querido Marcos: Dices que mequieres estas en una tristeza perono aspensado todavia en volver meparece mentira. Porlas notches des puesdecenar ago ganxillo en la tia dentrode la cocina veo el jersey que teago tengo mas delamitatecho pareceras un artista es un verde muy serioTengo ganas de hablar en ti (Nausica's love letter to Marc, p. 151)

According to Marc, in *Ulysses* James Joyce's goal was to 'inventar un tràgic vocabulari còmic, que no entendreu els anglesos ni els irlandesos, mai [...] fins que baixeu d'Anglaterra, d'Irlanda, i pugeu a viure al món' (p. 125). It is clear from the above examples that Bonet decided to apply a similar idiolect to his description of 1960s Barcelona. The juxtaposition and clashes of incompatible discourses demonstrate that there is not a single truth or reality –national, ideological, sexual or of any other kind– and that those who claim to

represent the totality of social experience are at best misguided. The mixture of texts, voices and sociolects not only offers a detailed description of contemporary linguistic usage, but also alters the reading experience, since it forces the audience to focus on the process of writing itself. In other words, the presence of uncommon linguistic items makes it evident to the reader that the structure of the novel as a genre in chapters, paragraphs and sentences follows a set of fixed rules that can be easily transgressed and dismantled. This is why *Míster Evasió* is a text which can be best described as unfinished, since it develops in unsuspected ways, disorients the reader and takes odd turns which are sometimes difficult to explain, as if indicating that nothing is essential and that the narrative could have included many more experiences, voices and characters.

The fourth chapter, for instance, is particularly challenging because it contains several extracts taken from history books, medieval texts and, according to Bonet, two acts of a play which was never published in full (Artigues 1998). If this section includes so many different stylistic units it is because it signals Marc's transition to adulthood, characterised by his frontal rejection of the values which have been instilled in him by his parents and teachers. Some of the inserted passages illustrate this point very well, because they deal with the peaceful coexistence of religions in medieval Barcelona, and therefore contest the dogmatic views of the Spanish church, which insisted on the myth that Spain was 'la reserva espiritual de occidente' and completely disregarded the historical importance of Muslim and Jewish communities in the peninsula. One of these passages, for example, explains that in the 16th century Muslims and Christians lived peacefully without trying to impose their faith: 'En materia relligiosa [Muslims] no violentaven a ningu' (p. 90; taken from Francesc Farreras i Candi, *Geografia general de Catalunya*, 5 [Barcelona: Establiment Editorial Albert Martín, 1913-1918]).

The narrator's national and social dissent is expressed through the language of the text, laden with colloquial expressions and Spanish loanwords and therefore manifestly different from the Catalan literary language of the period. In fact, on several occasions Marc mocks linguistic purism and, by extension, the post-war Catalan intelligentsia, who reacted to the harsh socio-political environment by

increasing control over language in order to protect it from the impurities of spoken speech. Bonet, on the contrary, embraces spontaneous Catalan and frequently criticizes overcorrection. The archaism –in Barcelona– *quelcom*, which can be found in most novels published in the 1960s, is rejected by the narrator on several occasions in favour of the more colloquial 'alguna cosa': 'fingir que necessitava quelc..., que necesitava alguna cosa' (p.129), 'Tu en saps quelc..., alguna cosa, ja?' (p. 135). Purist attitudes, however, were rife among the educated, and this is why the narrator is corrected by the Latin teacher: '-Vostè no baixa a veure si pesca algu [...]?/–Quelcom deu voler dir?' (p. 115). Nevertheless, Marc defends his right to use Spanish borrowings: 'per aquí deu començar el que l'Oriol en diu *El Chino*, bé, *El Xinu*, que és, suposo, com s'escriu en català pescat de l'hora, en català fresc' (p. 59). He is familiar, of course, with the standard form of this word, but he associates it with death, drawing an unsettling association between Bofill's terminal illness (he is dying of cancer) and the over-refined language used by many Catalan intellectuals: 'el doctor Bofill digué "Xinès". No me'n vaig riure. No gosaria riure'm de res que s'hagi de morir' (p. 59).

In another revealing passage, the narrator grotesquely explains how to write in 'proper' Catalan: 'ha de ser cantellut i joliu alhora, tal com pertoca a l'expressió veritablement catalana del català que ho és des del número dels peus fins al llamp de Déu' (p. 133). The language employed by Bonet could not be further removed from the model he ridicules: the narrator constantly uses vulgarisms such as *cardar*, *fotre* and *collontra*, and he does not hesitate to use Spanish loanwords such as *buenu, vale, altu, ganso* or *pollo* (both in the sense of 'guy') and a plethora of colloquial expressions: 'vejam si ho explico bé', 'cosa de no dir, tu', 'tu ja m'entens', and so on. Given Marc's uneasiness in relation to the language promoted by most intellectuals and his problems in fitting into post-war society, it is not surprising that, when describing his mood, he rejects peninsular tongues and uses an English word: 'es començava a congriar en mi la necessitat d'estar *outside*' (p. 19), 'jo començava a reconèixer pel tacte, per la penombra, la realitat d'estar tot sol, *outside*' (p. 23).

This feeling of isolation is partly a consequence of the social changes that transformed Catalan society in the 1960s, namely the

increasing apathy towards religion ('Diuen que els nois de la meva generació han deixat de banda el sentit de relligació amb Déu. Sobretot el sentit de la religió formal, publicitària', p. 43), the gradual decline of the rural areas (Marc is born in Calella de Palafrugell but moves to Barcelona) and, linked to this, the sudden appearance of urban subcultures: 'I no sóc un *rocker* ni un *mod* ni un *hippie* (anglès), ni un poca-solta (català), ni *blouson noir* (de Paris), ni *gamberro* (carpetovetònic)' (p. 142). Further to this, we cannot forget that the 1960s was a decade of political turmoil in which social paradigms seemed to be changing fast, as the narrator acknowledges: 'Precisament ara, tothom llança la primera pedra, noi. I és que, sobretot la gent subestructurada [notice the use of Marxist terminology], creu estar neta de pecat. I llança la primera pedra. També a Indo-xina, a Algèria' (p. 92). In the late 1950s-early 1960s, university students like Marc, dissatisfied with the conservative education system and the country's intellectual backwardness, were eager to absorb foreign influences. A secondary character, for instance, points out, referring to a fellow student, that 'Si és de Filosofia i Lletres, deu ser un "joven airado"' –this is, a Hispanic equivalent of the British Angry Young Men. On a similar note, Marc states that 'Al col·legi Major Ramon Llull de l'Escola Industrial, dèiem Biblioteca Breve als esnobíssims, perquè només llegien llibres francesos' (p. 62).[5] The notoriously highbrow Biblioteca Breve, masterminded by Carlos Barral, became a myth among students, many of whom, as Marc rightly suggests, considered that contemporary Spanish culture was stiff and old-fashioned. Juan Goytisolo, for example, explains in his memoirs *Coto vedado* that

> Los libros sobre los que pronto me arrojaría serían, casi sin excepción, de autores extranjeros: leída en francés o en las mediocres traducciones que llegaban bajo mano de Buenos Aires, las novelas que devoré entre mis dieciocho y veinticinco años no incluyan a un solo autor en castellano. La instrucción dispensada en el colegio no solamente me hizo aborrecer nuestra literatura […] sino que me persuadió también de que no había

[5] Marc, therefore, lives in the Col·legi Major Ramon Llull, a university hall of residence which still exists today.

> cosa en ella cuyo conocimiento valiera la pena. (p. 135; see also Bonet 1994: 64)

*Míster Evasió* is a text deeply immersed in this period: references to 1960s actors, singers and writers are rife. Most of them are only mentioned in passing: the French chansonniers Charles Aznavour and Gilbert Becaud, Marguerite Duras, Jack Kerouac, Richard Burton, Audrey Hepburn... The narrative also contains allusions to lesser known films which have not yet been identified in the literature devoted to the novel. It is worth examining them in some detail, since they will help us to illuminate some interesting aspects of the construction of the text.

The narrator watches two films with Nausica in Paris: *Somni dels cavalls salvatges* and *Fedra*. The first, originally entitled *Reve de Chevaux Sauvages*, is an experimental short by Denys Colomb de Daunant released in 1960 which features horses trotting in slow motion. Other than signalling Bonet's fascination with avant-garde art, there is not much we can infer from this reference. The second, *Phaedra*, directed by Jules Dassin in 1962, plays a more important role. In this contemporary adaptation of Euripides' *Hippolytus*, Phaedra falls in love with the son of her second husband, now a shipping tycoon. Afer watching this film, Marc relates the plot to his own experiences with Rosita and her father and points out that in Somorrostro Phaedra would be in love with her real son; in other words, she would commit incest. Marc also asks Nausica if Dassin directed *Never on Sunday* (1960), a highly successful film the plot of which clarifies Esquert's mysterious relationship with Rosita and also sheds light on the Latin teacher. In *Jamais le dimanche*, Homer, an American philosopher who visits Athens, attempts to educate Ilya, a prostitute who in his eyes symbolises the decline of contemporary Greece in contrast to its illustrious past. Ilya, however, is a free-spirited and naturally gifted woman who turns out to be much wiser than Homer initially believes. In the end, it is the philosopher who learns several important lessons: he finally understands that books are not the only source of wisdom and that everyday life can be as meaningful and sophisticated as ancient philosophy. What is of interest here is that Bonet appears to take the main characters of this

film (with some slight changes: the philosopher becomes a teacher, although both are equally fascinated by ancient cultures) and rework them for his own purposes. To begin with, the education of the Latin teacher serves to highlight the clash between Marc Esquert's new values and those of the previous generation in the same way that Homer finds it difficult to accept that 1950s Greece has little to do with its glorious heritage. The teacher's relationship with Rosita, on the other hand, echoes that of the philosopher with Ilya, because he also patronizes her: he cannot stop himself from uttering Latin sentences and indulging in elaborated double-entendres. Marc, in parallel to Homer's epiphany, finally understands that the culture of his pretentious friend is irrelevant and sterile, a mere intellectual game that has little connection to contemporary needs. This is precisely what Uriac comes to realise towards the end of his days, and for this reason he urges Marc to enjoy life to the fullest before starting a career as a writer. In this way, it is implied, he will be able to avoid pedantry and create a vivid and meaningful work which resonates in the present.

Alain Resnais's *Hiroshima mon amour* (1959), albeit never explicitly referred to in the narrative, is another important subtext. Bonet was probably as fascinated by the film's nonlinear structure, disrupted by frequent flashbacks, as by its subtle and elliptical plot, which focuses on a 36 hour relationship between a French actress who falls in love with a German officer during the occupation of France and a Japanese architect whose family suffers the consequences of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima. Several themes and cinematic techniques present in *Hiroshima mon amour* may have inspired Bonet's style, such as Resnais's attempt to stress the transitory nature of existence by interweaving past and present, which explains the complex film's temporality; the mixture of documentary footage and narrative fiction, which thematizes the problem of representation, and the elusiveness of the plot, which has to be decoded by the viewer. With regard to the film's content, Marc Esquert argues that 'quan esclatà la bomba atòmica sobre Hiroshima, la gent es va despertar, i tothom vol estimar bé, segons la passió que sent' (p. 165), and Nausica points out that 'Dels setze anys ençà estimo molt fort. Com una supervivent d'Hiroshima' (p. 168). Both Marc and Nausica,

therefore, seem to infer from Resnais's work that the traumatic imprint left by catastrophes such as World War II can only be overcome through the pursuit of love. As this and the previous examples demonstrate, in *Míster Evasió* Bonet draws upon characters, ideas and techniques from several films and texts such as Porcel's interview, Juan Goytisolo's *Señas de identidad* (see Pons 1993: 196-197), Joyce's *Ulysses* and Llull's *Llibre d'Amic e Amat*, among others, in order to rework and blend them in his own novel. This conflation of intertextual references results in a mysterious and fragmentary novel which contains numerous gaps that the reader must fill, such as the controversial fate of the Latin teacher.

Even though the narrator has affairs with Nausica, Penèlope and Rossita (and he enjoys them, as a mildly erotic bowdlerized passage indicates), his relationships with men go beyond what is traditionally accepted. In the last chapter, for instance, he goes to a bar where he meets by chance a Latin teacher with whom he engages in conversation. The next thing we know about this character is that the very night he met Marc he was killed. Some critics have argued that what happens between them remains a mystery; according to Rosselló Bover, for instance, 'el que resta entre ambdós resta totalment confús' (p. 53). The truth is that this episode leaves little to the imagination, because the reader will immediately understand that the 8000 *pesetas* which the protagonist finds in his pocket while lying on the beach the following morning are the payment for his services. This is what Pons suggests when she states that the whole episode reminds her of Passolini's death (1993: 182).

Several clues in the text help to elucidate beyond reasonable doubt what happened on that night: Marc, after having a few drinks, gives in to the teacher's request, or perhaps he is too drunk that he does not even know what he is doing. In any case, this course of action is, to some extent, perfectly logical, since it takes to the extreme his will to identify with the excluded from society (such as Rosita or her brother Antonio). Afterwards, driven by shame, guilt, or perhaps inhibited by the alcohol he has ingested, Marc kills the man. The following morning he wakes up on the beach and does not seem to be able to recall what happened the night before, but he stresses that he has been profoundly humiliated. Then, he goes back to the pension

where he lives and offers his roommate a shell that he has found in his pocket. The sexual symbolism of his puzzling behaviour becomes evident when Marc tells his roommate that 'Jo sóc un noi honrat' and further stresses that 'Et juro per la meva vida que no sóc un perdut, ni un pinxo, ni un ma...' (p. 121). In a similar way, in Geneva Dani affirms: 'Digues que sóc un degenerat. Llança'm la paraula que ara rumies' (p. 144). Because of self-censorship this word is never mentioned, but there is no doubt that the audience perfectly understood what the characters are talking about. As if this was not clear enough, once in Switzerland, Marc, in an inexplicable coincidence, bumps into the teacher's wife who, out of the blue, asserts that her husband 'era bona persona però *no era bon home*' (p. 124, the emphasis is mine). As for Marc, the fact that his two girlfriends –Nausica and Penelope– are the only characters whose name permits a symbolic interpretation seems to be related to Marc's ambiguous stance, because both names seem to invoke an idea of normative masculinity to which the protagonist perhaps cannot conform. We could even establish a comparison with García Lorca's play *El público*, which deploys a similar technique: the false object of desire of the protagonist is called Helena. In spite of this, however, the narrator states quite clearly that he likes Rossita ('Ja voldrien moltes nenes de Calella saber fet tan feliç un xicot, com m'hi va fer aquella'), and therefore he escapes categorical definitions.

Perhaps it is not surprising that in 1958, when *El mar* was published, some members of the Catalan intelligentsia, upset by the ambiguous relationship between the novel's two male protagonists, turned their back on Bonet. It is a well-known fact that this novel was received with hostility and that Bonet 'recibió recriminaciones de monjes de la Abadía de Montserrat y gente bien pensante de Catalunya' (Roque 1997: 31), to the point that Josep Maria de Sagarra saw the need to publish an article denouncing 'la aspaventera beatería' of those who had been offended (1958: 5). The reviews of the time devoted to *Míster Evasió* are also laden with veiled homophobic remarks: according to the critic of *La Vanguardia*, for instance, in this novel Bonet proves to be an 'Hombre de una rarísima sensibilidad' and, in relation to the main character, 'la història que James Joyce anatemiza como "un mal sueño", [lo] *estropea y pervierte*' (p. 69, the

emphasis is mine). The more explicit reaction in this regard is to be found in an interview published in *Diario de Mallorca* where the journalist asked: 'Igual que en *Mister Evasió*, en el resto de tu obra hay también esa misma clase de vidas que mucha gente clasifica com "depravación", "mala vida". ¿Cuál es tu intención, al preferir la descripción de estas vidas, a la descripción de vidas más saludables?' (Mateu 1969). The author's reply could not have been more assertive: 'En la zona humana de la vida, no hay que clasificar en alto y bajo, en normal y anormal, porque casi todas las formas de vida son buenas'.

In a letter by Bonet addressed to Carles Riba which deals with the controversy caused by *El mar*, the writer declared that 'Espanya primer fa els homes i després els devora. És igual. Però em fa mal que de Catalunya en puguin dir una cosa semblant.' (Pons 2010: 105). Almost the same epigraph was used to introduce *Míster Evasió*, which demonstrates that this work is in part a response to the heated controversy surrounding *El mar*. It also explains why he set out to explore the links between national, social and sexual identity in a very conservative environment where the narrator feels ostracized by both the supporters of the dictatorship and many of those who oppose it.

Incidentally, the situation perhaps does not have changed much since then. The fact that the three editions of *Míster Evasió* published after Franco's death (1987, 1995 ad 2010) do not include the cuts imposed by the censor is quite indicative of the magnitude of the problem. Most bowdlerized passages revolve around Antonio and his sexual experiences, such as an episode where he is looking for customers in a cinema or another one where he talks about a North American client:

> –Escolta. El que tens al costat em sembla d'aquests. El treballes amb el genoll?
> –Sí. Mira...
> –No lluita?
> –No. Aguanta, però.
> –Doncs és d'aquests. Passa't a poc a poc la mà pel cabell. Ara acosta-li l'espatlla i no et moguis.
> –Calleu aquí al darrera, coi.
> –Calleu, calleu, que aquí venim a veure cine, nois.

–Bona, Jordi.
–Tu treballa'l. Aquest, al final de la pel·lícula et dirà alguna cosa. Ja ho veuràs.
–Ara lluita una mica, tu.
–Separa't, doncs. Ara l'has de fer patir, una estona, fins que ell treballi.
–Prou.
–T'has separat?
–Mira. No ho veus?
–Toca't. Més. Que el 'tio' se n'adoni.

–¿Cómo estuvo?
–Se mojó, pero no llegó a mear.
–¿Bocadillo y a la calle, o...?
–I ara! De 2 a 8 del matí, la 'nécora'.
–Óstima! ¿Y es cabrón o desgraciado?
–Més desgraciat que un eixugamans.
–Esos no quieren la carrera. Quieren que les cuentes tus cosas, luego una o dos sesiones de 501, y ya han repostado. No van más que a eso. Dan asco, hombre. Trabajar, prefiero cabrones. Toman la recta, y al grano. ¿No es una marranada? ¿Pues por qué meterle diplomacia?

Even without these graphic passages, Bonet's exploration of the links between social, national and sexual dissent seems to be as uncomfortable as it was forty years ago, when *El mar* was considered 'una blasfèmia contra tot el que de més sagrat té Catalunya' (Alzamora, 1998). It is not difficult to find examples that prove this point: de Pablo states that one of the characters 'mantindrà una relació *presumptament* sexual amb un contrabandista' (the emphasis is mine). De Pablo's cautious stance, justified by the fact that the relationship to which he refers is only obliquely suggested, appears in stark contrast with the facility with which he is able to detect a myriad of subtle allusions – which, needless to say, are even less explicit – to the dictatorship: 'La imatge d'un sanatori no és una al·lusió de la dictadura *clara com la llum del dia*?' (p. 44, the emphasis is mine).

To conclude, the reasons for Marc's exile are personal as well as collective, and both aspects overlap when Marc's grandfather tells him to go to Barcelona to become a man ('i et fas un home', p. 29).

The problem which the narrator has with this statement is of a triple nature: he does not want his family to tell him what to do; he is not interested in becoming the man that they expect him to be and, finally, once in Barcelona he will find it difficult to integrate into a society which does not grant him enough freedom. As we have seen, *Míster Evasió* dismantles the conventions of mimetic realism, challenges *realisme històric*, problematises the protagonist's subjectivity and deconstructs the social, political and cultural milieu, both in relation to the dictatorship and the cultural resistance. As a result, the novel becomes a prime example of the tensions observed by Fernàndez between 'a nation under construction which monopolizes cultural discourse, and an heterogeneous body [in our case, that of Marc Esquert or his alter ego Míster Evasió] whose polymorphous desires are both inflected by national identity and a threat to the naturalization of the nation with the realm of sameness.' (2000, 1). Ultimately, no solution is found to harmonize the different forces that pull the protagonist apart and, unable to renounce his independence in order to succumb to the realm of sameness –be it by accepting the demands of his family, adopting one of the discourses of the opposition or integrating into the regime–, he reacts to the pressure by crashing his car against a lorry. This is a rather disappointing conclusion, particularly as this accident occurs when Marc seems to have finally managed to sever all ties with the past. The novel, however, finishes just before the accident, and therefore the text is inconclusive as to whether he dies or not; fortunately, the narrative is open enough for the reader to imagine that, perhaps, Míster Evasió emerges unscathed from the wreckage of history.

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